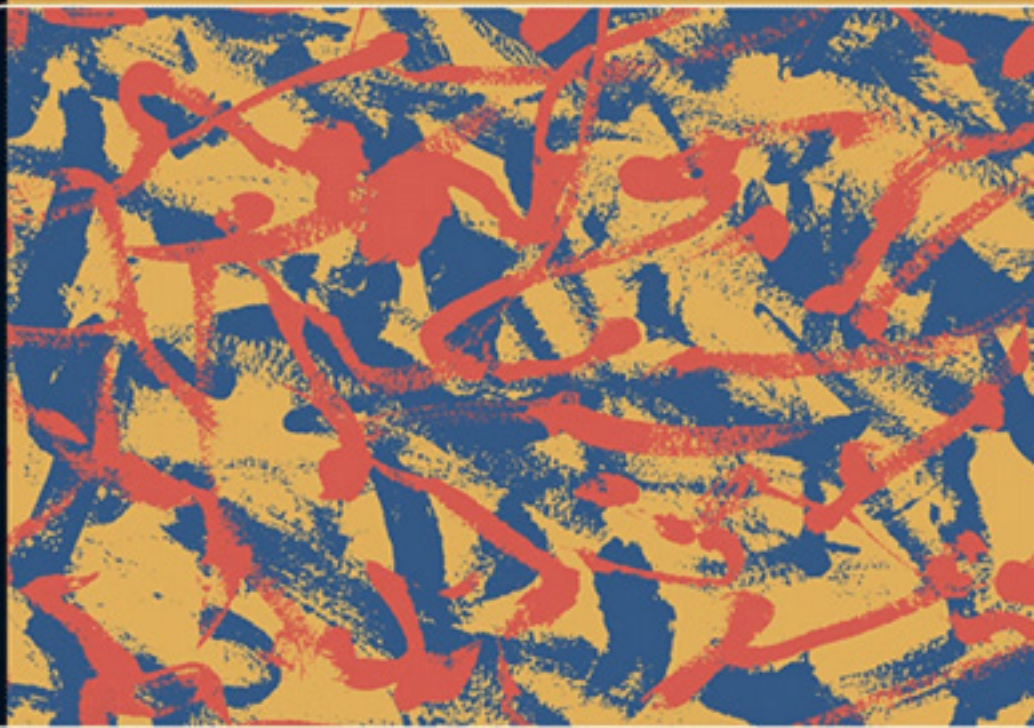


# SPOILING THE STORIES

THE RISE OF ISRAELI  
WOMEN'S FICTION



TAMAR MERIN

## **SPOILING THE STORIES**



**CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS OF WORLD WAR II**

INTERWAR PRELUDES, RESPONSES, MEMORY

**PHYLLIS LASSNER**, SERIES EDITOR

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**NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY PRESS | EVANSTON, ILLINOIS**

Northwestern University Press  
www.nupress.northwestern.edu

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Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Merin, Tamar, 1974– author.

Title: Spoiling the stories : the rise of Israeli women's fiction / Tamar Merin.

Other titles: Cultural expressions of World War II.

Description: Evanston, Illinois : Northwestern University Press, 2016. | Series: Cultural expressions of World War II

Identifiers: LCCN 2016031993 | ISBN 9780810133709 (pbk. : alk. paper) | ISBN 9780810133716 (cloth : alk. paper) | ISBN 9780810133723 (e-book)

Subjects: LCSH: Israeli fiction—Women authors—History and criticism. | Hendel, Yehudit—Criticism and interpretation. | Kahana-Carmon, Amalia—Criticism and interpretation. | Eytan, Rachel—Criticism and interpretation. | Women and literature—Israel.

Classification: LCC PJ5029 .M438 2016 | DDC 892.436099287—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016031993>

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project came to fruition in the Jewish Studies program at Northwestern University, where I found a supportive community of colleagues and friends without whom my book could not have been written. First and foremost, Phyllis Lassner: an attentive reader and a visionary editor, who believed in this project from the outset, urging me to adapt the yet untold story of Israeli women's prose fiction for an Anglo-American audience. I would like to deeply thank Phyllis and Jacob Lassner for their continuing generosity and friendship. I would also like to thank Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, who was an enormous source of support, always offering his friendship, his wisdom, and good advice. I am indebted to Barry Whimpfheimer and Elie Rekhess for their hospitality as well as for their support in my research endeavors. In writing this book, I was greatly assisted by countless conversations with Marcus Moseley, whom I am proud to call my colleague and friend. Not only did he share with me his wealth of knowledge and rigor, but the seminar we instructed together on the evolution of modern Hebrew literature was one of the finest teaching experiences I have had.

I am most grateful to my teachers and colleagues in the Department of Literature at Tel Aviv University where this project began. I thank my dissertation advisor, Michael Gluzman, for his support in my project and his devoted guidance, which helped me crystallize the subject and structure of the research. I would also like to thank Ziva Ben-Porat for being a great teacher, a sensitive reader, and a supportive colleague. Her pioneering studies on intertextuality and literary influence paved the way to the concept of intersexual dialogue presented in this book. I am also delighted to thank Menahem Perry, my first teacher in the Department of Literature at Tel Aviv University, for sharing his own readings in Hebrew fiction with me while I was a teaching assistant in his legendary course, "Mavo le'siporet" ("Introduction to Literary Fiction"). His phenomenal



literary interpretations have influenced me as a writer and a scholar of Hebrew literature more than anything else.

I would also like to thank the scholars—colleagues and friends—who read, commented, and contributed to this book in numerous ways: to Barbara Mann for her profound and perceptive reading as well as her helpful remarks; to Shachar Pinsker for his useful comments, his wisdom, and broad perspective; to Michal Arbel for her contribution to the first chapter on Yehudit Hendel; and to Oren Golan for his great help, his generosity, and his friendship.

This book would not have seen the light of day without Henry Carigan, my editor at Northwestern University Press. I would like to deeply thank him for being a strong supporter of the book, guiding it toward publication with immense intellectual integrity.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank both my Israeli and American students for sharing with me their perspectives on Israeli women's prose fiction and allowing me to revisit and at times reconsider my own insights. I hope they learned as much from me as I learned from each one of them.

I am happy to acknowledge the generosity of the various institutions whose financial support enabled the writing and publication of this book. The completion of my dissertation was supported by a fellowship from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, as well as by the Rotensreich Foundation (VATAT), the Dov Sadan Foundation, and the Wolf Foundation. I am also indebted to the Association of Israel Studies (AIS) and the Jewish Federation as well as to Northwestern University for supporting my research.

I am grateful to Rebecca Gillis, who beautifully translated some of the excerpts from Yehudit Hendel's and Rachel Eytan's works, and to Annette Ezekiel Kogan, who helped a nonnative English writer such as myself to smooth the edges and hopefully create the best scholarly work I could.

Finally, and most important, my deepest gratitude goes to my family: my parents, who supported and encouraged me throughout the writing of this project; my nuclear family, who traveled with me to the other end of the world and back; my husband, Matan Hermony, my son, Ori, and my daughter, Noga, who was born a few days after I submitted the final draft of the manuscript. This book is dedicated to the three of you, with love.

## A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

For Hebrew, I have used a simplified version of the Library of Congress system. However, in transliterating the names of Hebrew authors and the Hebrew titles of literary works, as well as names of literary characters, I occasionally used the common spelling of scholars of Hebrew literature, or alternatively the spelling used in the existing literary translations.



## **SPOILING THE STORIES**



## Introduction

In an agitated letter sent in 1904 to her editor, W. C. Brownell, Edith Wharton expressed her deep dissatisfaction with the literary critics of her time, who compared her latest collection of short stories to the works of Henry James: “The continued cry that I am an echo of Mr. James (whose books of the last ten years I can’t read as much as I delight in the man) makes me feel rather helpless.”<sup>1</sup>

At first glance, this short, bitter complaint seems to reveal a deep personal insult. The aggressive manner in which Wharton distances herself from her precursor even at the price of belittling him, as she confesses that “she can’t read” his books, and the sentimental overtone of the last sentence—“makes me feel rather hopeless”—testify to Wharton’s extreme vulnerability at the time. Indeed, Wharton in 1904 was at a very sensitive point of her literary career. She had published two collections of short stories and a debut novel but had yet to introduce the world to her major novels, among which were *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*. Thus, Wharton’s evocation of James seems to follow Harold Bloom’s problematic notion of the anxiety of influence: a primal fear of loss of authorship that leads to an aggressive confrontation with a literary precursor and the complete denial of the latter’s far-reaching influence.

Nevertheless, Wharton’s position on the question of literary authorship is more complex than meets the eye. Wharton uses the word “echo” to refer to the critic’s original accusation that she was merely “a disciple of James, a gifted disciple, to be sure, but not nearly so gifted as the mas-

ter,” as Irving Howe wrote.<sup>2</sup> The word “echo” neutralizes the hierarchical aspect of the affinity between Wharton and James as described by the critics, but it also relocates them in a new, positive context of literary repetition and resonance, which indeed began to pervade early Anglo-American modernism, of which Wharton herself was one of the most significant successors.

Moreover, the word “echo” as employed by Wharton has definitive feminine connotations, evoking the figure of Echo, the talented and talkative nymph who appears in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and other ancient myths. According to the myth, Echo was robbed of the ability to voice her thoughts after incurring the wrath of the queen of the gods, Juno, thus leaving her to repeat the last words she has heard. In Ovid’s version, Echo, whose voice has already been taken from her, falls in love with the handsome Narcissus, yet fails to gain his attention because whenever she opens her mouth to speak, all she can do is foolishly repeat what he has just said.<sup>3</sup> Despite the fact that the story of Echo suggests that women are not the masters of their own voice and can exist only as the faded repetition of someone else, Echo’s act of echoing and repetition also enables her to create an alternative text.<sup>4</sup> When he cries: “I’ll die before you’ll have your way with me!” she answers only, “You’ll have your way with me!” thus underscoring his control over her, and perhaps even male dominance over women in general.<sup>5</sup>

Wharton’s implicit reference to the figure of Echo—who has gradually since become a familiar symbol of female subversive discourse within the male canon—suggests that the option of “echoing” is one of the most effective responses to acts of literary oppression, since Wharton denies the accusation of “echoing” James but also embraces it. Thus, the word “hopeless,” with which the quote ends, denotes not only a lack of hope but also a stubborn, provocative insistence at adopting the act of echoing. It is, in fact, the only path for the “hopeless” female prose writer, up against an authoritative male tradition that threatens to take away her own voice while narcissistic male partners are unable to see beyond their own reflections.

Beyond the question of the affinity between Edith Wharton and Henry James—which resulted in a unique combination of rivalry and admiration, subordination and defiance<sup>6</sup>—Wharton’s complex attitude toward literary dialogue presents one of the fundamental questions engaging

feminist scholarship in the last decades: how can one write about literary influence in nonhierarchical, non-Oedipal, nonlinear, and, at the same time, gendered terms? This question, which is still far from being fully answered in Western literary criticism, has special significance in the case of the literary tradition that will be examined in this book: modern Hebrew literature.

Although it is customary to date the beginning of modern Hebrew literature to the Haskalah period, also known as the Jewish Enlightenment, which ran from 1780 to 1880, Hebrew prose fiction is actually a much more recent phenomenon, as Shachar Pinsker notes.<sup>7</sup> The first Hebrew novel, Abraham Mapu's *Ahavat Zion* (*The Love of Zion*),<sup>8</sup> was not published until 1853, and other significant prose works of Hebrew literature not until the final two decades of the nineteenth century, which is the historical point of departure for this study. While this period was referred to in traditional Hebrew literary historiographies as *sifrut ha-Tehiya* (literature of the Revival or Renaissance)—a historiographical construct with a clear ideological, national origin<sup>9</sup>—more recent studies have explored this early twentieth-century Hebrew fiction as part of modernist Jewish and European literature.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly enough, both approaches have underscored, overtly or covertly, the exclusion of Jewish women from this evolving revolutionary literature. As various studies have shown in recent years, this exclusion had a decisive effect on the entrance of women into the canon of Hebrew literature. Furthermore, it shaped and molded the modern Hebrew canon itself, perpetuating strong relations of influence between male writers that continued after the move to the Land of Israel.

In fact, one of the common assumptions in feminist Hebrew literary scholarship is that until the 1980s, Hebrew prose fiction was primarily the domain of male writers, while women generally expressed themselves in poetry. Thus, Dvora Baron, the first female Hebrew fiction writer, wrote only short stories and never developed into a novelist, nor did she become fully integrated into the evolving Israeli canon. The most significant novels by women published before the establishment of the State of Israel were written by poets—Leah Goldberg and Elisheva Bikhovsky—and did not receive much critical acclaim at the time of their publication. Several studies from the last few decades indicate that in Hebrew poetry, on the other hand, the door was more open to women, who succeeded—even if for limited periods of time—in establishing female genealogies,



female dynasties of mothers and daughters to replace the male, Oedipal dynasties of modern Hebrew literature. In addition, for many decades the production of Hebrew women's prose lacked continuity, which made it difficult for female prose fiction authors to establish strong traditions similar to those established in Hebrew poetry. Between Dvora Baron's first collection of short stories and the next major publication by a female author, Yehudit Hendel, two decades passed. Then, more than a decade elapsed before the second and the third authors examined in this book—Amalia Kahana-Carmon and Rachel Eytan—appeared on Israel's cultural and literary map, during the so-called boom in Israeli women's prose fiction during the 1980s.

Is a feminist historiography of Hebrew prose possible, given the paucity, marginality, and lack of continuity typifying women's fiction? What alternative can it offer to both the assumption of the late naissance of Israeli prose fiction and the female genealogies model?

It is noteworthy that the female genealogy model, which pervaded Israeli literary criticism years after it first emerged in American academia, presents a more profound problem that has already been theorized in recent scholarship on intertextuality and influence: Is the metaphor of authoritative literary parenthood—whether motherhood or fatherhood—indispensable when it comes to literary influence? Or, as recently proposed by Chana Kronfeld, can we acknowledge poetic and historical agency without enforcing an authoritative hierarchy between supposedly strong and weak, late and early authors?<sup>11</sup>

And going back to the family metaphor: can we take into account not only the manner in which literary “parents” influence the writing of “sons” and “daughters,” but also the manner in which literary “children” influence the writing of the parents? Is it possible to investigate not only the referencing of the Hebrew canon by Hebrew female authors, but also the late work of Hebrew female authors as shaping and molding, post facto, the canonical fathers themselves?

This book presents the as yet untold story of the rise of Israeli women's prose fiction, while further exploring and expanding the gendered models of literary influence in modern Hebrew literature. The theoretical idea upon which this book is based is that of *intersexual dialogue*, which refers to the various literary strategies employed by Israeli female prose

fiction writers expressing their voice within a male-dominated and (still) inherently Oedipal literary tradition.

## Intersexual Dialogue

In their pioneering book *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein argue that the notion of literary influence, which first emerged in the eighteenth century, was associated from the outset with what they referred to as “honorific force,” thus hinting at its authoritative, hierarchical aspect.<sup>12</sup> This very aspect gained strength later on in the works of such critics as T. S. Eliot, Erich Auerbach, and Frank Kermode, who examined the manner in which writers incorporate and engage in dialogue with the texts of their inspirational predecessors. However, it was Harold Bloom in his pioneering work, *The Anxiety of Influence*, who sanctified the male figure of the writer under influence.<sup>13</sup>

Much has been said and written about the male and aggressive nature of the Bloomian model, describing literary history as “heroic warfare” engaging “strong poets” and their predecessors, leaving no space for female writers. As is well known, the Bloomian model elicited a series of feminist responses—the most outspoken of which was Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s pioneering *The Madwoman in the Attic*<sup>14</sup>—which created alternative female genealogies to replace the all-male Bloomian historiographies. Those responses, however, often replicated the Bloomian model instead of challenging its fundamental assumptions.

In this context, it is important to note Bloom’s use of the word “relation,” which appears in *The Anxiety of Influence* in a significant familial context—in this case, relations of rivalry and identification between literary fathers and their sons. This same basic familial structure remains unchanged in many of the feminist responses to Bloom, which offered only one solution to the female author, “the daughter of too few fathers” as Gilbert and Gubar refer to her: to reject the exclusionary, aggressive “father’s text” while joining with the mother—that same mother who could never be a worthy role model in the patriarchal world.<sup>15</sup>

The concept of intersexual dialogue presented in this book relates to the entirety of literary strategies available to Israeli female authors who sought to express their voice vis-à-vis the patriarchal tradition of modern

Hebrew literature. Intersexual dialogue attempts to fill the conceptual gap that was left by the prominent Oedipal models of literary influence<sup>16</sup> while giving a new narrative to Hebrew women's fiction. To conceptualize intersexual dialogue, I refer to the late work of theoreticians Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler, which elaborates on the traditional feminist discussion of literary influence while merging notions of literary dialogue and psychoanalytic feminist critical theory that engage with I-Thou relations in a gendered context.

It was Kristeva who coined the term "intertextuality" in the 1960s when she referred to the literary text's inherent nonisolated nature, destined to relate to past works. With this concept, Kristeva addresses Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, which deeply inspired her early work.<sup>17</sup> For Bakhtin, dialogism was not a description of actual speech but a philosophical idea, a characterization of our experiences of creating meaning. The truth is not born in the mind of the individual, but evolves through a dialogic negotiation between different speakers. Thus, dialogism is an alternative to official monologism, the oppression and negation of the other's voice. Dialogism refers, in this sense, to the intersubjective quality of meaning. The dialogic exists in the space between expression and understanding. This space—the "inter" that separates subjects—is not a limitation but a condition of meaningful utterance which, according to Bakhtin, is fully realized in literature, mainly in prose and, first and foremost, in the novel.<sup>18</sup> Kristeva's early writing about intertextuality refers to this poetic and ideological "inter" space between monologic literary discourse and other, previous texts that resonate within it in different ways.<sup>19</sup>

As Kristeva's work developed, and especially after she turned to psychoanalysis in the 1980s, she further investigated the affinities between intersubjective dynamics and linguistic and literary dynamics, while expanding her early, ungendered concept of intertextuality. One of Kristeva's most significant concepts throughout her late work is that of *reduplication*: an archaic identification, which in many respects dictates all further identifications.<sup>20</sup> This identification is the result of mimesis between child and mother: the child identifies with the mother's breast, incorporates the breast, and eventually becomes the breast. Reduplication is not an imitation, but rather "a jammed repetition" that precedes the specular identification specific to the famous Lacanian mirror stage, in which the baby identifies with his new mirror image, replacing his fragmented,

chaotic self, prior to looking in the mirror.<sup>21</sup> As opposed to the illusionary, imaginary identification that is the result of the mirror stage, reduplication enables the double to “hold, for a while, the instability of the same, giving it temporary identity,” and thus the double becomes “the unconscious substance of the same, that which threatens it and could engulf it.”<sup>22</sup> Kristeva compares this primal identification with the acquisition of language, or as she refers to it, the incorporation of “the speech of the other,” a distorted resonance with the voice of the other in order for the self to establish its own unique voice.<sup>23</sup>

This primary reduplication is also, in Freudian terms, a type of transference: the infant takes on the role of the mother, the role of the other.<sup>24</sup> However, the transference takes place not only between the infant and the mother but also between the mother and the father, the same father referred to by Kristeva as the “imaginary father” who precedes the Oedipal drama. Kristeva bases the figure of the imaginary father on Freud’s notion of the “father of individual prehistory.”<sup>25</sup> Her imaginary father is not really, or not only, a father. Rather, he is a combination of both mother and father—with both masculine and feminine characteristics.<sup>26</sup> As noted by Kelly Oliver, the figure of the imaginary father enables us to reimagine the stern, authoritarian father of Freud’s Oedipal narrative that was perpetuated by Lacan, who did not see “the ‘loving father’ in Freud.”<sup>27</sup>

The mechanism of reduplication and the figure of the imaginary father whom Kristeva seems to pull out of the Freudian closet let us reenvision the fundamental dichotomy of the primal, authoritative, tyrannical father text and the submissive, admiring, diminutive daughter text. Kristeva makes it possible to challenge the fixed, gendered identity of the “original” text and to reimagine it, to read it against the discourse it ostensibly puts forward. This process is illustrated by Kristeva’s own dialogue with Freud, where she finds the other, gender-fluid aspects of his work, reading him—ironically enough—beyond Oedipus.

While Kristeva offers a new account of the affinities between intertextual relations and intersubjective relations, Judith Butler is undoubtedly the theoretician who explores the far-reaching gender implementation of this process, thus challenging the very categories of both gender and text. Since the publication of her pioneering work, *Gender Trouble*, Butler has been engaged with the fundamental problem of how to articulate the feminist project outside the paradigm of identity politics, which

assumes the category “woman” as a point of reference for all feminist discussions.<sup>28</sup> On the contrary, Butler seeks to challenge the very notion of a subject prior to representation. Thus, Butler’s notion of *performance*: a mere signifying act composed of a series of tributes, gestures, and texts, which create the illusionary effect of an “inherent” gendered essence organized around the two categories of man and woman. Butler creates a new understanding of sexual identity—and identity in general—as a signifying practice, based on repetition and variation through language.

Butler’s observations on the performative, imitative character of gender led to an important new understanding of gender in literary dialogue and intertextuality. The manner in which Butler points out the imitative and repetitive nature of gender becomes in itself an intersexual dialogue, which dissolves the distinction between a “male” and “female” text, between the “original text” and the revision—dichotomies upon which any traditional discussion of the relations of literary influence rely. The “revision”—in this case, the female revision of the male text—is revealed in a Butlerian reading as an act of subversive repetition, revealing the “unoriginality” of the original itself.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, with her discussion of identity and especially sexual identity as a signifying practice, Butler opens the door for a radical account of intertextuality as “intersexuality”: an unavoidable encounter between different texts and different sexes that never achieve self-identity but rather challenge the very notion of the original text, whether male or female.

In her later book, *Antigone’s Claim*, Butler explores literary intersexual dialogue. Her investigation is based on the character of Antigone, Sophocles’s heroine, who dares to bury her brother Polyneices after her uncle Creon published an edict prohibiting such a burial, intent on leaving Polyneices’s body exposed, dishonored, and ravaged. Butler reads the confrontation between Antigone and Creon—the representative of state law—as one that challenges the Oedipal model of the “law of the father.” Antigone, who undermines Creon’s authority by insisting on burying her brother and proclaiming her deed publicly, appears at first to be a “manly” heroine. However, she does not truly embrace this manhood. In fact, her autonomy is gained through assimilation of the authoritative voice of the one she resists: “She acts in defiance of the law but also because she assumes the voice of the law in committing the act against the law.” This simultaneous refusal and assimilation of paternal author-

ity also changes Creon, the father figure. As her addressee, he becomes, as it were, “unmanned” by her defiance, so that neither retains his or her original gender status.<sup>30</sup> The result is a new option for alternative, more fluid familial relations based not on the exertion of authority but on values of mutual responsibility, loyalty, and identification.

In light of the traditional familial models of literary influence, Butler, in *Antigone's Claim*, challenges the gender hierarchy of intertextual relations between parent figures and their sons and daughters. While her earlier essays examine the subversive potential that emerges from repetitive, performative speech acts, in *Antigone's Claim* she expropriates similar acts of repetition and revision from their traditional Oedipal context. From the dialogics of original and revision, the authoritative father and his subordinate or rebellious children, Butler extracts new possibilities of intersubjective and implicitly intertextual relationships, a departure from the hierarchical family structure.

In the footsteps of Kristeva and Butler, I think of intersexual dialogue as an indeterminate space between sexes and texts. In its most ambitious form, intersexual dialogue challenges the distinction between female and male texts, between an original and a rewrite, between the literary children and their authoritative parental figures.

The notion of intersexual dialogue is by no means unique to the Hebrew canon. Intersexual dialogue recurs throughout literary history, particularly at moments when a literary tradition is on the verge of expanding its poetic and ideological horizons. Edith Wharton wrote her most significant works, in which she conducted a literary dialogue with Henry James, just as Anglo-American modernism was about to change the form of the novel. As Virginia Woolf's statements anticipated, this shift was greatly due to female novelists.<sup>31</sup> Woolf herself employed intersexual dialogue in several of her works, the most prominent of which is *To the Lighthouse*, where she conducts a gender-charged dialogue with several canonical Western masterpieces, including Plato's *Symposium*.<sup>32</sup>

What I refer to as intersexual dialogue can also be found in various minor female traditions seeking to gain recognition from the dominant culture in which they play a part. A good example is the case of African American women's novels, which employed different intertextual strategies in an attempt to enter American mainstream literature in the 1980s, as shown in Michael Awkward's pioneering study *Inspiring Influences*.<sup>33</sup>

Israeli fiction, however, has become one of the definitive and most fascinating test cases of intersexual dialogue as a literary phenomenon and as a female strategy that challenges the options offered by Hebrew literary criticism. It goes beyond the female genealogies model, but also beyond intertextual paradigms that undermine the existing male texts in order to point out their hegemonic nature. Moreover, intersexual dialogue is inseparable from the birth of Israeli female prose in the first decades following the establishment of the State of Israel. The first female Israeli prose fiction writers—excluded from the Hebrew canon on the one hand and lacking dominant foremothers on the other—established their formative place in the Israeli canon through a complex, conflicted, and often paradoxical dialogue with the tradition of modern Hebrew literature, which contained both the authoritative parental foundation and the poetic, ideological potential to be anti-Oedipal and gender-fluid.

### Modern Hebrew Literature and the Bonds of Oedipus

In the final scene of Uri Nissan Gnessin's novella "Hatsida" ("Sideways"),<sup>34</sup> the protagonist, Nahum Hagzar, strolls down the street of a small eastern European town after having left his hometown, Vilna. Hagzar, a promising young writer paralyzed by writer's block, recalls his former literary ambitions:

Then came mighty Vilna itself with its many yeshivas and the library of Strashun and the halls of learning where he worked, and the book *Kneset Israel* with the lovely portrait of Peretz Smolenskin and the long, monumental nights of writing in his room there, and companions whose dreams had resembled his own. He felt that he was going to choke. Something hummed in his ears and he could hardly see. ("Hatsida," 162)

This gloomy final scene does not merely convey the tragic direction of young Nahum Hagzar's life, but also reveals the poetic and national foundations of the initiation into writing of the turn-of-the-century Hebrew writer. Writing—or, more accurately, the promise of writing—comes vis-à-vis the ultimate literary father figure: Peretz Smolenskin, the Maskilic writer and editor and the herald of the *Tehiya* movement. Smolenskin's

portrait, hanging in Strashun's library in Vilna—one of the largest libraries of the Jewish world during the Haskalah—is a striking metaphor of poetic and national fatherhood: the great literary father within the home of Jewish national awakening.

In many respects, the final scene of “Hatsida” reveals the intensity of the Oedipal drama at the heart of modern Hebrew literature, a tradition that relied, to a great extent, on the constant combination of identification and rivalry between fathers and sons. However, this very scene reveals—and this is perhaps the source of its dramatic impact—the fissures in this Oedipal drama. The novella ultimately does not embrace literary and national fatherhood, but depicts the process of anti-initiation, the rejection of the father figure. Thus, Nahum Hagzar, the ambitious young writer striving to write his “second long article on the beauty of Hebrew literature” (“Hatsida,” 136), gradually loses his ability to write, and eventually ceases writing altogether. His recalled gaze at the portrait of Peretz Smolenskin is not, in the end, that of a son who accepts his father's heritage.<sup>35</sup> Rather, it is the shameful glance of a son who has failed to continue the Oedipal dynasty of modern Hebrew literature.

It is no accident that this novella excited the literary imagination of several Israeli female prose fiction writers who identified with the pessimistic renunciation of the literary assets described by Gnessin. This act of renunciation was indeed uncommon within the framework of the traditional Hebrew initiation into writing. However, as we shall see, it was almost mandatory in the case of Israeli women prose writers, whose late rise was, in many respects, the result of their marginal place within the Oedipal narrative of modern Hebrew literature.

As noted recently by Orian Zakai, the Zionist narrative itself was mapped onto the Oedipal drama as early as 1975, in Jay Y. Gonen's pioneering book, *The Psychohistory of Zionism*.<sup>36</sup> This process was historicized twenty-two years later by Daniel Boyarin and other scholars who examined the relations between Zionism and psychoanalysis, arguing that they both revolved around the project of normalizing Jewish masculinity.<sup>37</sup> Modern Hebrew literature played a pivotal role in this process, postulating a strong affinity between manhood, nationhood, and writing. The prominent turn-of-the-century Hebrew prose writers—among them Miha Yosef Berdichevsky, Gershon Shofman, Yosef Hayim Brenner, Yitshak Dov Berkovitz, and Uri Nissan Gnessin—depicted sexually passive,



effeminate protagonists who seem caught between female passivity and the urge for political power. Nevertheless, the figure of the sexually passive diaspora Jew, the *talush* (the uprooted man), still had one stereotypically male characteristic: the ability to write in Hebrew.

Not only was the talent for creative writing considered contradictory to women's true nature, as suggested by Otto Weininger in his infamously antisemitic 1902 *Sex and Character*, comparing Jews to women<sup>38</sup>—but women were also literally excluded from the study of Hebrew until the end of the Haskalah period. This exclusion had a traumatic effect on Jewish women even after they were officially allowed access to the study of Hebrew, preventing them from creating a tradition—and no less important—a narrative of female fiction writing. At the same time, the vast majority of the *talush* stories depicted male protagonists who were in fact Hebrew writers. Most of these stories had a strong autobiographical component, modeled by and large on the Western *Künstlerroman*, the artist's novel. The *Künstlerroman*, which emerged in the nineteenth century as a descendant of the *Bildungsroman*, focused on a young man becoming an artist: in most cases, a writer. As noted by Franco Moretti, the *Bildungsroman* ends with the young man's integration into society and his becoming a good citizen, while the *Künstlerroman* depicts an almost opposite process, focusing on the triumph of art over life itself.<sup>39</sup> One of the most common assumptions of the artists' novel is that the writer is destined to live outside society and forsake all types of human intimacy, including marriage and other romantic and erotic interaction. From Thomas Mann's Tonio Kröger to James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, the protagonists struggle between art (that is, writing) and life (that is, eros) only to choose the first option and withdraw from life's disappointments.<sup>40</sup> The dichotomy between life and art also has definitive gendered connotations, as Maurice Beebe observed as early as the 1960s: "every artist is a man"—and not only a man but "always the same man—sensitive, dreamy, passive, bookish, egocentric, tormented," traits which are surprisingly in accordance with those of the *talush*.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, while the so-called anti-masculine characteristics of the turn-of-the-century *talush* challenged the gender pattern of the Western *Künstlerroman*, the ars poetica tradition actually perpetuates this very pattern. On the one hand, sexual passivity in the stories of Hebrew literary initiation places the Hebrew writer in the sphere of the feminine, from

which the new Jewish nationality sought to withdraw. On the other hand, through writing in Hebrew, the uprooted, gender-disoriented protagonists were able to regain their long lost masculinity, and at times join in the national revival project.<sup>42</sup>

However, not all Hebrew works of fiction depicting unfulfilled eros presented a well-structured initiation into writing, as was prevalent in Western modernism. Thus, for example, the sexually frustrated protagonist of M. Y. Berdichevsky's "Orva parah" ("A Raven Flies") is left with nothing but rage and disappointment, after his beloved rejects his advances. However, toward the end of the novella he eventually succeeds in transforming love into literature as he writes a short text entitled "To the Woman," in which he expresses his stormy feelings.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Y. H. Brenner's "Ba-choref" ("In Winter"), one of the most important turn-of-the-century Hebrew novels, ends with the erotic as well as intellectual failure of a young man of letters. After an unfulfilled love affair, the protagonist Yirmiah Fireman returns to his eastern European hometown to become a rural *melamed* (religious preschool teacher) like his father. The opening of the novel, foreshadowing this failure, also includes the declaration of the protagonist's ambition to become a writer. Fireman argues, "Even though I am not a hero, I would like to write down my past, my un-heroic past."<sup>44</sup> The ostensibly pessimistic opening of "Ba-choref" thus tells the story of personal failure, but at the same time it transforms this failure into a literary text.

As I will further demonstrate, other voices emerged within this male *ars poetica* discourse. Nevertheless, mainstream modern Hebrew literature succumbed to the Oedipal pattern. The first to describe the history of modern Hebrew literature in Oedipal terms were the Hebrew authors themselves, who, in their fictionalized autobiographies, depicted their rebellion against their actual fathers, representing the world of Jewish tradition. Thus, Yirmiah Fireman, Brenner's protagonist, turns his back on his father, the *melamed*, and replaces the father's Pentateuch with a new, secular father text: Ahad Ha'am's "Al pa'rashat drahim" ("At a Crossroads"), a text which laid the foundation for the new secular Jewish nationhood.<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, the process of self-determination by embracing literary fathers became extremely common at the turn of the century, in the constitutive years of modern Hebrew literature. For example, Hayim Nahman Bialik,

later crowned a national poet of Hebrew and Israeli literature, makes reference to his fatherly authority to select and name the significant poets of his generation in his essay “Shiratenu ha-tseira” (“Our Young Poesy”).<sup>46</sup> Brenner himself, in his scholarly works, also often appointed literary fathers for his generation, whether a prominent father such as M. Y. Berdichevsky or a “rejected father such as Ben-Avigdor.”<sup>47</sup>

This tendency also pervaded Hebrew literary criticism. Yosef Klausner, the great father figure of Hebrew scholarship, described the history of Hebrew literature as an endless male dynasty, beginning with the Bible and lasting through the modern age, intertwining Bloomian terms—long before Bloom actually conceived of them—such as “precursor” and “literary authority” with the ideal of national revival in the Land of Israel.<sup>48</sup> Oedipal interpretations also emerge from the work of scholars who ostensibly sought to present an alternative to the national historiographical narratives presented by Klausner. For instance, Dov Sadan, in his “Massat mavo” (“Introductory Essay”)—which has been said to reflect a pluralistic attitude toward the national and geographical boundaries of Hebrew literature—also defines modern Hebrew literature as resulting from questions of literary fatherhood.<sup>49</sup>

Oedipal narratives were often evoked by Hebrew literary critics when they began to investigate works of fiction that were written in the Land of Israel that perpetuated and even intensified the male, national model prevalent in the works of turn-of-the-century Hebrew authors. Although at least four generations of fiction writers were active in the Land of Israel during the first few decades of the twentieth century, most scholarly attention has been devoted to the “youngsters”: the poets and prose writers who became consolidated as a group during World War II and the struggle to establish the State of Israel, which included authors such as Moshe Shamir, Yigal Mosinson, Matti Meged, Hayim Guri, Aharon Meged, and others. This group, later referred to as “the 1948 generation” or “the Palmach generation,” was perceived for many decades as a uniform, cohesive group, whose realistic fiction served as a reflection of the Zionist collective, embodied by the figure of the virile, all-Israeli sabra, who had ostensibly replaced the effeminate *talush*.

Although this perception has been challenged in recent years by scholars who point out moments of resistance and criticism in the promi-

ment works of the 1948 generation authors,<sup>50</sup> most critics agree that Israeli literature of the 1948 generation adhered to what Gershon Shaked called the “Zionist metanarrative.” This metanarrative, which was primarily associated—according to Shaked—with “relationships between fathers and sons,”<sup>51</sup> created what Hannah Naveh described as a “male practice . . . blind to the presence of women (in life and in literature) within the process of building the nation.”<sup>52</sup>

The picture first began to change in the late 1950s, when a new generation of writers such as A. B. Yehoshua, Amos Oz, Amalia Kahana-Carmon, and Yitzhak Orpaz conquered the Israeli literary establishment. This group of writers, later known as the New Wave or the Statehood Generation authors sought an alternative to the realistic, collective, engaged writing of the 1948 generation, thus putting forward a new and more complex “I” to replace the nationalistic “we” represented by the figure of the sabra. However, though the New Wave authors criticized the all-male ethos of the Israeli sabra, they did not challenge the predominantly male and Oedipal perspective of the national narrative.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, the very transition from the 1948 generation to the Statehood Generation was traditionally depicted in unabashedly Oedipal terms. Shaked, for instance, describes this poetic transition as a literary rebellion led by sons against their fathers, resulting in the sons embracing their grandfathers—diasporic writers such as Berdichevsky, Gnessin, and Agnon, in whom the New Wave writers found a substitute for their failed fathers, the 1948 generation authors.<sup>54</sup> Although this act of substitution of grandfathers for fathers, described by the Russian formalists as a prominent dynamic of literary history, was supposedly a distancing from the Oedipal model, it ultimately affirmed it. Indeed, the turn to the grandfathers has been perceived by scholars as part of the aggressive, revisionist dynamics of modern Hebrew literature.

### **Toward a Feminist Historiography of Hebrew Prose Fiction**

In light of the aforementioned, it is not surprising that women were slow to gain entrance to the evolving Hebrew canon. As mentioned, the reasons for their belated arrival should be traced to the Haskalah period, when Jewish women were denied access to the study of Hebrew as a holy

tongue. This traumatizing exclusion was lifted in the 1880s as a result of the Zionist-national awakening and the growing fear of Jewish women's assimilation.<sup>55</sup> The following paragraph, taken from S. Y. Agnon's well-known novella "Bidmi yameha" ("In the Prime of Her Life"), centers on the character of a young Jewish girl, Tirtza, whose father encourages her to learn Hebrew:

"I will find you a teacher and you will learn Hebrew." My father then found me a teacher to his liking and brought him home. The teacher, at my father's urging, taught me grammar, for as with most of our people, my father believed grammar was the soul of the Hebrew language. The teacher taught me the Hebrew tongue, the rules of logic, and the meaning of "What profit hath man." I was left breathless.<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, the character of Tirtza, who studies Hebrew mechanically, obeying the law of the father, experiencing her alienation from this male, sacred language, became the fictional prototype of the Hebrew female author at the turn of the century. Several female prose fiction authors and poets who were active in the first half of the twentieth century—from Dvora Baron to Rachel Blubstein to Ester Raab—described in detail their similarly harsh feelings of isolation and self-doubt at the moment they finally began publishing works in Hebrew.<sup>57</sup>

Dov Sadan, in his pioneering "Massat mavu" ("Introductory Essay"), written only one year before the establishment of the State of Israel, describes the moment when the female author entered modern Hebrew literature:

One of the greatest innovations (of modern Hebrew literature) is the participation of the female author. We encountered Hebrew female authors in the early Haskalah period [Rachel Morpurgo] and in the late Haskalah as well. However, although they add up to a fine "Minyan" ("prayer quorum of ten") they certainly never exceed the status of being an extraordinary phenomenon.<sup>58</sup>

When Sadan addresses the move to the Land of Israel, however, he maintains that the "woman problem" was being resolved:

We have found that the appearance of the woman as an author in exile was only a minor episodic phenomenon—far from the reality of the Hebrew literary life in our homeland, in which the woman, naturally, lives her life in our language, using our language. As much as she has established her place in life, she has conquered her place in our literature. The second *Aliya* (second immigration to the Land of Israel) brought important discoveries in the field of poetry (Rachel) as in the field of prose fiction (Dvora Baron). The following waves of immigration brought women a distinguished place in our literature—in poetry, prose fiction, and scholarly writing.<sup>59</sup>

Nevertheless, the history of Israeli literature proves that Sadan's enthusiastic 1947 declaration was too optimistic. Various studies show that the place of women writers in the evolving Israeli canon was extremely marginal. Moreover, Sadan's blurring of the distinction between Hebrew female poets and prose authors was far removed from the actual literary reality in the Land of Israel. Whereas in poetry women achieved significant accomplishments and gained critical recognition, female prose writers were not nearly as successful. In fact, the common assumption in Hebrew literary criticism, as articulated by Yael Feldman, is that for the first 150 years of modern Hebrew literature, Hebrew prose fiction was primarily the domain of male writers while women generally expressed themselves in poetry.<sup>60</sup>

The paucity of female Hebrew prose writers in comparison to the number of female poets can be seen as one outcome of the stereotypical gendered distinction between poetry (especially lyric poetry) and prose fiction.<sup>61</sup> However, the reluctance of Hebrew women writers to attempt prose fiction should also be considered against the backdrop of the male, authoritarian figure of the *tsofeh le-Beyt Yisrael* (the observer for the House of Israel). This character, first shaped by the Maskilic writer Isaac Erter in his book of stories by the same name gradually became the ultimate model of the Hebrew author: the national spokesman, the prophet, and alternatively—the physician who can cure his aching people of Israel.<sup>62</sup> Hebrew poetry, as Hamutal Tsamir argues, even that of the New Wave, also took on a nationalistic role,<sup>63</sup> but Israeli poetry from the late 1950s onward generally turned from the national to the lyrical, as in the

writing of Statehood Generation poets such as Natan Zach, Moshe Dor, and Yehuda Amichai. At the same time, the prose authors of the Statehood Generation, among them Amos Oz and A. B. Yehoshua, continued to adhere to the prominent national-collective perspective, sustaining the image of the Israeli prose fiction author—not the poet—as the ultimate nationalist speaker.<sup>64</sup> This distinction is, in fact, extremely palpable in Israeli culture, where prose fiction authors—notably Oz and Yehoshua and in recent decades David Grossman, Eyal Megeed, and others—often appear in the Israeli media as national spokesmen, talking sense to the Israeli people in times of political turmoil.

On the other hand, Hebrew women's prose written in Israel before the 1980s was not only less bountiful but also alienated from the literary mainstream as well as from the generational map of Israeli literature. Dvora Baron, the first female Hebrew prose fiction author, was warmly accepted by her literary peers abroad as well as in Israel, but despite this recognition she was perceived as a minor female alternative to the prominently male prose fiction of her generation. Her reluctance to engage with the realities of life in the Land of Israel, her insistence on the short, lyric, impressionistic mode, and the fact that she never made the transition from short stories to novels defined her—in the eyes of her generation and those following—as a marginal writer.<sup>65</sup>

Baron's female peers were even less fortunate. The women writers of the first waves of immigration to the Land of Israel in the First Aliya, Second Aliya, and Third Aliya, among them Nechama Puhachevsky, Pnina Caspi, and Shoshanah Sharirah, were not only marginal, but—unlike Baron—never received any critical recognition from the Israeli literary establishment. As shown by Yaffa Berlovitch, most of these authors wrote short fragments and did not attempt novels or novellas, except for pulp fiction pieces that gained popularity during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>66</sup> The few women who did write novels and attempted to become part of the literary establishment, most notably Leah Goldberg and Elisheva Bikhovsky, were recognized only as poets and never succeeded in making the transition to prose fiction writers. The common assumption, articulated by Gershon Shaked, was that these poets' novels—Bikhovsky's *Basimtaot* (*Alleyways*) and Goldberg's *Michtavim minesia meduma* (*Letters from an Imaginary Journey*) and *Ve'hu ha-or* (*And This Is the Light*)—earned little critical acclaim because they did not focus on the Jewish question in relation

to Zionist ideology.<sup>67</sup> The critical silence was also due, however, to the male-dominant establishment's reluctance to recognize these women as prose authors. The prose works of both poets had little readership and critical attention until recently, when the republication of some of their novels and short stories in Israel led to a reevaluation of their work.

This situation ostensibly began to change after the establishment of the State of Israel when several women writers—especially the three subjects of this book, Yehudit Hendel, Amalia Kahana-Carmon, and, to a lesser extent, Rachel Eytan—gained some critical acclaim. However, the still short and rather tragic history of Hebrew and Israeli women's prose also suffered from a lack of continuity. Two decades passed between the publication of Dvora Baron's first collection of short stories and that of Yehudit Hendel. More than a decade went by between Hendel's collection and Kahana-Carmon's first collection of short stories. More than two decades passed after Kahana-Carmon and Eytan appeared on Israel's literary scene before the blossoming of Israeli women's prose fiction in the 1980s and 1990s, when a new generation of female authors conquered the field of Israeli fiction.

Is a feminist historiography of Hebrew prose possible, then? Can a female historiography be written when there is no actual female literary history? Can women writers participate in a literary tradition that does not acknowledge their existence? Is there a possibility of literary influence that goes beyond the Oedipal male dynasty so dominant in Hebrew literature? In general, Israeli feminist scholarship, especially on the subject of Hebrew women's writing, is a relatively new field, still in its developing stages. It was not until the 1980s following the boom in Israeli women's prose fiction that critics began to take more interest in the problems—as well as achievements—of women's writing in Hebrew.

The most prominent studies written thus far have focused on poetry rather than prose fiction, putting forth new historiographies of Hebrew women's poetry via the female genealogies model. For example, Dan Miron's pioneering 1991 study, *Ima'hot me'yasdot, ahayot horgot* (*Founding Mothers, Step Sisters*) on the Hebrew modernist poets of the 1920s and 1930s, among them Rachel Blubstein, Ester Raab, and Yocheved Bat-Miryam, was one of the first to address the subject of Hebrew female poetry in generational terms.<sup>68</sup> Although his approach was criticized later for its inherent gender essentialism, he also paved the way for more



gendered studies of Hebrew women's poetry. Michael Gluzman's work on the Hebrew modernist poets, for example, highlights the heavy price paid for the female modernists' exclusion from the canon alongside the immense artistic freedom they gained in the process.<sup>69</sup> Recent studies of Hebrew women's poetry—such as Dana Olmert's study on the female modernists and Shira Stav's study on Dahlia Ravikovitch, Yona Wallach, and Tirtza Atar—did explore the intertextual relations between female poets and the Hebrew canon, but these studies also identified strong generational affinities between the poets themselves.<sup>70</sup>

In Hebrew female prose fiction, however, the female genealogies model was not nearly as successful. With the small number of prose writers and the lack of continuity in their work, most of the influential studies on Hebrew women's prose fiction focused on theorizing female authors' marginality vis-à-vis the Hebrew canon, thus portraying nonhistorical trajectories. Examples are Esther Fuchs's early study *Israeli Mythogynies: Women in Contemporary Hebrew Fiction* and Yael Feldman's *No Room of Their Own: Gender and Nation in Israeli Women's Fiction*.<sup>71</sup> Although the latter made a major contribution to the understanding of Hebrew female prose fiction with its insightful observations on the differences between Hebrew female poetry and prose, it did not outline a female historiography of Hebrew prose fiction. Rather, the book portrays nonhistorical trajectories in Israeli women's prose fiction, veering from Shulamit Lapid's 1980 novel *Gey oni* to the works of Amalia Kahana-Carmon in the 1970s to Netiva Ben-Yehuda's 1948 Palmach works and back to Ruth Almog's 1980s fiction.

Attempts at outlining female genealogies in Hebrew fiction were also quite problematic. Lily Rattok, for instance, wrote a historiographical account of Hebrew prose fiction based on two founding mothers, Dvora Baron and Amalia Kahana-Carmon. Rattok describes Dvora Baron as a “disappointing” first literary mother, who eventually surrendered to the male patriarchal establishment without leaving her female successors an alternative narrative. On the other hand, Rattok considers Kahana-Carmon, who entered the Israeli literary scene fifty years later, to be an “improved” model of a foremother, presenting “a new female narrative” based on feminist awareness.<sup>72</sup> Although Rattok's attempt at a gendered model for relations of literary influence in Israeli women's prose fiction was trailblazing, it was later found to be problematic. The difficulties

were primarily the fifty-year gap between the two female writers in question and the lack of continuity typical of women's literary endeavors, which made it impossible to formulate a female genealogy in Hebrew prose fiction. Other feminist scholars who further developed the female genealogy model, such as Pnina Shirav, also had difficulty contending with the near lack of prose fiction writers and their uneven scattering throughout different periods.<sup>73</sup>

Shirav's study dedicated to the works of three prose fiction authors, Yehudit Hendel, Amalia Kahana-Carmon, and Ruth Almog, consists of three monographic studies on the early and late work of the female authors in question. Shirav's recurring argument, in regard to each of the three, is that their early work reflects a lack of feminist awareness, as opposed to their later work from the 1980s and on. Shirav thus perpetuates the common misconception that Israeli women's prose fiction was resurrected in the 1980s as a gendered literature.

In the last few decades, however, feminist scholars have begun to look at the daring attempts of Hebrew female writers to enter the male canon rather than challenge it from the outside. Several articles in Jelen and Pinsker's collection, *Hebrew, Gender, and Modernity: Critical Responses to Dvora Baron's Fiction*, explore the manner in which Dvora Baron employed Jewish religious sources for new, gendered purposes.<sup>74</sup> Similar intertextual processes are also noted by Orian Zakai in her recent study of pre-state female authors including Baron.<sup>75</sup> Tova Cohen and Wendy Zieler have also studied female poets and prose authors who appropriated the canonical Hebrew texts by means of de-allegorization and personalization.<sup>76</sup>

However, despite their significant contribution to the discourse on intertextuality and their influence from a gendered perspective, these studies embrace the hierarchical model of relations between the female text and the canonical father text, the appropriation of which for feminine, anti-nationalistic purposes implicitly assumes its superiority. Moreover, the prevalent discussions of female appropriation of the Hebrew male canon, including Cohen's and Zieler's studies, do not differentiate between poets and prose fiction writers, though they primarily address poets, as is typical of Hebrew criticism's general focus on women's poetry rather than prose. This focus shifts only after the 1980s, when—according to the common assumption—Israeli women's prose fiction first emerged

as a new, unique phenomenon, detached from the continuum of modern Hebrew literature.

### **Intersexual Dialogue in Israeli Women's Prose Fiction**

As opposed to previous research on Hebrew and Israeli prose fiction, this study situates the rise of Israeli women's prose fiction in the 1950s to the 1970s. It is my claim that during these decades, the pioneering Israeli prose fiction writers, lacking strong literary foremothers, established their formative place in Israeli literature through a complex and conflicted intersexual dialogue with the Hebrew canon. In their revolutionary, gender-loaded fiction, the first Israeli female prose authors did not attempt to appropriate the canonical, male text—nor implicitly expose its hegemonic nature. Rather, they sought to open their precursors' texts to dialogue and re-examine gender-fluid aspects that were suppressed throughout many years of reading and interpretation.

On a theoretical level, I explore the case of Israeli women's prose fiction as a means of challenging the options offered by traditional feminist discourse on intertextuality and influence. I seek to go beyond female genealogies but also beyond intertextual models that undermined existing male texts in order to lay bare their hegemonic nature. Following Kristeva and Butler, I think of intersexual dialogue in Israeli women's prose fiction as a literary technique which allowed the first Israeli prose fiction authors to join with the Hebrew canon while still challenging its gender boundaries: unmanning it, imagining it anew, reading into it those gender-fluid aspects that had escaped the attention of readers and commentators.

On a historical level, I argue that intersexual dialogue became—for the female authors who published their works during the first decades after the establishment of the State of Israel—a means of gaining a formative place in the evolving Israeli canon. They employed intersexual dialogue as part of the process of self-constitution within a young canon in the making. As in Western literature where intersexual dialogue became prevalent with the rise of modernism and the coinciding hope for a change in the situation of women writers, intersexual dialogue became an inseparable part of the labor pains of Israeli literature, from the late 1940s to the early 1970s.

This book focuses on intersexual dialogue as it evolved in the first three decades after the establishment of the State of Israel in the works of three major prose fiction writers: Yehudit Hendel, Amalia Kahana-Carmon, and Rachel Eytan. I have chosen to focus on these authors because they are the most prominent representatives of the literary phenomenon of intersexual dialogue in Israeli literature. They were writers who pervaded—if only for limited periods—the holy of holies of the Hebrew male canon via literary correspondence with turn-of-the-century writers such as Gnessin, and later writers such as Agnon and David Fogel.

In addition, these three female writers are, in my opinion, the most important prose fiction writers in the history of modern Hebrew literature, notwithstanding the differences in their status within the Israeli canon. Contrary to their female precursors, each of them successfully passed the most crucial test of a Hebrew author by writing novels. As opposed to a few other female authors of their generation, such as Shulamit Har'even and Ruth Almog—who achieved most of their literary recognition only after the boom in Israeli women's fiction in the 1980s—Hendel, Kahana-Carmon, and Eytan were significant participants in the poetic developments of their time. Moreover, each of these writers shaped and molded not only other contemporary female authors, but Israeli prose in general, due at least in part to their uses of intersexual dialogue.

The importance of these three writers also stems from the fact that each of them emerged during a pivotal juncture in the history of Israeli literature. Yehudit Hendel was the representative of the 1948 writers, the literary generation that laid the foundation for evolving Israeli literature as realistic, local, and national. Amalia Kahana-Carmon was a vital participant in the most meaningful historical process taking place in Israeli literature in the 1950s and 1960s—the transition from 1948 generation literature to Statehood Generation literature. Rachel Eytan's work embodies the fierce poetic and ideological developments that took place in Israeli literature and culture between the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War.

These three major decades—the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s—resonate in the works of the first Israeli female prose fiction writers not only as a historical background but as a reflection of different approaches within Israeli literature with regard to the Hebrew literary past. While Yehudit Hendel wrote her early prose fiction during a period in which dialogue

with the diasporic past of Hebrew literature was perceived as contrary to poetic and ideological *bon ton*, Amalia Kahana-Carmon and Rachel Eytan produced their works at a time when correspondence with the literary past became part of the *zeitgeist* of Hebrew literature, although their subversive use of intertextuality still challenged the dominant ideology of their era.

Rachel Eytan's reception was different from that of the other two. Whereas Yehudit Hendel and Amalia Kahana-Carmon successfully entered the canon of Israeli literature, Eytan met with critical acclaim at the beginning of her literary career but was later rejected by the Israeli literary establishment and eventually faded into oblivion. Nevertheless, Eytan's contribution to the poetics—and politics—of intersexual dialogue in Israeli women's prose fiction was crucial, in spite of and perhaps because of the dramatic circumstances that led to her disappearance.

One must also consider the imaginary fathers—in Kristeva's terms—whom the first Israeli female prose fiction writers chose to reinvent, despite the traditional interpretations of their works prevalent in Hebrew literary criticism. These imaginary fathers were not uniform in terms of their historical, ideological, and generic affiliations. Gnessin and Berdichevsky were canonical authors identified with the national project of the *Tehiya*, but others who were active in the first decades of the twentieth century—such as Fogel, and to some extent Agnon—were more difficult to place in Hebrew literature's historiography. Nonetheless, each and every one of the imaginary fathers offered a gendered and ideological alternative to the national, male-centered narratives of Hebrew literature.

Gershon Shaked, the traditional historian of Israeli literature, provided a justification for including all these writers under one rubric when he dubbed them the “grandfathers”—a term aimed at separating the diasporic writers from the official fathers of Israeli literature, that is, the 1948 generation who embraced the realistic, nationalistic, localized *Eretz-Israeli* writing.<sup>77</sup> I seek to broaden Shaked's definition and at the same time challenge its Oedipal bias in an attempt to explore its gender-fluid aspects, allowing the grandfathers to transform into imaginary fathers à la Kristeva: motherly fathers who question the stern, authoritarian father figure most associated with the Oedipal narrative.

Hebrew literary criticism perceives Gnessin as the prototype of the Hebrew prose fiction writer and as a “writer's writer,” as Gershon Shaked put

it.<sup>78</sup> However, the first female Israeli prose fiction authors' intersexual dialogue with his works reveals a significant shift away from both the *ars poetica* and national perceptions prevalent in turn-of-the-century Hebrew literature. His stories contain sadomasochistic, destructive artist figures, some of whom relinquish writing and immerse themselves in *eros*: a typically female, anti-national theme later adopted by Rachel Eytan when she attempted to write a subversive *Künstlerroman* challenging the male Hebrew *ars poetica* tradition.

The first female Israeli prose fiction authors also evoked the work of other authors active at the turn of the century who employed gender-loaded themes that undermine male national narratives of Hebrew literature. Berdichevsky's short story "Ba'emek" ("In the Valley"), for instance, shows how feminine creative endeavors were repressed by religious Jewish society, a theme which later shaped Amalia Kahana-Carmon's novella "Lev ha-kaits, lev ha-or" ("Heart of Summer, Heart of Light"). Her novella also draws on Bialik's *ars poetica* verse, which has been described by scholars as containing definitive female components later suppressed by the poet himself in his own attempt to adapt to the national agenda of Hebrew literature. Kahana-Carmon embraces Bialik as a poetic imaginary father, in addition to Gnessin and Berdichevsky, her imaginary fathers in prose, as part of her revolutionary, ambitious literary style, which glides fluidly between genres, deliberately challenging the distinction between prose and poetry.

The author whose work had the most decisive influence on the first female Israeli prose fiction writers, however, was undoubtedly S. Y. Agnon, who began publishing in the 1910s. In spite of his later canonical and iconic position in Israeli literature, Agnon was perceived throughout the 1920s as writing in an obsolete literary style that no longer reflected his generation's poetic and ideological needs. This perception still affected the literary establishment of the 1948 generation. Even Hebrew literary criticism, which later withdrew its judgment of Agnon as a representative of old Jewish tradition, had difficulty situating him within a defined generic and ideological framework. Baruch Kurtzweil claimed that Agnon's work was based on dichotomized, dialectical ideological foundations, implying that the contradictory, dialogic aspect of his work contained minor, subversive voices, like the feminine voice itself.<sup>79</sup> Agnon's use of popular, noncanonic literature and the grotesque aspect of his

work can also be associated with all sorts of minor literature, and women's writing in particular.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, the difficulty of placing Agnon within the Oedipal male historiography of modern Hebrew literature and his tendency to adopt a female point of view in several of his significant works also make him a definitive participant in intersexual dialogue.

Alongside Agnon, David Fogel, another imaginary father, was active in the first decades of the twentieth century. His novel *Hayei nisuim* (*Married Life*) was a great influence in the late prose fiction of Rachel Eytan as well as on later prose writers such as Zeruya Shalev, whose work will be discussed in the epilogue as a continuation of the poetic path forged by Eytan. Contrary to Agnon, who openly returned to Jewish sources from which national Hebrew literature was beginning to withdraw, Fogel was a European modernist, closer to assimilated Jewish authors such as Alfred Döblin and Franz Kafka than to the Hebrew writers of his own generation like Avigdor Ha-meiri, Eliezer Shteinman, and Shimon Halkin. Fogel seemed to conceal any national or historical Jewish affiliation, which led to his exclusion from the traditional historiographical narrative of modern Hebrew literature and left him estranged from the literary establishment in the Land of Israel. Although Fogel's poetry, which includes poems written from the female first-person perspective, has been recognized by Hebrew literary criticism, his prose fiction has not been discussed from a gendered standpoint, in spite of the fact that it suggests—as shown by the female prose fiction in dialogue with it—radical engagement with gender and sexuality.

The intersexual dialogue with the imaginary fathers of modern Hebrew literature enabled the first female Israeli prose fiction writers to establish themselves in the literature of their generation via a paradoxical stance, from both outside and inside the Hebrew canon simultaneously. Intersexual dialogue thus destabilizes Shaked's traditional narrative of "returning to the grandfathers," that is, the Statehood Generation's intertextual references to the diasporic grandfathers—Gnessin, Berdichevsky, Fogel, and Agnon—as part of their rebellion against their disappointing fathers, the 1948 generation. The three female prose fiction writers upon whom this book focuses expropriate this intertextual dialogue from the custody of the Statehood Generation authors and reveal it to be a poetic challenge to the Oedipal historiographical model prevalent in Hebrew literary criticism.

The first chapter of the book is an examination of the early prose fiction of Yehudit Hendel, written against the backdrop of Israel's generation of 1948. The chapter explores the literary dialogue of the young Hendel with Agnon, the admired yet abandoned literary father of the 1948 generation. Following Butler's reading of Freud's notion of melancholia, I explore this intersexual dialogue as a form of melancholic internalization: an assimilation of the realistic 1948 generation-style prose, while destabilizing the poetic and ideological constancy it dictated, revealing, at the same time, the fundamental otherness in Agnon's oeuvre.

The second chapter deals with Amalia Kahana-Carmon's intersexual dialogue with a few of the turn-of-the-century imaginary fathers of modern Hebrew literature, including Berdichevsky, Gnessin, and Bialik, in her stories from the 1960s. This dialogue, read against the background of the central intertextual process of Kahana-Carmon's generation, the return to the grandfathers, challenges Oedipal notions of literary influence.

The third chapter is an examination of Rachel Eytan's fiction of the 1960s and 1970s. The chapter focuses on Eytan's "jammed"—in Kristeva's terms—return to the Hebrew male *Künstlerroman*. The first lines of this process, based on the intersexual dialogue Eytan conducts with the canon of Hebrew literature, were penned in her acclaimed first novel. This very process takes, however, a new, radical turn—both poetically and politically—in her second novel, which ultimately resulted in her banishment from the Israeli literary scene.

The epilogue explores new directions in intersexual dialogue in the so-called feminist and postmodern era of the late 1990s and 2000s. It focuses on contemporary novelist Zeruya Shalev, whose fiction entails self-conscious, humorous intersexual dialogues with the imaginary fathers, and provides a concluding discussion of the phenomenon of intersexual dialogue in Israeli women's prose.

Last but not least is the issue of translation. This book naturally required the quoting and paraphrasing of large passages from Hebrew. Since I did not want to burden the reader with a language not understood by a large segment of its intended readership, all quotations are translated. This decision presented some major difficulties. First, the problem of writing in English about Hebrew women's writing, whose general absence from the Anglo-American bookshelf is yet another testimony to its unfortunate marginality. In recent years more and more works of Hebrew



and Israeli literature have been translated into English, but the vast majority of the works of the first Israeli prose fiction authors remain untranslated. Good translations of the Hebrew male authors discussed in this book were not difficult to find, but of all the female authors, only Rachel Eytan's *The Fifth Heaven* and Zeruya Shalev's *Love Life* are available in translation, and other translated prose works are unusable.

I therefore had to do most of the translation of the female prose works myself, sometimes with the assistance of others. I hope I faced the challenge well, by attempting to follow the original as accurately as possible without losing its creative force. I can only wish that this study—on crucial decades in the previously unexplored history of women's writing in Hebrew—will inspire more translations of significant works such as those appearing in this book.

## CHAPTER 1

# On the Absent Pen

## *Intersexual Dialogue as Melancholia in Yehudit Hendel's Prose of the 1950s*

I met Agnon once, or more accurately I saw him. It was at a cocktail party held at a friend's house in Jerusalem. I did not introduce myself, and he stood deep in conversation with the man I had come to the party with. Two Galicianers; he spoke to him but looked at me, or rather looked through me with that gaze of one who sees far, who sees and does not see, who raises the mask only to lower it again. It was the gaze of those who miss nothing, but are always somewhat blind; the gaze at once narrow and broad, which for me is the essence of Agnon. I forget the color of his eyes, but I clearly recall the misty black round of his pupils, with a whitish arc around them. For many years I have associated this image with Agnon in connection with the black letters and white spaces that fill the Agnonic text with its sense of abandonment, a world of leavings and the eternal exile of life naturally in the holy tongue and in the Holy Land.

—YEHUDIT HENDEL

Yehudit Hendel was not the only Israeli writer to describe an encounter with “the incontestable master of Hebrew literature” in dramatic, almost mythic terms.<sup>1</sup> Others have described their meeting with Agnon as a critical moment in which, by exchanging words with the master, the young

writer won approval for his existence in the literary scene. In *A Tale of Love and Darkness* Amos Oz, for example, tells how he made a pilgrimage to Agnon's house in the Talpiot neighborhood of Jerusalem, with the intention of hearing Agnon's verdict on Oz's first stories. He was turned away but floated "with dancing steps, drunk with delight" when Agnon praised his first book in a later letter.<sup>2</sup> A. B. Yehoshua, on the other hand, in his essay, "Hakir vehahar" ("The Wall and the Mountain"), deliberates upon the blatant contempt Agnon displayed, "playing this confused little act that we now inflict on young writers who come to us, pulling out a few moldy sweets from a tin." Nevertheless, Yehoshua later realized that Agnon's penetrating remarks about his writing—"in good literature neither the style nor the language should be felt"—had constituted an important stage in his literary development.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike Oz's and Yehoshua's descriptions, which reinforce conventional critical views of the two as Agnon's successors in Israeli literature, Hendel's recollection of her encounter with Agnon is markedly strange. She does not dare to introduce herself, let alone ask him to approve her writing. Standing shyly to one side, looking at the two great artists—Agnon and "the man I came with" (her husband, the painter Zvi Mairovich)—conversing without looking at her, she seems to be articulating her marginal status in a cultural scene premised on affiliations between male artists. Nevertheless, the scene of Hendel's encounter with Agnon was more than an expression of her exclusion from male Hebrew literature, of which Agnon was a supporting pillar. As the scene plays out, Hendel attempts to disrupt the unquestioned gender hierarchy set up at the start between the admired, authoritative male writer and the excluded, marginal female writer.

Thus her sideways glance at Agnon is revealed as penetrating, all-seeing, noticing "the misty black of his pupil" and "the white arc" around it in Agnon's eyes. Agnon's gaze, on the other hand, is described as a kind of non-gaze, almost a blindness: "the gaze of one . . . who sees and does not see, who raises the mask only to lower it again."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Hendel seems to occupy the privileged, male role of an all-seeing prophet, while Agnon is given the passive, feminine role of the object of her gaze, unable to return it. In the literary context, Hendel appears to be casting herself in the familiar image of the observer for the house of Israel with his penetrating and discerning gaze. As shown by Dan Miron, this gaze

appears in classical Hebrew literature and is akin to the medical gaze Michel Foucault finds in the modern hospital: a new gaze, different from the careful, empirical experiment typical of the classical age, an authoritative, diagnostic gaze, penetrating the helpless body of the patient.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the rest of the scene situates her as the one capable of diagnosing Agnon, interpreting him, articulating his poetic world: “a world of leavings and the eternal exile of life.” But unlike the gaze of the observer for the house of Israel, which differentiates between the self and the other, between the active gazer and the helpless object of her gaze, Hendel’s glance at Agnon expresses integration, blurring of boundaries, welding of his literary and nonliterary personas to her own. Thus, the “world of abandonment” she refers to in Agnon’s words actually hints at her own poetic world of boundless melancholy, a world of eternal wait for an absent other, from whom one can never be separated. Further on in the text, words attributed to Agnon such as “swallowed” are inextricably embedded in her own:

But besides this—the matter of the absent pen, the sense or the incurable fact of the absent pen, is also perhaps the strength of the absent pen, of the white spaces, the empty space between each letter and the power of the missing words, that which makes a text solid as a block of marble which at any given moment seems to move and shake and, in fact, the black letters loved Agnon, and as we know, the holy letters pleaded for me that they loved me, letters of the holy tongue, twenty-two letters and five final letters; he didn’t forget the final letters and I do that which has been prescribed for me: I have been given such and such letters to write with and I write with them.<sup>6</sup>

Not only does Hendel move her talk of Agnon from the third to the first person, thus attributing the things said to herself, but interestingly, the final sentence, “I do that which has been prescribed for me: I have been given such and such letters to write with and I write with them,” precisely reiterates what Agnon himself said in his thank you speech given at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem when he was awarded the Irving and Bertha Newman Prize by New York University in 1963.<sup>7</sup>

At first glance, it seems as though Hendel internalized and incorpo-

rated Agnon's words into her own from a position of self-effacement and admiration. But her words, heard like Agnon's in an acceptance speech at a literary prize-giving ceremony—the Agnon Prize, at that!—blur the literary, biographical, and gender distinctions between the two writers. Hendel aligns herself with the Agnonic position of total dedication to writing, with the writer who has been given “such and such letters to write with” and writes with them.

Indeed, Hendel's symbiotic, mimetic relation to Agnon as it emerges from the text of her acceptance speech at the presentation of the Agnon Prize constitutes an important key with which to understand her poetics, as well as its unique place in Hebrew literature. The symbiotic relation between self and other preoccupies Hendel from her earliest works, which repeatedly portray scenes of voyeurism, mimesis, identification, and internalization of absent others whose presence persists. At the same time, Hendel's symbiotic, melancholic poetics is most clearly expressed at the meta-poetic level, through the intersexual dialogue that her early works conduct with Agnon.

Hendel, who began her career as practically the only woman writer of the 1948 generation—associated in Israeli literary consciousness with the nationalistic, the masculine, and the heroic—nevertheless left her mark on it as a result of a paradoxical process of melancholic contamination with Agnon: the repressed other of the 1948 generation authors.<sup>8</sup>

## Yehudit Hendel and the 1948 Generation

Yehudit Hendel was born in Warsaw in 1926, immigrated to Palestine with her family in 1930, and began publishing her first stories in the 1940s, when the 1948 generation was in its heyday.<sup>9</sup> Hendel belongs with the 1948 generation not only chronologically, however, but also because of her early subject matter. Her first works—the short-story collection *Anashim aherim hem*<sup>10</sup> (*They Are Other People*) and the novel *Re'hov ha-madregot* (*The Street of Steps*)<sup>11</sup>—deal with subjects not very different from those occupying S. Izhar, Moshe Shamir, Yigal Mossinsohn, and other writers of the period. Like them, Hendel wrote about the War of Independence and its aftermath, the conflict between Eretz Israel old timers and the new immigrants as well as about kibbutz life.

Indeed, it seems that the literary establishment of the period tended to identify Hendel's writing with the zeitgeist of the 1948 generation. One of her earliest stories, "Tzili ve'yedidi Shaul" ("Tzili and My Friend Shaul") was even included in the anthology *Dor ba'aretz* (*A Generation in Eretz Israel*),<sup>12</sup> which constituted "a first mapping of a literary generation which was then at the high point of its creative flight" as Avner Holtzman observes.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, at the start of her literary career, Hendel was categorized by critics of the period as a feminine writer, working on the margins of her generation's canon. The critic Yosef Lichtenbaum, for example, referred to Hendel as a "poetess," and wrote that she "is supreme because of her unforgettable and unique ability to create the varied world of her own experience in a truly feminine manner."<sup>14</sup> The journalist Hanna Bat-Miriam praised the "secret of the combination of [Hendel's] work as a writer with her role as wife and housewife."<sup>15</sup> Even historians of Hebrew literature had difficulty regarding Hendel as a typical representative of the 1948 generation, hesitating in fact to attribute her work to any particular generation. Gershon Shaked, in his monumental historiographical work *Ha-siporet ha-Ivrit 1880–1980* (*Hebrew Fiction: 1880–1980*) commented that Hendel is "closer to Kahana-Carmon and Yehoshua Knaz than the group of realist writers with whom she shared her beginnings in *Anashim aherim hem*," putting her in a secondary position among those of the succeeding generation as well.<sup>16</sup> Even Nurit Gertz, in her canonical study of the crossover of generations in Israeli prose, *Hirbet hiza'a*, does not include Hendel with the 1948 generation writers.

Feminist criticism of the 1990s and 2000s exposed the gender bias of these studies while embracing Hendel's later work beginning with the autobiographical novel *Ha-koah ha-aher* (*The Other Power*), published in 1984.<sup>17</sup> This work appeared at the end of sixteen long years of silence and documented her life with her husband, the artist Zvi Mairovich, who had died seven years previously. Among other things, the book marked Hendel's rebirth as a writer because it introduced a new character who returned in later books: a female narrator and Hendel's alter ego, who bears witness to events touching on the lives of women and their relationships with their surroundings.

During this period, feminist critics including Pnina Shirav, Lily Rat-

tok, and Yael Feldman pointed out the pattern of Hendel's exclusion from the historiography of Hebrew and Israeli literature.<sup>18</sup> In the face of the doomed attempt to integrate Hendel into the existing male-Oedipal historiography, those scholars sought to put Hendel's writing into a separate category of feminine writing as a link in an alternative, female genealogy of Hebrew literature. Pnina Shirav, for example, declared Hendel to be the next in line in a dynasty of women beginning with Dvora Baron, herself becoming a sort of literary foremother or, as she puts it, an "older sister" to later writers such as Amalia Kahana-Carmon and Ruth Almog.<sup>19</sup>

At the same time, feminist critics have had a hard time with Hendel's early prose, which was written against the backdrop of the 1948 generation, viewing it as adopting the male literary norms of the period. Most of the feminist scholars tend to draw a clear line between Hendel's early work, which Yael Feldman describes as "lacking in feminist awareness" and the "personal," "feminine" writing which she developed during the 1980s and which put female characters and conflicts on center stage.<sup>20</sup>

One exception is Talila Kosh Zohar, who argues that although Hendel's 1948 generation writing "joins the hegemonic discourse and represents the Zionist ethos, it also suggests an alternative representation, since as a woman, her marginalized status in this arena precludes her reporting on the War or representing it." As a result, Kosh Zohar claims, even in her war stories, Hendel wrote about women and the home front, thus undermining "the prevalent representation of women in the (male) fiction of those years as anonymous, absent, and transparent figures."<sup>21</sup> Dan Miron takes this line of argument further in his book *Ha-koah ha-halash* (*The Weak Power*) in which he recognizes gender aspects in Hendel's early work as well. In his introduction Miron writes that the narrator of Hendel's *Ha-koah ha'aher* already existed, "albeit not clearly or entirely stylistically expressed" in her early books, *Anashim aherim hem* and *Re'hov ha-madregot*. Miron describes this figure as follows:

The most prominent representative of "écriture feminine" in Israeli literature . . . belongs to writing dealing not with feminine subjects or representations of women among the important objects of her life . . . but rather in utterances free of the male "symbolic order" (in the sense of Jacques Lacan's conception) whose source is the phallic principle.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, Miron offers a new insight into the gendered aspects linking Hendel's late works to her earlier writing. But in describing Hendel's poetics as "feminine," liberated from the "male 'symbolic order'" Miron essentially suspends Hendel's work in that same vacuum in which earlier literary historiography and indeed later feminist criticism left her.

In this chapter I seek to question the traditional view of Hendel as a writer who shaped a distinct feminine writing, separate from the historical continuity of Hebrew and Israeli literature. Instead, it is my claim that Hendel articulates a dialogic, melancholy poetics, grounded in a return to a personal, national, and most of all, literary, past. The ultimate expression of this process appears in the intersexual dialogue she conducts with Agnon's prose. His work—which digressed in various ways from the Hebrew literature emerging as the national literature of Eretz Israel—enabled Hendel to establish not only her own poetic identity, but also her unique place in the historiography of Hebrew literature.

In this sense, my reading of Hendel's early work signals a further stage in the fundamental revision occurring over recent years of Hebrew literature criticism of the 1948 generation.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, in this chapter I argue that Hendel actually led this literary generation in new poetic and ideological directions. Her very marginality enabled her to be at the forefront of these changes, instituting far-reaching changes discovered by Hebrew literature only a decade later and which continue to resonate to this day.

### **Hendel's Melancholic Intersexual Dialogue with Agnon**

What did Agnon give the young Hendel? As I stated in the introduction, Agnon's unique place in Hebrew and Israeli historiography made him an obvious source of influence for the burgeoning phenomenon of women's prose writing in Israel. Nevertheless, Hendel's early intersexual dialogue with Agnon acquires special significance against the backdrop of the 1948 generation, which is usually understood as rejecting Agnon's literary influence. The conventional historiographic view, represented by Gershon Shaked, casts Agnon, among other diasporic authors, as a literary father abandoned by his children, the 1948 generation, and then adopted once again a decade later as a literary grandfather by the Statehood Generation authors.

Nitsa Ben-Dov's book *Vehi tehilatech (And It Is Your Praise)*, published



in 2007, demonstrates the hold this view has had on recent scholarship. Ben-Dov describes in detail the foundational influence of Agnon on the prose fiction of the leading novelists of the Statehood Generation—A. B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz—supporting her argument by remarking on the split between Agnon and the 1948 generation writers. Indeed, Agnon’s fiction, especially his definitive, modernistic works, were seen as alien to the realist local prose of the 1948 generation, which continued in many ways the Eretz Israel genre of the Second and Third Aliyot.<sup>24</sup>

From an ideological point of view, however, this rupture can be seen as the product of ideas formed as early as the 1920s in the journal *Ha-shiloah*, edited by Yosef Klausner, where Agnon was described more than once as an “exilic” author whose writing expressed the stereotype of the “old” Jew and was inappropriate for the emerging literature of Eretz Israel. In 1924, for example, Klausner wrote of the short-story collection *Al kapot ha-manul* (*On the Handles of the Lock*) that they were “old fashioned, archaic.”<sup>25</sup> The same year, the critic D. A. Friedman wrote that Agnon was “an expert in the past” and, completing his portrait of Agnon as the epitome of the “old,” exilic Jew, stated that “there is much effeminacy in Agnon’s flaccidity.”<sup>26</sup>

In the 1930s and 1940s, under the influence of such critics as Baruch Kurtzweil and Dov Sadan, the early view of Agnon as representing the world of tradition<sup>27</sup> was revised and he was crowned as the greatest writer of his generation.<sup>28</sup> It seems, however, that the exilic, anachronistic, anti-national, feminine image of him portrayed in *Ha-shiloah* in the 1920s infiltrated the literary consciousness of the 1948 generation. Although they hugely respected Agnon, corresponding with him, sending him their books, and even writing about his work, as Dan Laor has pointed out, Agnon’s influence is hardly apparent at all in work written in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>29</sup> This trend was consistent with ideas articulated by Moshe Shamir in 1946, in his famous manifesto “Im bnei dori” (“Together with My Generation”), in which he sketched out the face of 1948 generation literature as realistic, local, and in dialogue with reality rather than with literature:

The “friends” are all members of my generation. Nothing unites us more than the generation’s sense of responsibility, far and beyond creative difficulties, the dictates of modernism, indepen-

dent personal peculiarities, a sense of absolute, one hundred percent belonging to a human revolution beats within us . . . Our generation may not bring about revolutions in literature. This will be a generation of realistic literature, breaking free and exposing perhaps without literary demolition, but it will cling, it must cling to the revolution of reality.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, critics and writers of the 1948 generation testify to Agnon being their mentor, despite his distance from Shamir's "revolution of reality" and lack of material influence. Most notably, Moshe Shamir himself paid tribute to "Reb Agnon" in his address to the 1957 Congress of Hebrew Writers, but asserted that his writing was in "decline," cut off from the major events of the day. In the same lecture, Shamir called for a modern literary renaissance as an alternative that would lead to liberation from the "shackles of tradition, tradition in reality and tradition in the concepts and terms with which we are attempting to define [that reality]." <sup>31</sup>

The literary and theoretical rift between Agnon and the 1948 generation was summed up by Robert Alter, who argued that the 1948 generation "almost entirely ignored Agnon's example" and added that in the succeeding "Statehood Generation, a phenomenon described by the Russian formalists took hold in Hebrew literature; when a young literary generation needs to rebel against a literary father, it turns for a model to a literary uncle or grandfather. So here, Grandfather Agnon could serve as a guide in a shadowy world."<sup>32</sup> Alter's comment is a further demonstration of the foreignness of Agnon's fiction to the Palmach generation. Furthermore, it exposes the stubborn insistence of Hebrew literary criticism to cling to the patriarchal model of literary influence, only to replace the father figure with that of a dominant grandfather.

In this context, I argue that Hendel's literary dialogue with Agnon in her early fiction predated, in fact in many ways presaged, a process of "return to the grandfathers" in the words of Shaked. Moreover, I wish to argue that this literary dialogue not only shaped Hendel's poetics but also challenged, retrospectively, Agnon's patriarchal literary image, as it revealed the fundamental otherness, the inner rupture in Agnon's work, which itself moves frequently between modernism and romanticism, realism and fantasy, and masculinity and femininity. Thus, Hendel's

reading of Agnon subverts the figure of a reigning literary father rejected by his children and adopted as grandfather of a new, male literary generation. Instead, she presents Agnon as a father offering a way out of the Oedipal dynasty of Hebrew literature: an imaginary father in Julia Kristeva's terms, holding within him both fatherly and motherly traits.

The complex intersexual dialogue that Hendel conducts with Agnon in her early prose may be described in terms of Judith Butler's reading of Freud's notion of melancholia.<sup>33</sup> Although melancholia, according to Freud, borrows some of its traits from the practice of mourning—which would regularly be the reaction to the loss of a loved object—it also contains other features from the process of regression to a state of narcissistic identification. Thus, Freud defines melancholia as a mimetic practice aimed at incorporating the lost love within the very identity of the one who remains.<sup>34</sup> Following Freud, Butler suggests that the Freudian notion of this other in the self implies that the distinction between self and other is not primarily external. The self is, from the outset, radically implicated in the other. Butler addresses this incorporation of the other as a subversive repetition that never produces a true identity, thus exposing the instability of the very category that it constitutes.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, Butler employs this idea of the other within the self to challenge the dichotomy between identification and desire. Thus, she argues that the non-self-identity of the subject's psyche leads to a state in which the melancholic incorporation of the other—of all the variously gendered others loved and lost—appears to precede and constitute desire (and motivation) itself. In this sense, mimesis precedes the possibility of loss and the disappointments of love.<sup>36</sup>

It is important to stress that melancholic internalization also includes an aggressive, sadistic aspect that Freud acknowledged as the first form in which the self signals his desire to encompass an object by consuming it.<sup>37</sup> The psychoanalyst Ruth Leys, to whom Butler refers in her reading of Freud's melancholia, links the rivalry involved in mimesis with a fluidity of the distinction between self and other, arguing that mimesis always produces a paranoid, sadistic desire to annihilate the other who is also the self.<sup>38</sup> Her claim is that this rivalry becomes doubly relevant in situations involving the gaze, evoking Lacan's description of the child in the famous mirror stage. There, the child first experiences the unbridgeable gap between himself and his reflection in the mirror, resulting in

rivalry between the self and its double, that image of the self as reflected in the mirror.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, Hendel's early work constitutes an ambitious realization of Butler's model of melancholic internalization as psycho-literary intertextuality. Her prose delineates recurring situations involving voyeurism, imitation, doubles, and a constant blurring of the distinction between the self and a certain lost other who maintains his presence even in his absence. At the same time, this melancholic model exists in Hendel's work not only thematically, but also as an enactment of an intersexual dialogue with Agnon, the lost other of the realistic, local, and national literature of the 1948 generation. At first glance, it seems as though the young Hendel, who was yet to establish a poetic identity of her own, offers us a local, Eretz Israel version of Agnonic prose in her early work. But Hendel's return to Agnon infiltrated her realistic, Eretz Israeli prose and enabled her to challenge the generic, thematic, and ideological norms adhered to by her peers.

### **The Fake Sabra: The Young Hendel Rewrites “The Doctor’s Divorce”**

Hendel's literary dialogue with Agnon began in her early stories, which were published in various magazines and literary supplements during the 1940s. Most of these stories appeared in Hendel's first short-story collection, *Anashim aherim hem*, published in 1950. Echoes of Hendel's dialogue with Agnon are variously apparent in most of the stories in the collection, including exilic characters seemingly taken from the Jewish, eastern European shtetl: grotesque, sad clowns alongside dreamlike sequences. Biblical and mishnaic phrases, seemingly written in “Agnonese,” also recur in the vast majority of the stories. Hendel's reference to Agnon was, however, most apparent in the novella “Almanato shel Eliezer” (“Eliezer's Widow”),<sup>40</sup> in which she conducts an intertextual dialogue with Agnon's story “Ha-rofe ve'grushato” (“The Doctor's Divorce”).

Hendel's novella was first published only six years after “The Doctor's Divorce,” which itself first appeared as a short story in the collection *Bechor (First Born)*, edited by Berl Katzenelson,<sup>41</sup> with which Hendel seems to have been familiar. Three years later “Almanato shel Eliezer” was included in Hendel's first short-story collection, *Anashim aherim*

*hem*. Like other stories in the collection, it is set against a background typical of the 1948 generation literature, on a kibbutz. Ya'akov Milech, the Viennese doctor of Agnon's story, is replaced by Gad, a member of a kibbutz on the banks of the River Jordan. Gad falls in love with Bracha, a new member of the kibbutz. They marry and have a child, but then Gad is consumed with jealousy of his wife's previous husband, Eliezer, who was gored and killed by a bull in the kibbutz cowshed.

Hendel adheres to the emerging realistic tradition in kibbutz stories of the Third Aliya, particularly in her authentic, sensual depictions of the local landscape, nature, and climate, typical of the Eretz Israel genre. "Almanato shel Eliezer" also obeys the norms of the period in terms of its protagonist, Gad the kibbutznik. Gad's sabra point of view is actually exceptional in *Anashim aherim hem*, most of whose protagonists are marginal figures, social others in the Israel of that time. The novel opens with a description of Gad remembering Bracha's arrival "ten years ago," thus marking him as a relative "old-timer" on the kibbutz. His somewhat patronizing tone when referring to "our girls" ("Almanato," 51) in the first-person plural is another typical trait of the sabra that was later subject to parody.<sup>42</sup> Hendel also seems to highlight Gad's misogynistic point of view as the jealous, possessive husband who constantly makes his female partner the object of his penetrating, interrogative gaze.

Indeed, at first sight it seems that Hendel's adherence to the poetic and ideological norms of the literature of her generation would limit the interpretative potential of her dialogue with Agnon. The novella is likely to appear as an attempt to reconstitute an eastern European, Agnonic plot in the reality of Eretz Israel on the eve of the establishment of the state. Thus, the few scholars who have written about this early novella have tended to regard it as an immature text, lacking in the individuality apparent in the rest of her early work.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, "Almanato shel Eliezer" is far from a juvenile draft by an inexperienced writer who has not yet formed a poetic identity, but rather an articulation of Hendel's melancholic intersexual dialogue with Agnon. This intersexual dialogue enabled Hendel to read Agnon's prose anew, thus revealing its gender-fluid aspects, while subverting the figure of the Israeli male sabra protagonist who stands at the center of the story.

Let us read the opening paragraphs of Hendel's "Almanato shel Eliezer" and Agnon's "The Doctor's Divorce":

I remember the first day Bracha came here, ten years ago. She was wearing a short, loose, yellowish dress made of translucent, summery material embroidered with stars, holding in her hand a suitcase bound in brown cloth with white shell buttons she had forgotten to close . . . In those days Bracha had a crown of yellow hair and she would skip around the farmyard; when she spoke she would toss her head passionately till the dense freckles on her face danced too. The freckles were crowded around the bridge of her nose as a kind of yellow mark, laid a shadow over her eyes, and merged into a single glowing tangle with her abundance of summer hair . . . And Bracha tosses her head from side to side and laughs and you feel like she is laughing like that only for you and for no one else in the world. (“Almanato,” 51)

When I joined the staff of the hospital, I discovered there a blonde nurse who was loved by everyone and whose praise was on the lips of all the patients. As soon as they heard her footsteps, they would sit up in bed and stretch their arms out toward her as an only son reaches for his mother, and each one of them would call, “Nurse, nurse, come to me” . . . Even the ill-tempered kind who find all the world provoking—as soon as she appeared, the frown-lines in their faces faded. The smile that illuminated her face was enough to make patients obey her. In addition to her smile, there were her eyes, a kind of blue-black; everyone she looked at felt as if he were the most important thing in the world. (“The Doctor’s Divorce,” 135)

Study of these two opening paragraphs from Hendel and Agnon, respectively, reveals their kinship. Both authors use the first-person singular in a nostalgic, male, confessional register,<sup>44</sup> involving a stereotypically blonde, blue-eyed, universally adored female heroine. More than anything, it seems that both opening paragraphs include an exposition of the major themes that Hendel sketches out following Agnon: the male, penetrating gaze at a woman, the object of his desire.

Hendel’s protagonist, Gad, establishes Bracha as an erotic object as his gaze lingers over her body or, in an explicitly fetishistic act, over parts of it, thus giving rise to the old misogynous dichotomy between the

Madonna and the whore. Bracha, like Agnon's heroine Nurse Dina, is described as someone whose innocent appearance and expression are merely a fraudulent manipulation: "you feel like she is laughing like that only for you and for no one else in the world." Her apparent innocence as cover for her supposedly true dark essence is hinted at in the image of her yellow freckles casting a shadow over her eyes, a development of the blue-black reflected in Dina's eyes. This oxymoronic image of Bracha embodies the distance in the protagonist's mind between the "pure" relationship he shares with his wife now and her dubious sexual past. Thus, when Bracha suggests calling their newborn son Eliezer at the novel's climax, Gad notes that "the freckles round the bridge of her nose darkened" just as the doctor in Agnon's story felt that "the blue-black in her eyes darkened" whenever the story of her past affair came up in their conversations.

Hendel's novella, following Agnon, focuses on the protagonist's voyeuristic male gaze as it eroticizes its feminine object, but goes on to question the very maleness of that gaze. Although Bracha knew Gad before she ever met Eliezer, and despite the hint that she inspires romantic notions in him, their relationship is not realized at first, for reasons which later become clear. At this point, Bracha moves in with Eliezer, another kibbutz member and her future husband. Their apartment faces Gad's, which allows him to watch the couple in secret through the window. After Eliezer's death, Gad and Bracha finally come together.

Gad's absolute superiority—his ability to gaze at Bracha without her knowing it—establishes her as the ultimate passive female object, observed in intimate and sexual moments by the desiring male. The situation affords Gad another kind of sadistic pleasure besides voyeurism.<sup>45</sup> This sadistic aspect is revealed toward the end of the novella when Gad takes on the role of investigator wishing to "bring to light" the "true" nature of Bracha's past relationship with Eliezer and to discover "signs" in Bracha again and again of its power in the present ("Almanato," 80).

Nevertheless, the text sketches another possibility behind the protagonist's back, which subverts the unidirectional trajectory of the desiring, interrogating male gazing at the passive, sexual woman-object. Consciously, Gad declares that Bracha and Eliezer's relationship, to which he has been witness, is an obstacle to his own relationship with Bracha in the present: "All the years she was lying with me and dreaming about

Eliezer . . . and why did she marry me?” (78). The text also suggests, however, that Gad’s direction of his voyeuristic gaze toward Bracha and Eliezer facilitated the relationship between Gad and Bracha, even if not through a normative heterosexual model of male desire. Thus, it is noteworthy that Bracha was acquainted with Gad before she met Eliezer. The text even hints that she was just as, if not more, romantically interested in Gad than he was in her, but their relationship was never realized then, despite the apparent absence of anything standing in their way. This is how Hendel describes their first intimate encounter, in the kibbutz dining room, early in the morning:

You have no sweater and you’re not cold; it’s autumn already, I said. I didn’t want her to forget I was there. She inclined her head and laughed out loud.

Me, cold? Even in winter I sometimes go without a sweater, ha ha, now even more so. I sweat so much when I’m hot, I get terribly hot, don’t you believe me? And she loosened her shirt a little and fanned her brown skin with it. I see, I said, you’ve opened all the windows . . . I thought: I’ll wait a little longer, and I followed her head with my eyes in its constant movement between the tables. Suddenly I didn’t want her to know I was there, to see me just staring at her silently and I shrank down in my seat and almost got up to go. (55)

Unlike the opening scene of the novella, in which Gad is cast as the voyeuristic, penetrating male gazer and Bracha as the passive object of his gaze and his desire, in their first intimate encounter Gad’s desire for his wife-to-be is not articulated in active, male terms. Thus, he voices narcissistic identification with Bracha, “Suddenly I didn’t want her to know I was there, to see me just staring at her silently.” He wishes to become the object of her gaze in his turn, perhaps even to become a male spectacle arousing voyeuristic desire in her: “I didn’t want her to forget that I was there.”<sup>46</sup> It is therefore no surprise that when Bracha gestures seductively, establishing herself once more as a normative female erotic object—“I get terribly hot, don’t you believe me? And she loosened her shirt a little and fanned her brown skin with it”—Gad ignores the gesture and expresses a wish to disappear or leave.



Later, when Bracha and Eliezer become lovers, Gad refers to this development as a “strange” one that “no one understood” (“Almanato,” 57). Nevertheless, given Gad and Bracha’s first encounter, it can be argued that the new relationship between Bracha and his apparent rival Eliezer grants Gad his wish to preserve Bracha’s interest in him. Thus, Hendel describes Gad’s satisfaction with his encounter with Bracha on a kibbutz path, when she asks him how he is and compliments him while he himself affirms her attention with a self-effacing feminine response: “I didn’t think anyone took so much interest in me” (59). On the other hand, his desire “just [to stare] at her silently” is fulfilled when he becomes the dumb observer of erotic scenes between Bracha and Eliezer. In fact, Gad is so desirous of his daily observation of Bracha and Eliezer that when he has the opportunity to exchange his “old, damp, rickety hut” for a new, remodeled apartment, he refuses on the grounds that “it isn’t right, there are other people ahead of me, sick people and so on” (60).

The text, in fact, hints at the possibility that Gad’s eagerness to observe Bracha and Eliezer—in spite of the pain that this voyeuristic observation arouses in him—enables him to evade a real relationship with the seductive Bracha. He seeks to escape—if only temporarily—from the demand to “man up” for her.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, there are other occasions when Gad seems uncomfortable with demands for normative masculinity, preferring, for example, to read alone in his room rather than hang out with other male kibbutz members or undertake hard physical labor. Meir, his neighbor, reports that “[He’ll] end up turning into a mouse; [he] nibbles so many books” (“Almanato,” 56), a characterization far from the familiar image of the sabra turning his back on the spiritual world and closer to the image of the learned, sexually passive, exilic youths of the Tehiya literature.

At the same time, Hendel also raises the possibility that Gad’s observation of Eliezer and Bracha is an essential condition for the later realization of her relationship with Gad, following Eliezer’s death. Thus, the novella juxtaposes this chapter in which Gad is a tortured, enthusiastic observer of Bracha and Eliezer’s passion with the next chapter, in which Gad and Bracha consummate their relationship and at the end of which Bracha becomes pregnant with Gad’s child. In fact, it can be argued that Gad’s desire for Bracha is aroused only after he has discerned someone else’s desire for her, as suggested by René Girard in his description of mimetic desire in the nineteenth-century European novel.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, Gad

begins to woo Bracha only once she is in a relationship with Eliezer. As is evident in the scene in the kibbutz dining hall, Gad casts a mimetic gaze toward Eliezer, “learning from him” how to desire Bracha. However, in order to further investigate this complex gender drama, it is useful to return to Agnon’s “The Doctor’s Divorce.”

### *“The Doctor’s Divorce”*

At the climax of “The Doctor’s Divorce” Agnon describes an unexpected encounter between the doctor, Ya’akov Milech, and the man he believes to be his rival, his wife Dina’s ex-lover.<sup>49</sup> This encounter, which has been read by critics as the epitome of the male sexual jealousy narrative at the heart of the story<sup>50</sup> is mediated by a brutal, penetrating gaze, evoking Michel Foucault’s medical gaze as it appears in *The Birth of the Clinic*. Foucault refers to the medical gaze as based not only on physical examination, but also on an endless verbal interrogation, including questions about the manifestations and causes of pain, the patient’s medical history, and so on, with the aim to pursue that which is unseen or hidden.<sup>51</sup> The doctor decides to admit his new patient to the hospital, “Whether he needed it or not . . . I told the nurse that I had discovered in him a disease which hadn’t been adequately studied yet and that I wanted to investigate it myself” (“The Doctor’s Divorce,” 151).

From here on he exercises his supreme authority in the hospital as a doctor and the omnipotence of his penetrating gaze, pinned on the helpless patient who cannot return it. The gaze accompanies constant verbal discussion of the patient and his body, the purpose of which is to bring to light the true nature of his disease and to vanquish it. Agnon’s story exemplifies the failure of the brutal, categorizing medical gaze, however, both in the official doctor-patient relationship and in the hidden rivalry between the husband and the ex-lover. Thus, the doctor fails to shed light on this mysterious illness which “[hasn’t] been adequately studied yet.” His patient is discharged and leaves the hospital without the doctor reaching any conclusions about the symptoms that brought him there in the first place. At the same time, the doctor fails in the secret goal he has set himself: to understand the true nature of the relationship of the man with his own wife, a task also described in the text in terms of a penetrating, diagnostic gaze. Although the doctor “[watches] him and

[studies] him as though [he] could learn what rubbed off on him from Dina and what rubbed off on her from him” (152), ultimately the patient is discharged without the doctor gaining any new insights into their relationship. Moreover, the penetrating medical gaze that Doctor Ya’akov Milech attempts to cast on his patient is quickly replaced by a mimetic one: “and from devoting so much attention to him, I was acquiring some of his gestures” (152).

The failure of the medical gaze described by Agnon derives, first and foremost, from the absence of its most fundamental condition, the drawing of clear boundaries between the observer—the doctor—and the object of his gaze, the patient. Not only does the doctor fail to cure the patient, who was, perhaps, healthy in the first place, the patient becomes sicker under his care. The doctor encourages him to smoke and fattens him up until he develops a double chin, while we learn that the doctor himself is “sick” with jealousy over his wife, which drives him mad and leads him to admit a healthy man to hospital unnecessarily.

The breakdown of the distinction between observer and observed, doctor and patient, and health and sickness is also accompanied by the blurring of the distinction between man and non-man. Until the doctor meets the lover, the doctor imagines him to be the very embodiment of powerful, irresistible manliness. Under the doctor’s care, the patient undergoes a process of feminization: he becomes delicate, feeble, and gains weight to the point that it seems that the doctor’s treatment has made the patient similar to “a woman who has given up everything for the sake of eating and drinking” (153). This process of feminization is reinforced after the lover’s discharge from the hospital, when he appears to Milech in a dream and rebukes the doctor: “What do you want from me? Is the fact that you raped me any reason for you to have it in for me?” (155).

The dream, which has been read by various critics as an expression of a desire to commit a violent rape, a wish to castrate his patient,<sup>52</sup> may be explained otherwise if one takes into account the full significance of the blurring of gender distinctions between the doctor and his patient. On one hand, the doctor’s treatment— involving stuffing the patient with food and nicotine which ultimately turn him into a woman— can be read as a metaphorical rape: the violent penetration of the patient’s body, fixing him in the classical feminine role of the helpless rape victim.<sup>53</sup> The gender fluidity in the doctor-patient relationship here goes beyond ag-

gressive homoeroticism toward the other, however. In fact, more than the doctor-patient encounter reinforces a clear dichotomy between the male observer and the helpless, feminine object of his gaze, it generates mutually contaminated and fluid gender identities. Besides losing his medical gaze and his professional authority over the patient during his course of treatment, the doctor loses his identity as a man so that in fact, both doctor and patient undergo a process of feminization. Milech's treatment of his patient stereotypically evokes that of a compassionate nurse heaping attention and food on her patient and stroking his male ego, more than treatment by a formal, objective doctor: "And I came in to visit him and examine him again and again, asking him if he had a good night's sleep . . . and praise his body to him, telling him that it would in all probability last to a ripe old age" ("The Doctor's Divorce," 152). Indeed, the dreamlike, unrealistic ambience of the treatment creates a gender twilight zone in which gender, medical, and other realities are blurred.

"Almanato shel Eliezer" continues this Agnonic move, creating Hendel's own gender twilight zone. Thus, the interrogative, identity-invading gaze of Hendel's protagonist Gad turns his male rival into an object of desire as well as of mimesis. In this, Gad appears to be the successor to Agnon's unsuccessful Viennese doctor and exposes retrospectively the gender fluidity appearing in Agnon's own story. Indeed, Gad's voyeuristic gaze establishes Eliezer as a homoerotic object, in a further development of the occult attraction between Agnon's feminized doctor and his wife's lover.

Hendel's process of destabilizing gender identities is more complex, however, blurring distinctions between identification, desire, and rivalry—in which identification with a (female) other invokes desire for her. In the encounter in the kibbutz dining hall, Gad adopts a feminine position, inviting Bracha to view him as an object. Later, in the voyeuristic setting, Bracha becomes an object of Gad's narcissistic identification once more, this time from a male point of view. Gad observes a sexually active Bracha seducing Eliezer, casting her in a male role that he himself should have undertaken in his relationship with her and which he ultimately learns from her after Eliezer dies.

"Almanato shel Eliezer" presents, then, an interesting literary realization of Judith Butler's melancholic internalization model in which the male subject imitates the desire of the woman, the original object of

his own desire, thus challenging the heterosexual distinction between desire and identification. The traditional literary heterosexual triangle in which two men compete for the affections of one woman becomes one in which desire and identification, masculinity and femininity, symbiosis and separateness are all expressed interchangeably.

### *Agnon as an Imaginary Father*

Hendel's melancholic return to Agnon enabled her not only to embed gender-fluid elements in her 1948 generation prose with its male, sabra protagonist, the diametric opposite of the old, exilic Jew. It also allowed her to reimagine Agnon as a different kind of literary father, one that can be understood in light of Kristeva's notion of the imaginary father, who incorporates both motherly and fatherly attributes. Indeed, Hendel's retrospective rewriting of "The Doctor's Divorce" uncovers Agnon's text not as a typical confessional story dealing with possessive, male jealousy—as it is usually read by Hebrew literature scholars—but rather as a text dealing with the fluid boundaries of gender identity. Moreover, Hendel's reworking of Agnon's thematic materials exposes the heavy price to be paid for any attempt to stabilize those boundaries and to erase the past.

What does this past entail? In the context of Agnon's biography and poetics as reflected in "The Doctor's Divorce," it is an exilic, Jewish past invoking at once nostalgia, revulsion, and guilt. It is the past of the Jewish shtetl, which returns to disrupt Agnon's text even when he seeks to break free of it. Dan Miron describes "The Doctor's Divorce"—together with other stories such as "Panim aherot" ("Another Face") and "Sipur pashut" ("A Simple Story")—as works that deal with immigrants who are "dynamic, energetic but uprooted from their intimate local and social milieu." Ya'akov Milech, "the poor proletarian from the village of Buczacz who sought education and success in Vienna" exposes, according to Miron, "the heavy price of uprooting a man from his environment and from the home in which he grew up. Something in his personality is damaged."<sup>54</sup>

Miron's observations imply that Agnon challenges the traditional depiction of Jewish existence in the shtetl as regressive, sick, and damaged, with gender often appearing as the site of the damage. By contrast, he points to the damage entailed in attempts to bury this past, which will

always result in a return of the repressed. Extrapolating Miron much further, one might say that Ya'akov Milech's encounter with his wife's ex-lover signifies this return of the repressed. The grotesque, troubling, sexually elusive lover from the past may be a figure for the problematic, threatening past which Ya'akov Milech himself seeks to repress in his boundless ambition to succeed and become assimilated, socially and professionally, in Vienna.

In order to investigate the extent to which discussion of the past infiltrates the present in Hendel's novella, one must similarly consider the melancholic aspect of Gad's desire for Bracha which is deflected onto an absent other. This absent other from the past pervades the present of the novella in the form of Gad and Bracha's newborn baby, Eliezer, who is named after Bracha's dead husband—forcing Gad, full of denial and repressions as he is, to confront it.

### *The Return of the Repressed Past*

The birth of the baby at the novella's dramatic climax figures, then, the return of the repressed past into Gad's life. If until this point Gad avoided thinking about the long years during which he would peep through the window of his room at Bracha and Eliezer's apartment, suppressing the conflicted feelings and gender ambivalence this evoked in him, it all erupts with sudden force after the birth of the baby.

Despite his initial joy at the news that Bracha is pregnant, Gad finds it difficult to express warmth toward his son or his wife once the baby is born. He spends long hours outdoors, wandering aimlessly, meeting his friend Meir from his bachelor days again ("Almanato," 85). Gad's distancing from Bracha and the baby is presented, from Gad's point of view, as a direct consequence of Bracha's suggestion that they name the baby Eliezer, turning the baby into an extension of Eliezer himself: "And now I'll call my son after him and every day we'll be saying that name and I'll never know if she's talking to my son or to him" (78).

The reasons for Gad's distance from his wife and baby son go beyond his sexual jealousy of Bracha's past with Eliezer, however. More broadly, one could say that calling the baby Eliezer expresses the return of a damaged gender past that was repressed in favor of the establishment of a worthy, male sabra figure. In fact, the text suggests that Gad's behavior

after the birth tends to express the old anxieties he suffered at the beginning of his relationship with Bracha which revolve around his ability to function as a man.

Recent scholarship has shown that such anxieties were not exclusive to Hendel's protagonist, but rather typical of other major representative male characters in 1948 generation literature. In a broader literary-historical context, one might say that "Almanato shel Eliezer" enacts a far-reaching development of the problematic of nostalgia—the experience of painful, emotional longing for a lost home, which Michal Arbel describes as fundamental for 1948 generation literature.<sup>55</sup> Arbel argues that this experience, whose dominant themes are the failure of many protagonists to grow up and their difficulties in functioning as husbands and fathers, include explicitly melancholic aspects. As Michael Gluzman has shown with regard to the major male text of the period, Moshe Shamir's *Hu halakh Ba'sadot (He Walked through the Fields)*, these melancholic aspects incorporate a profound gender crisis.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, in contrast to Shamir's novel, which reflects anxiety about growing up and becoming a father, Hendel's novella describes in great detail the actual source of the anxiety: the baby who bursts through the new, fragile fabric of Gad's life and unravels it. Not only does Gad avoid any encounter with the baby, he also regresses in his relation to Bracha, ultimately becoming a child himself with her. This is most evident in the scene where Gad comes home late at night and wakes up the exhausted, hurt Bracha moaning that he is "a miserable man, and that [she doesn't] care!" ("Almanato," 87). Gad's egocentric, childish demand for his abandoned wife's attention heightens the tension between the live baby Eliezer as a symbol of renewal and progress, and the way the figure of the baby—as an extension of the dead Eliezer—engenders a regressive move toward the past. Gad, incapable of growing up and facing up to fatherhood, is therefore held back by the dead Eliezer from moving forward in his relationship with Bracha. At the same time, the text indicates that it is Gad's inability to contain the past with all its repressed aspects, particularly his prior feminine identification with Bracha, which prevents him from moving forward, from functioning as a partner and as father to his newborn son.

On a historical-allegorical level, one could say that this process undermines the figure of the sabra as the ultimate embodiment of an am-

bition to bury the exilic past and to cure the sick, diaspora Jew. In this sense Gad the sabra, the kibbutznik, who wishes to repress his own and his wife's past, is the ultimate representation of a national aspiration to detach from the exilic Jewish past with its damaged gender; to annihilate the old, feminine Jew—Judith Butler's "other within the self"—and to be reborn into an homogenous, stable, male identity. On the metapoetic level, Eliezer's return as the embodiment of a gender-damaged past, undermining identities, is analogous to Hendel's intersexual dialogue with Agnon. Thus, Hendel's melancholic dialogue with Agnon enables her to internalize and embed the Agnonic text, itself the embodiment of an other, exilic, literary past that infiltrates Hendel's Eretz Israeli, realistic prose. Both the historical and poetic aspects of this melancholic process reach a climax in the final scene of the novel, when Gad, wandering aimlessly around the kibbutz, encounters his wife swimming in the Jordan in the depths of dangerous whirlpools:

She lifted her head and shouted to me from the water then a whirlpool came and swept her away into the stormy current and the circles of the whirlpool widened and churned . . . The silence was like a fine mist around her and silvery rivulets trickled silently under her back. She leapt naked from the water and stood beside me on the flat stone and against the blue all around her skin seemed to light up the air . . . "Bracha, don't come down here tomorrow. I don't want you to come down any more," I said. She curled up in the blanket and inclined her head like a kind of yellow cloud. I heaped words upon her, saying that I wouldn't think about that nonsense any more, neither would I leave her alone in the evenings, that I wouldn't go to the guards anymore, and I don't know what happened to me since then. I had no peace. And here, she loves me and now everything will be all right again. I repeated this sentence many times over, but Bracha just shook her head at me, red-eyed. (88–89)

At first glance, the scene revolves around themes of death and despair. Bracha appears to be a kind of modern day Ophelia, whose agonized partner has driven her mad to the point of wanting to take her own life in the raging waters of the river. For a moment she seems to be actually



dead: “The silence was like a fine mist around her and silvery rivulets trickled silently under her back.” But the next moment she comes back to life, rising like Venus from the river: “She leapt naked from the water . . . her skin seemed to light up the air.” Although Bracha’s “death” and subsequent “resurrection” in the waters of the River Jordan carry explicitly Christian connotations, in a Jewish context this scene evokes the crossing of the Jordan by the Jewish people, signaling their taking possession of the Land of Israel in Joshua 1:1–2.

It is noteworthy that many works written during the Second Aliya period include the motif of entering the River Jordan with clear allusion to the biblical image, as a moment of birth and establishment of a national self. This is in many ways an early incarnation of the birth from the sea myth of the sabra, articulated later in Moshe Shamir’s second novel *Be’mo yadav* (*With His Own Hands*),<sup>57</sup> which was first published in Hebrew in 1951. Shamir depicts Alik, the ultimate sabra, as being “born from the sea” with no past and no exilic heritage, thus shaping the sabra image for years to come. Nevertheless, like other Zionist images, this optimistic, nationalist figure incorporates within it its pessimistic opposite.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, one might say that Hendel’s story, and particularly this scene of immersion in the River Jordan, is permeated with an atmosphere of anxiety and death, rather than renewal, thus hinting at her critique of the idea of rebirth in the Land of Israel.

Gad himself views his wife’s emergence from the water in this scene as an opportunity to wipe out his damaged past and to establish a new persona, promising that he “wouldn’t think about that nonsense any more” and declaring that “now everything would be all right again.” Bracha’s red eyes indicate that this may not be possible, perhaps because the myth of immersion in the Jordan River and its later thematic incarnation as birth from the sea does not actually cure a damaged past, but rather perpetuates it.<sup>59</sup> Although Hendel’s novella predates the emergence of the 1948 generation myth of birth from the sea by four years, it also seems to presage the frailty of the figure of the sabra who had to be re-created over and over in order to exist at all. Nevertheless, Gad, staring at Bracha, who seems to have died and come back to life right before his eyes, confronts the female other within himself. He regards this other with the same melancholy, mimetic, identifying gaze that blurs gender distinctions and identities.

The final scene of the novella does not merely expose the difficulty of detaching oneself from one's past, and from the other within the self in a historical-allegorical and thematic-gender sense, however. It also demonstrates the difficulty of detachment from a literary past embodied in Agnon's writing. This dreamlike scene, replete with Christian and Jewish imagery, inevitably evokes similarly allegorical and surrealistic passages in Agnon's prose and creates a stylistic and generic twilight zone, in which the novella abandons the realistic mode.

The Agnonic text's stylistic and generic contributions to Hendel's writing are still quite subtle in this early period of her work. "Almanato shel Eliezer" would seem to demonstrate that the young Hendel was conforming to the demand for realism articulated by Moshe Shamir just one year earlier, in his "Together with My Generation" manifesto. In it, he called on his peers to join a "reality" rather than a "literary revolution" in the context of 1948 generation literature's relationship with Agnon's work. Although in 1947 the young Hendel's work had not yet enacted a "literary revolution," the melancholic, dreamlike closing scene of "Almanato shel Eliezer" demonstrates that she also refused to undertake a "realistic revolution," with its literary commitment to a local, collective Israeli literary present. Even at this early stage of her writing, Hendel returns again and again to a literary past, to an other, and to the sea in an attempt to find herself with and in it.

### **Cracking the Mirror: Intersexual Dialogue as Melancholia in *Re'hov ha-madregot***

The extent to which Yehudit Hendel conducted a melancholic, intersexual dialogue with Agnon in her next work, *Re'hov ha-madregot* (*The Street of Steps*), is somewhat surprising at first, given the novel's enthusiastic reception by Hendel's contemporaries. Unlike the stories in *Anashim aherim hem*, which were seen as relatively marginal examples of literature of the period, *Re'hov ha-madregot*, first published in 1955, has been described by scholars from that day to this as one of the last examples of the realistic novels of 1948 generation literature: "A representative and mature example of the early Israeli novel, of a time before Oz, A. B. Yehoshua and Amalia Kahana-Carmon" as Dan Miron put it.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the novel was celebrated by the Israeli literary establishment

as well as by the general readership. A year before it appeared in 1955, it won the Asher Barash Prize for novels by unknown writers. The following year, it became a best seller, was adapted for the stage, and was produced at the national Ha-bima Theater.<sup>61</sup>

*Re'hov ha-madregot* affected a substantial change in Hendel's standing from a relatively marginal writer to one of the women writers most associated with the 1948 generation authors. Evidence for that can be found in the critic Shalom Kramer's declaration, shortly after the publication of the novel, that "Eretz Israel prose's vanguard, becoming pregnant and giving birth in the new Jewish settlement, has gained another young woman writer, who evokes the new life being woven into the country with an artist's thread."<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, at first glance it would seem that, more than anything, the huge popularity of *Re'hov ha-madregot* derived from the fact that it successfully realized the dominant literary norms of the 1948 generation. Unlike Hendel's first collection of short stories, which was put together from short fragments entailing limited action, some even utterly static, *Re'hov ha-madregot* boasted what Dan Miron referred to as a "compact dramatic structure."<sup>63</sup> All of the subplots involving poor residents of Re'hov ha-madregot in Lower Haifa serve the romance at the heart of the story: the trans-ethnic and cross-class love between Avram, son of a poor Sephardic family from Wadi Salib, and Arella, the daughter of a rich Ashkenazi contractor from the Carmel district, who have both lost their mothers. This plot, beginning with the lovers' attempts to overcome the circumstances keeping them apart and ending with their final breakup—all over a period of only four days—is of a kind preferred by the 1948 generation writers who favored intense, tight story lines.

Avram and Arella's story also presents a reasonably realistic picture of life in Israel in the 1950s, especially with regard to the ethnic tensions that preoccupied most writers of the period. Just one year before the publication of the novel, the new Kameri Theater, established in 1954, produced Yigal Mosinson's play *Kazablan*<sup>64</sup> which had a plot suspiciously similar to *Re'hov ha-madregot*: a War of Independence hero of Mizrahi origin, unable to assimilate into a society recovering from the war, falls in love with a young Ashkenazi girl, much to her conservative parents' displeasure. Like "Almanato shel Eliezer," *Re'hov ha-madregot* seems to obey the gender norms of the period, focusing on the male protagonist

Avram, who is given more weight, at least in the first part of the novel, than his female love object, Arella.

Nevertheless, although *Re'hov ha-madregot* seems to be firmly anchored in the emerging cultural and social reality in Israel following the War of Independence, the central experience of the novel is the motherless protagonists' longing for the past. As in "Almanato shel Eliezer," the immense sense of nostalgia embedded in *Re'hov ha-madregot* is also exemplified in its poetics. In the dialogue Hendel conducts through the novel with Agnon, the literary father repressed by the 1948 generation writers in their attempt to create Shamir's "free and exposing" literature, the text rises above the creative difficulties and demands of modernism. This exilic, Agnonic past is mediated by Agnon's first Eretz Israel story, "Agunot,"<sup>65</sup> whose feminine, melancholic underpinnings infiltrated Hendel's first novel, leading it to new poetic, ideological, and gendered directions.

Although, as in her early stories, Hendel adhered in *Re'hov ha-madregot* to her generation's dictate of realistic representation of post-1948 Israel, the melancholic internalization of Agnon's "Agunot" enabled her to establish her ideological poetic identity as split—at once inside and outside her generation's literature. It also exposes in turn the melancholic gender rupture in Agnon's prose which expresses a profound longing of great poetic as well as personal, biographical significance, for the past and most of all for his own mother left behind in exile.

Hendel's intersexual dialogue with Agnon's "Agunot" in *Re'hov ha-madregot* is embedded in one of the work's major themes: the search for an absent mother in the mirror. This figure, which evokes Lacan's model of the mirror stage as well as classical views of the work of art as a mirror, ultimately leads back to melancholy, to that constant symbiotic longing for the lost other.

### *Cracking Lacan's Mirror*

*Re'hov ha-madregot* explicitly embodies what Nurit Gertz refers to as "the morning after":<sup>66</sup> the morning after the establishment of the State, but also after the loss of all others, those left behind in the process, who find their way into Hendel's text in the form of Holocaust survivors, new immigrants, the elderly, and the sick. *Re'hov ha-madregot* describes the

return of what psychoanalysts call the “primal other”—the mother who bursts suddenly into the last part of the novel, which is titled, ironically enough, “The Morning After.”

This part takes place the morning after Arella’s visit to Re’hov ha-madregot in Haifa, where while waiting in vain for a tardy Avram, she encounters the poor local residents who constitute the major figures in his life. She returns home to her father’s house on the Carmel Ridge and from here on we see Arella alone in her room, wondering about the day before on Re’hov ha-madregot and gradually sinking into childhood memories of her dead mother:

Her father once told her that even in her sleep she resembled her mother, and that it was odd that she did not remember her at all. In her childhood she believed that if she stood in front of the mirror her mother would peep at her reflection over her shoulder, embracing her reflection. It was a kind of optical illusion and she was terribly sad when her mother’s reflection did not appear behind her in the mirror. Dad certainly never dreamt that she was searching for her mother’s reflection in the mirror, while her own, solitary reflection shimmered there. (*Re’hov ha-madregot*, 285)

This scene of searching for her mother’s reflection in the mirror recalls the scene in Agnon’s story “Agunot” in which, following a series of romantic disappointments, the female protagonist Dina looks for her dead mother’s image in the mirror. Dina goes to Jerusalem with her father, who attempts to betroth her to the talmudic prodigy Yehezkel Ahiezer, who has been sent over for the purpose from Poland and for whom the father has established a large yeshiva. Dina instead falls in love with Ben Uri, a native Eretz Israel artist who has been commissioned to build a Torah ark in honor of the wedding. Ben Uri, however, is so involved in building the ark that he gradually forgets about Dina, who, in turn, tosses the ark out of the window. The following scene takes place shortly after Dina’s impulsive act:

On her couch in the night Dinah lies and her heart wakes. Her sin weighs heavily upon her: who could bear her burden of guilt?

Dinah buries her head in her pallet, oppressed by sorrow, by shame. How can she look to Heaven, how call to it for grace? Dinah springs from her couch and lights the taper in her room. In the mirror opposite, light flares out in her eyes. It had been her mother's glass, but held no trace of her mother's glance. Were Dinah to look into it now, it is only her own countenance she would see—the countenance of a sinner. “Mother, mother!” her heart cries out. But there is no answer. Dinah rose and crossed to the window, she rested her chin on her hands, and looked out. Jerusalem is cradled in mountains. The wind swept down and entered her chamber, extinguishing the light, as in a sick-room, where some invalid sleeps. It played around her hair and through her ears, whispering sweet melodies, like the songs Ben Uri sung. Where, oh where is he now? (“Agunot,” 35)

What is the significance in the two texts of the search for the dead mother's approving reflection in the mirror? From a psychoanalytic point of view, the search clearly resonates with Lacan's mirror stage model as a representation of subjectivity.<sup>67</sup> Lacan associates the subject's entry into the symbolic order—the realm of language, law, civilization—with that moment when the baby, charmed by his own reflection in the mirror with its illusion of unity, wholeness, and autonomy, identifies with the image, adopting it as his own. This image, in fact, becomes an alternative to his fragmented, chaotic experience of self prior to this point. Lacan links this adoption of the false, external image of wholeness and autonomy—signifying the entry into the symbolic order—to the authorizing gaze of the mother, who is referred to in Lacanian psychoanalysis as the “primary other.” At the same time, however, entry into the symbolic order signals the baby's detachment from his early relationship with the mother, his first love object. Lacan and his commentators describe these early relations as symbiotic and all-consuming, based on identification, internalization, and assimilation of the mother.<sup>68</sup> The mother's approving gaze reflected in the mirror, then, constitutes the final, definitive element of the mirror stage, authorizing the end of symbiotic relations with the mother and separation from her.

In light of the above, the question arises: What happens if the mother does not appear in the mirror, and fails to authorize with her gaze the

child's identification with the self-image reflected in it? Given the literary interpretative usefulness of the Lacanian model for the mirror scenes in *Re'hov ha-madregot* and "Agunot," how might one read the search for the absent image of the mother in the mirror as depicted in both texts? If the appearance of the mother's authorizing gaze in the mirror facilitates separation, then its absence is liable to indicate noncompletion of the mirror stage, non-separation, embedding, symbiosis.

Thus, the constant, desperate, and doomed search for the mother's appearance in the mirror paradoxically preserves symbiotic relations with her, and—in Freudian terms—produces melancholy, that primal, symbiotic, consuming, internalization of the lost love object into the identity of the one left behind. Indeed, melancholy makes the absent mother present, and returns the daughter to a state of primal identification with her, facilitating a mutuality and dialogue between the two. This mutual, dialogic relationship in fact presents an alternative to the familiar, psychoanalytic view of the mother-daughter relationship in which the daughter must displace the mother.<sup>69</sup> This very view is being represented by the authoritative fathers in the two texts, Arella's and Dina's fathers, who both attempt to turn their daughters into replacements for their dead wives, preventing them from marrying other men of their own choice.

A melancholic affinity with the mother also appears in both texts as a response to romantic disappointments. Agnon describes Ben Uri as a dedicated artist, who prefers his art to his love, bringing Dina to the final, destructive act of hurling the holy ark out of the window, which is followed by the mirror scene in "Agunot." Hendel's protagonist Arella also wishes to conjure up her dead mother only after Avram abandons her, having decided to renounce his relationship with her and to go to sea as a ship's captain.

### *In the Wake of the Absent Mother*

Following Agnon, Hendel, then, seeks to restore the absent mother. Indeed, in *Re'hov ha-madregot*, the mother's absence is of thematic, ideological, and metapoetic importance. First and foremost, it is perpetuated in Avram and Arella's problematic romantic relationship. The lost mother becomes an excess, irremovable presence, which prevents the

two from growing up—and in psychoanalytic terms, from displacing the mother—thus becoming parents themselves.

Although the novel suggests that the two break up because of external difficulties—their different socioeconomic classes and Arella's father's strictness—it appears that the couple also contends with an inner difficulty that prevents them from forming an adult relationship. For example, at the height of their love, “[Avram] wondered at himself that he was about to take Arella Dagan as his wife . . . it seemed momentarily strange to him, a sort of hallucination a person wakes up from” (*Re'hov ha-madregot*, 32), suggesting that the difficulty of sustaining a relationship derives from an inability to escape the melancholic state of orphanhood which perpetuates a primal, childlike, symbiotic relation to the mother.

In the broader literary context, *Re'hov ha-madregot* articulates a further development of that difficulty in maturing, which was a prevalent theme in 1948 generation works. At the same time, however, *Re'hov ha-madregot* is unique in the explicit connection it makes between the melancholy experience, which hovers like a dark cloud over the male, heroic literature of the 1948 generation, and the image of the absent mother. The mother—in her very absence—becomes larger than life.

When considering the historical-gender context of the 1948 generation, one cannot overlook the analogy between the mother's absence from the novel and the exclusion of femininity and motherhood particularly from the all-male sabra ethos, as described in a string of sociological, historical, and literary studies in recent years.<sup>70</sup> In light of these studies, the mirror scene may be read as a subversive attempt to reinstate the mother figure, driven to the margins by the sabra ethos that looked for nourishment only to the male, Zionist body. One could argue further that the dialogue created in the mirror scene between the daughter and the absent mother hints indirectly at the existence of a feminine alternative to the Zionist ethos, which centered on the Oedipal affinities between men. Indeed, the symbiotic, melancholic, dialogic connection to the mother is portrayed in *Re'hov ha-madregot* as a response and in opposition to the relations created between the male characters: Arella's father, Gavriel Dagan, and Avram. The latter are described as conducting an economy of exchange based on the transfer or nontrans-



fer of the daughter as a commodity between the two. This constitutes a development of a similar theme in Agnon's story, in which not only is the daughter transferred between father and bridegroom regardless of her own wishes, but the man she loves replaces her with a valuable work of art of his own making.<sup>71</sup>

Gavriel Dagan is the explicit agent of a similar economy of exchange in Hendel's novel, as the authoritative father who imprisons his daughter in his fine house on the Carmel, stressing to Arella her likeness to her mother: "Her father once told her that even in her sleep she resembled her mother" (*Re'hov ha-madregot*, 285). This likeness reinforces her role in his view as a replacement for his dead wife, and he refuses to transfer her to another man. Arella herself cannot recall her mother, and unlike the father, experiences a lack of likeness, an otherness, with regard to her. Paradoxically, this detachment facilitates a melancholic identification in her relationship with the mother that does not conflict with her erotic relationship with Avram. As may be seen in the rest of the mirror scene, Arella's longing for her mother precedes the only erotic act in the entire novel, an autoerotic act of self-pleasuring:

Suddenly she wanted to get up and stand in front of the mirror, naked, as though sharpening the pleasure of her solitude before her reflection in the mirror. She got up, opened her robe and her legs trembled on the cold floor. She stood on tiptoe, feeling her body stretching and getting taller, and came forward, standing in front of the long narrow mirror in the closet in the corner of the room. She lightly stroked her belly and her breasts, rosy in the light shed by the stove in strips of red and pink, and looked through her hair which spread over her eyes at the curves of her waist, and thought that she had got a little thinner, and Avram didn't like her thin, liked her body full. And she smiled to herself, enjoying her reflection in the mirror. (285)

This autoerotic scene takes place immediately after Arella acknowledges her mother's absence from the mirror and her identification with her mother in a symbiotic connection that precludes separation. At the same time, the scene swiftly leads from autoeroticism as part of this inter-woman identification with the mother, to heterosexual desire for the

other: Avram, the bridegroom forbidden by the father who wants Arella to persist in her role as her mother's double.

On one level, one could argue that the interconnection created in the scene between her melancholic affinity with the mother and her longing for Avram may indicate the symbiotic identification subsisting in Arella's relation to Avram as well. It is noteworthy that Avram's role in the novel is not only that of Arella's object of desire, but also her double. Arella recognizes Avram's need for his own dead mother in a cross-gender identification. More broadly, in this scene Hendel seems to be alluding to the affinity melancholy creates between identification and desire, which is central to Agnon's story too. Moreover, it appears that the scene constitutes an important playing out of Hendel's poetics, suggesting the possibility of achieving gender autonomy, and perhaps autonomy in general, via a paradoxical process of internalization, consumption, and embedding of the other.

Furthermore, the affinity created in the text between the melancholic act of internalizing the mother and gazing at the mirror, which from Plato on has constituted a figure for creative acts, amplifies the meta-poetic significance of the process. In the tenth chapter of *The Republic*, Plato lays down the basis for his classical understanding of art as a reflection, a "mirror [held up to] nature." He describes looking in the mirror as a means of creating by artistic imitation, advising his audience to carry a mirror "around with you wherever you go. That way you'll soon create the sun and the heavenly bodies, soon create the earth, soon create yourself, other living creatures, furniture, plants, and all the things we've just been talking about."<sup>72</sup>

Indeed, throughout literary history, looking in a mirror has been a recurring male *ars poetica* figure, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have pointed out. But what sort of self is reflected back to the woman writer looking in the mirror? May we speak of autonomous subject when only male images and a male literary tradition are reflected back to her?

The response proposed by Gilbert and Gubar is a search for an alternative, feminine tradition, embracing influential mothers from literary history.<sup>73</sup> Following Gilbert and Gubar, the search for the reflection of the mother in the mirror can be seen as an expression of Hendel's own attempt to search for influential literary mothers in the history of Hebrew literature. The search ends in failure—as indicated by the screaming

absence of the mother from the mirror—largely due to the paucity of influential women prose writers in generations preceding Hendel. In her attempt to confront this failure, this lack of feminine literary tradition, Hendel does not delude herself that she would become an authoritative writer leading a new literary tradition, or that she would become a literary mother herself, displacing mothers who came before her. In fact, the refusal of Hendel's protagonist Arella, following Agnon's Dina, to pass through the mirror stage properly and to succumb to the illusion of autonomy it evokes, resonates with Hendel's own refusal to sink into a primary fallacy of original writing.

She decides, then, to crack the mirror: that of Lacan, who perpetuates the illusion of autonomy and separation and also that of Plato, the omnipotent, godlike mirror which creates an original work of art from nothing. Instead, she chooses an alternative, intertextual, melancholic mode of writing which enables her to embed Agnon's prose fiction within her own realistic, local prose while at the same time evoking the other, feminine, antinational foundations of the early Agnonic text.

### *Aginut as Melancholia*

The way in which Hendel rewrites the mirror scene from "Agunot" indicates the affinity between the melancholic mother-daughter relationship and *aginit*, that state of abandonment in marriage where the woman is "chained" to her lost husband who disappeared and would not grant her a divorce. Indeed, the state of *aginit* itself reflects, as Michal Arbel puts it, a "constant affinity with what is absent."<sup>74</sup> This affinity has been understood by most commentators on Agnon's story in national-religious, heterosexual terms as being between the people of Israel and their homeland, and as analogous to a man's relation to his wife. Scholars have argued that these affinities remain unrealized in "Agunot" because of the sin of the father who insists on marrying his daughter Dina off to a husband from the diaspora.<sup>75</sup> Other scholars attribute different meanings to the *aginit* particularly in terms of creativity, relating to the character of Ben Uri, the artist.<sup>76</sup> It appears, however, that these scholars did not appreciate the crucial role played by the mirror scene in the story, and the extent to which it expresses the state of *aginit*.

In fact, Dina's search for the mother in the mirror is the ultimate em-

bodiment of her state of *aginit* as it conveys an enduring affinity with what is absent, perpetuating both presence and absence, absolute otherness and symbiotic closeness. Following Judith Butler's observation that melancholic internalization precedes and indeed establishes desire for the other, it may be argued that *aginit*, as a form of melancholic state, exposes the connection between mother and daughter as a repressed, a priori condition for the heterosexual drama seeming to stand at the heart of the story. Indeed, Dina's longing for the mother precedes her search for Ben Uri in the text and is described as leading to it.

In a national context, the mirror scene may be seen as telling a different story than the religious-national allegory "Agunot" is usually understood to be. Rather than describing the painful results of preferring partnership with the diaspora and thus creating a state of disharmony, the mirror scene tells a story of retreat and escape from the supposedly longed for coupling with the Land of Israel, to the mother and exile left behind.

This untold story was autobiographically loaded at the time of writing "Agunot." When Agnon left Buczacz in 1908, his beloved mother, Esther Czaczkes née Farb, was suffering from an incurable cardiac illness. Agnon wrote this story immediately following his immigration to Eretz Israel. Not long after the story's publication in 1909, his mother died, intensifying his feelings of guilt over leaving her. In fact, as Dan Laor points out, these guilty feelings were so severe that Agnon sometimes claimed he had immigrated to Eretz Israel in 1909, not 1908, as though he wished to erase the fact that he had left one year before his mother's death.<sup>77</sup>

Agnon reveals his association of the publication of "Agunot" with longing for his dying mother in a slip of the pen. Following his mother's death in May 1909, Agnon wrote to Brenner: "Before I had your card, I received news from another place, very sad news . . . that my soul's beloved was ill and she was beautiful and comely and I loved her and she would kiss me, oy Brenner, on my temples." A few lines below, Agnon writes, "I trust you not to add to my words and not to pour more tears into my well as I regret that my master and teacher S. Ben-Zion [editor of *Ha-omer*] has let himself go a little with 'Agunot' and has thus allowed short-sightedness to abuse my work."<sup>78</sup> This last sentence ostensibly relates to an entirely literary matter: Agnon's anger that Ben-Zion made corrections to the manuscript of "Agunot."<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, the opening lines of his letter asking Brenner "not to pour more tears into my well" conflate the literary

harm done to Agnon by Ben-Zion with the personal harm Agnon felt he himself had caused his dying mother left behind in exile, the memory of whose kisses deepened the “well” of sorrow and guilt.

Agnon’s guilt-ridden yearning for his dying mother in the diaspora illuminates, then, the centrality of the mother-daughter connection in “Agunot,” which has been largely overlooked by criticism on the story. Hendel rearticulates this important relation in the dialogue created between the two works regarding the mirror scenes in both, and the melancholic model of identification this dialogue entails. Thus, the feminine-melancholic affinity with the absent mother goes to the heart of the literary paradigm which Agnon constituted for Hendel, offering a substantial deviation from his patriarchal literary persona usually portrayed in Hebrew scholarship.

Indeed, the Agnon reflected in his first Eretz Israel story may be seen as a kind of motherly literary father whose feminine and exilic aspects—neglected by 1948 generation writers in favor of a national-Zionist realistic revolution—are imagined anew by Hendel. The title of the story, “Agunot,” which developed into its author’s nom de plume and surname, hints at Agnon’s cross-gender identification with his female protagonist and her melancholic longing for her absent mother. But in a wider, meta-poetic sense, the title of the story also incorporates the manner in which Agnon chose to turn the fundamental melancholic, feminine process of the text into his own “literary passport” as an artist. It is interesting to note in this context that various critics often understood the character of Ben Uri, the Eretz Israel artist entirely dedicated to his art, to be Agnon’s self-portrait.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, Agnon’s work as it later developed—moving frequently between Eretz Israel and the diaspora, faith and skepticism—shows him to be closer in spirit to the character of Dina the agunah, torn between her unrequited love for Ben Uri and her prohibited relationship with the mother and home left behind.<sup>81</sup>

### *Cracking the Realist Mirror of the 1948 Generation*

Dan Miron has shown that *Re’hov ha-madregot* has both what he calls a horizontal axis relating to the main plot and the active movement of the protagonists, and a perpendicular axis, which is static, relating to the

secondary characters and to incidental descriptions, far from the great heroics of the period.<sup>82</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that the novel becomes increasingly distanced from the horizontal plane in the final part following the mirror scene, and under the influence of the melancholic, intersexual dialogue generated by it.

The mirror scene signals in fact not only a thematic and ideological shift, but also a departure in style and genre. It marks the transition from a 1948 generation realistic, dynamic, and dramatic love plot with a male protagonist, a dominant father, and a daughter transferred between them, to an alternative, internal, psychological, modernistic plot centering around a melancholic, woman-to-woman relationship with the absent mother. In this part of the novel, the dynamic movement of the protagonists upward and outward from Re'hov ha-madregot, is held back and slowed down. The heated, noisy life of Lower Haifa after the 1948 War, one of financial shortages, uncertain security, and ethnic and class struggles is exchanged for a slow, steady descent into the characters' minds, especially that of Arella, who becomes, surprisingly, the main protagonist and focalizer of the novel:

The desolation of the room screamed out from every corner. —Dad. —Yes, Ella. —Nothing. —All right, Ella. These curtailed conversations between herself and Dad. —All right, Ella. She recalled how he stared at her with his penetrating pupils when she said she was joining the Palmach Brigade. His expressionless gaze when he said to her: But you lack for nothing at home. And when she said: I've already decided, Dad answered curtly: So why are you coming to tell me if you've decided . . . She curled herself up within the blanket. Something had happened to her today in Avram's house. What was it? What was it? She recalled Nissim . . . saying something about the guys remembering that time, the war, almost nostalgically . . . Avram said to him that that was the most turbulent time of his life, and his friends were killed then, he said. (*Re'hov ha-madregot*, 286–87)

Arella's inner monologue, of which I have quoted only a short fragment, stretches over almost twenty pages and breaks the narrative tension and

linear progress characterizing the first part of the novel. Arella's mind takes the reader far from the everyday reality of the novel as well as from its main narrative—the love plot with Avram—to a fictive twilight zone ranging between scraps of memory and associations, and breaking down the barriers between past and present. The past, and, in particular, memories of the war erupt into Arella's present and become an integral part of it, bringing with them turmoil and loss, explosive vitality and self-annihilation, the living and the dead.

This sudden move into the female mind of Arella disrupts the gender norms established at its opening. The transition allows Hendel to extricate herself from the conventional, male point of view of 1948 generation fiction and suggests a female view from outside the war and the events of the time. Moreover, the transition from Avram's mind to Arella's suggests a further revision of the sabra myth, which Hendel began in "Almanato shel Eliezer." At first glance, the focus on Arella seems to signal a victory for the Ashkenazi, sabra elite from the heights of the Carmel over the marginal folk of Re'hov ha-madregot. In many ways it seems that Avram, in his ceaseless aspiration to be accepted into Ashkenazi, sabra society, and particularly his submission, ultimately, to the law of the contractor father, comes closer than Arella herself to the sabra ethos marking him as other. This is expressed in an especially loaded image at the end of the novel, when Avram, wanting to free himself of his relationship with Arella, goes off to sea intending to work as a ship's captain.

On one level, Avram's going to the sea clearly expresses his wish to run from commitment to Arella and family life in general. But metaphorically speaking, it may be understood in the context of the sabra myth of birth from the sea, which was formally expressed just a few years earlier in Moshe Shamir's monumental *Be'mo yadav*. Avram, unlike the Ashkenazi sabra, was not born from the sea but on the miserable, filthy ground of Re'hov ha-madregot. He goes to sea in an apparent attempt to be born again, alone, devoid of a past, love, wife, or family, and destined to become, finally, part of the Israeli myth. By comparison, Arella, who as a woman stands no chance of becoming a mythological sabra, does not mourn her lack of acceptance. Her movement in the novel, descending to Avram from the Carmel Ridge to Re'hov ha-madregot—like the movement Hendel herself signals in her melancholic intertextual process—

constitutes a shift from the Israeli center to the margins. This is a descent from the all-sabra present into the past, from the living to the dead.

Alongside its effect on her characters, Hendel's intersexual dialogue with Agnon signals a significant change in the generic norms shaping the novel. Although like her early stories, *Re'hov ha-madregot* seems to adhere to her peers' demand for direct reflection of Israeli reality, the manner in which her writing internalizes and embeds Agnonic prose produces a fine but ever widening crack in the 1948 generation writers' mirror of realism. Gershon Shaked described "Agunot" as an explicitly anti-realistic story, a text combining "a fictive-legendary experience with the existential identity of a man at once inside and outside of reality."<sup>83</sup> Indeed, in the last part of *Re'hov ha-madregot*, after the mirror scene, the fundamental antirealism of Agnon's story infiltrates Hendel's novel such that it gradually loses its realistic essence altogether. This development resembles the process Hendel sketches out on a smaller scale at the end of "Almanato shel Eliezer." *Re'hov ha-madregot*, however, takes her undermining of the 1948 generation writers' realistic poetics much further.

Thus the linear, realistic, omniscient narrator of the beginning of the novel is replaced in this last part by a quasi-modernistic stream of consciousness narrative. Arella's long, repetitive monologues, which first appear after the mirror scene and recur almost continuously till the end of the novel, produce an inner reality which undermines the 1948 generation's demand for historical realism. Arella's inner reality challenges rules about time and place and destabilizes absolute distinctions between past and present, center and margins, the self and (dead) others including the mother, who becomes inextricably entwined with the daughter.

The last part of the novel does not merely develop a psychological alternative reality, but also introduces an intra-literary reality, an intersexual dialogue with Hebrew literature's past, as Agnon, its ultimate representative, returns to the text in the form of intertextual allusions to "Agunot." Later in Arella's stream of consciousness, she conjures up her first encounter with Avram over her friend Dina's birthing bed, another allusion to Agnon's protagonist, Dina the *aguna*. Like Agnon's Dina, Hendel's Dina loses her beloved, her husband Shmuel, who is killed in battle. Nevertheless, although Hendel's Dina seems to undertake the



normative work of mourning, the acceptance of the loss and the inevitable separation from the absent beloved, it is melancholy rather than mourning which finds its way back into the text:

In the morning, in the hospital, she herself leaned over Dina's bed and lied to her, saying that Shmuel was alive. Dina lay laboring in the bed, white. —There were disasters on the way to Tzemach, Ella. —Sleep, Dina. Suddenly she thought she heard Dina's voice coming to her from the pillow. —Shmuel has not come back, Ella. —He will come back. —They didn't find him. —He will come back, Dina. She choked back her tears and a young man approached Dina's bed in silence. He had a small scar above his eye, and when they walked down the long corridor, he told her, Arella, that Shmuel was dead. (*Re'hov ha-madregot*, 288)

Arella, in her promise that “He will come back . . . He will come back, Dina” offers comfort to her friend, but that repeated promise of Shmuel's return sends the reader back to the Agonic text, to melancholy, to the eternal drama of presence and absence. At first glance, Arella's exchange with Dina seems to allude to the 1948 generation writers' central trope of the living dead, which was to become a national allegory of a collective rebirth, affirming the Zionist narrative. Arella's words evoke Hayim Guri's poem, so strongly associated with the 1948 generation—“Hineh mu'talot gufotenu” (“Look, Our Bodies Are Strewn”), which includes the famous line: “We'll meet again, we'll come back like red flowers.”

Hendel's melancholy is substantially different from the 1948 generation's living dead trope, however. Where the image of the living dead maintains the vitality of the dead, melancholy perpetuates death's infiltration into the realm of the living. Perhaps more than anything else, melancholy expresses the creative potential embodied in this figurative death in all its forms in Hendel's writing: turning back, relinquishing autonomy, and mimetic, cross-gender incorporation into the other as well as into the literary past.

These elements increasingly distanced Hendel from the realistic revolution of the 1948 generation, enabling her to create a kind of literary twilight zone that Hebrew literature only began to explore in the next gen-

eration, in the New Wave Hebrew prose of the 1960s. For example, the individualization of death as evoked in the last part of the novel, as well as its female point of view—marginal in that generation’s literature—may be read as a prologue to the emergence of the antihero characteristic of Statehood Generation literature. Most of all, she offers an initial model of intersexual dialogue with Agnon, her literary father, whom she reimagines for the next generation of writers.

### Getting through the Dead Day with the Living Man

At first reading, it seems as though Hendel had no further need of Agnon in her works written after the revolution in Hebrew prose fiction that took place in the 1960s. Nevertheless, a melancholic intersexual dialogue with Agnon persists in her work even as late as the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, reaching its peak in *Te’rufo shel rofeh ha-nefesh* (*Crack Up*),<sup>84</sup> where Hendel suggests a modern revision of “The Doctor’s Divorce” in a reworking of her earlier novella “Almanato shel Eliezer.”

Moreover, it seems that the melancholic dialogue with Agnon became the organizing logic of her poetics, which are premised on the establishment of psychological as well as poetic autonomy via a paradoxical act of symbiotic embedding in the absent other. This poetic principle recurs throughout her work, all of which places a melancholic relationship with some sort of absent other on center stage—whether it be a mother, as in some of the stories in *Kesef ka’tan* (*Small Change*); children or other casualties of war, as in *Har ha-to’im* (*The Mountain of Losses*);<sup>85</sup> or friends, as in *Crack Up*. Hendel’s melancholic poetics reach their most dramatic expression, however, in *Ha-koah ha-aher* (*The Other Power*),<sup>86</sup> in which she describes the final years of her husband, the painter Zvi Mairovich, who had died seven years previously.

Critics view *Ha-koah ha-aher*, published after a long literary silence, as an important turning point in Hendel’s work that marks a shift to more personal and feminine writing as opposed to her earlier works influenced by the 1948 generation. Nevertheless, it seems that this most personal and original of Hendel’s works actually constitutes the ultimate expression of her melancholic, intertextual process first formed in her early prose fiction. In a commentary on *Ha-koah ha-aher*, A. B. Yehoshua wrote that in it, “an artist . . . makes another artist’s work his own.”<sup>87</sup> Indeed, Hendel

refers to, analyses, and conducts a dialogue with her dead husband's work throughout the novel.<sup>88</sup>

Hendel's endless references to Mairovich's work are accompanied by a strong sense of his presence, even after his death, as in the phrase "to get through the dead day with the living man" that epitomizes the stuff of which melancholy is made: the penetration of life by death, and the blurring of the borders between self and other and between past and present. *Ha-koah ha-aher* exemplifies the fruitful creative power of this process, which, far from silencing the artist, inspires her to create.

At first glance, her utter merging with Mairovich would seem to negate Hendel herself. Early in the book, she presents herself as a devoted wife, serving the total artist Mairovich. With the dedication of a compassionate nurse, she brings him food and patiently submits to his sudden outbursts. She seems to have no independent existence when she declares at the beginning of the book:

I know beyond all suffering or pain that my real life began that winter night when I went into Café Nordau to shelter from the rain and he was sitting there . . . and ended on another winter night, twenty-eight years later . . . when he sat on his rocking chair, by the door in the dining room, and I asked him whether he'd like more tea and he said later, but later there was only his death. (*Ha-koah ha-aher*, 25)

Nevertheless, precisely from her apparent assimilation into the figure of Mairovich, the book sketches out a process of segregation and separation, together with the revelation of Hendel's individual voice as an artist. *Ha-koah ha-aher*, as Dan Miron notes, "would not have fulfilled its role as a work of art and as a fascinating human testimony if it had not begun with symbiosis and subjugation."<sup>89</sup> This is poignantly expressed in Hendel's description of her realization that she must write, which came to her in the years following her husband's death. "It was suddenly strange to me that I could," she remarks. Unlike the poet Yocheved Bat Miriam, who told Hendel that she could not write about her dear friend Mairovich (46), Hendel discovers that she could write about her dead husband and her loss, writing death into life.

The ability to write about death is inseparable from melancholia in the text. On a psychological level, Hendel makes the dead other present, perpetuating her endless assimilation into him. Hendel bypasses normative discourses of mourning: society's demand that we say farewell and move on, which she resisted in so many of her works. Melancholia is not merely an embodiment of Hendel's psychology, but also, most importantly, of her intertextual, dialogic poetics. Her correspondence with Mairovich's work in the book constitutes a continuation of her intensive correspondence with Agnon in *Re'hov ha-madregot*. In her dialogue with Mairovich, as in her intersexual dialogue with Agnon, Hendel seeks to question the ideal of an authoritative, original, primal artist, and to suggest a new possibility of creating derived from an inability to separate, to become segregated, to distinguish between the self and the other.

Study of *Ha-koah ha-aher*, as of Hendel's later work, demonstrates that this Agnonic poetic world persisted in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, long after the literary revolution of the Statehood Generation, with its return to Agnon, had ended. Nevertheless, Hendel first intimated this literary revolution in her early work, and perhaps even foresaw the cracks that were destined to appear in Shamir's "freeing and exposing" Palmach generation literature.

Moreover, the gradual breakup of realism portrayed in Hendel's melancholic, intertextual writing hints indirectly at the fragility of the concept of transparency employed by Shamir and his peers. Recent scholarship has shown this transparency to be an almost imaginary concept, a product of national fantasies that nourished the realistic revolution to a great extent. In many ways, precisely those works that seemed to aspire to transparency in fact conjure other literary possibilities, including those rejected by the collective literary memory of the 1948 generation. They include works, which, like *Re'hov ha-madregot*, managed to find their way into the 1948 generation's realistic revolution and then to light the way out for later generations.

The young Yehudit Hendel's intersexual dialogue with Agnon opens the way for a reevaluation of her place in Palmach generation literature: not merely as a marginal writer swept along by the 1948 generation's poetic norms, but rather as the writer who led that literary generation in new poetic and ideological directions. Amalia Kahana-Carmon, a repre-

sentative of the next literary generation, wrote: “Who is the 1948 generation writer? — Perhaps, like ‘Who is a Jew?’, it is whoever sees himself as such.”<sup>90</sup> Whether or not Yehudit Hendel saw herself as such, it seems that in the 1950s, against the background of the 1948 generation, she illuminated a way from the 1948 generation’s aesthetics of reality to literature, cracks in the mirror, and the melancholic morning after.

## CHAPTER 2

# The Secret That Makes a Hero of the Weak

## *Imaginary Fathers and Cross-Gender Identification in Amalia Kahana-Carmon's Early Prose*

If all the heavens were scrolls and all the world scribes and  
all the forests quill pens, they would not suffice to write all  
I have learned from my teachers.

—AMALIA KAHANA-CARMON

In an article entitled “Va’yitvadea Yosef el e’hav” (“And Joseph Made Himself Known to His Brothers”), published by Amalia Kahana-Carmon in 1966, shortly after her first, widely acclaimed collection of short stories, *Bi-khefifa ahat* (*Under One Roof*)<sup>1</sup>—the author confronted her approving critics. After expressing gratitude for the praise, Kahana-Carmon argued that the critics concentrated on marginal aspects of her stories, particularly on the love plots in them, which were not, as she put it, “the point.”<sup>2</sup>

Kahana-Carmon’s remark provoked the fury of the Israeli literary establishment. In response, Yona Bahur, one of those critics of whom Kahana-Carmon had complained, wrote: “I admit shamelessly, that after I read her collection of short stories . . . I reveled in it so much I wished to meet her face to face. Now, however, having read her article above, I wished to reread the stories immediately, and reveled in the fact that no meet-

ing with her did or ever would take place.”<sup>3</sup> Menahem Peri, Kahana-Carmon’s main editor for the last few decades, confirms her demanding and problematic literary persona. He recently described her in an interview as “a difficult author,” impossible to please.<sup>4</sup>

Why, then, did Kahana-Carmon respond so coolly to her enthusiastic critics, earning herself an image that kept her distanced from Israeli literary circles for the last twenty years? Lily Rattok, the most outspoken scholar of Kahana-Carmon’s work, tried to explain the writer’s harsh response to the critics as an expression of frustration with the publication of her first collection of short stories. Rattok points out that while Kahana-Carmon began writing stories in the late fifties, the publication of the collection *Bi-khefifa ahat* took several years, mainly because of changes the editors insisted be made to the stories.<sup>5</sup> Hence, while her literary peers, notably A. B. Yehoshua and Amoz Oz, were publishing their first collections of short stories, Kahana-Carmon’s debut collection was held back. It finally appeared in 1966, by which time she had become embittered against the literary establishment and publishers.

It seems, however, that Kahana-Carmon herself provides the most convincing explanation for her hostility toward the Israeli literary establishment. Kahana-Carmon’s claim that her critics are missing the point in focusing on the love plots in her stories embodies the writer’s poetic and gender stance in all her early prose: a persistent, stubborn refusal to take on a stereotypical woman’s role in the male-dominated field of Hebrew literature. This refusal dictates the intersexual process at the heart of Kahana-Carmon’s early prose, based on cross-gender identification with a male literary tradition, which is thereby opened up to a new reading.

This intersexual process enabled Kahana-Carmon to take part in the Oedipal literary battle led by the Statehood Generation authors against their literary fathers, the 1948 authors. However, this very process also made Kahana-Carmon the herald of a new literary struggle: that of women’s writing within the male Hebrew canon.

## Kahana-Carmon and the New Wave

All three authors on whom this book focuses established their poetic fingerprints by writing within a male and inherently Oedipal model of literary

influence. This process was, however, the most problematic for Kahana-Carmon, because she, as opposed to Yehudit Hendel and Rachel Eytan—who were considered marginal in relation to their contemporaries—was perceived by Hebrew literary criticism as a significant participant in the prominent Oedipal progression of her generation: the transition from the 1948 generation literature to the 1960s New Wave.

The New Wave in prose, quick to follow the important contributions already made in poetry in the 1950s, provided a platform for young writers, including A. B. Yehoshua, Amos Oz, Yitzhak Orpaz, and Kahana-Carmon herself.<sup>6</sup> The New Wave authors decided to reject the realistic, nationalistic, documentary literature of their fathers, the 1948 writers, while undertaking a new, abstract, nonrealistic prose in order to connect with a linguistic heritage and past Hebrew literature that had been neglected, as they understood it, by the prior generation.<sup>7</sup> One outcome of this process was a turn toward literary grandfathers: exilic writers such as Berdichevsky, Gnessin, and Agnon, in whom the Statehood Generation writers found a poetic and ideological substitute for the disappointing literary fathers of the 1948 generation.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, Kahana-Carmon seemed on her way to becoming one of the definitive representatives of this mainstream Oedipal intertextual process. Her early prose—ripe with citations from the holy sources as well as from Agnon, Gnessin, and Berdichevsky—was seen by scholars of Hebrew literature as embodying the return to the grandfathers typical of her generation. For example, Shlomo Grodzensky, the editor of *Amot*, which awarded Kahana-Carmon a prize for her short stories “Im na matsati hen be’eineha” (“If I Have Found Favor in Your Eyes”) and “Ne’ima Sasson kotevet shirim” (“Ne’ima Sasson Writes Poems”) refers to her distance from the local documentary prose of her peers of the 1948 generation.<sup>9</sup> Gershon Shaked, in his book on the Statehood Generation writers, *Gal hadash ba-siporet ha-Ivrit (A New Wave in Hebrew Fiction)*, insists that there is an “analogy between the new and the old cultural contexts” in Kahana-Carmon’s early stories, and that her prose is close to its Hebrew literary antecedents.<sup>10</sup>

The critics’ overwhelming embrace of Kahana-Carmon at the start of her literary career suggests that this pseudo-male intertextual process was successful. Kahana-Carmon is the only woman writer identified by



Hebrew literary scholars as an inseparable part of the “Statehood Generation club,”<sup>11</sup> and her early stories are studied in schools and universities in Israel alongside those of A. B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz.<sup>12</sup>

However, in addition to her masculine image as a member of the exclusively male “Statehood Generation writers club,” Kahana-Carmon is also studied in Hebrew literature scholarship under the rubric of women’s literature, as the female author who “dictated the values, created the style, and in great part also the self-awareness of women’s literature,” as Gershon Shaked put it.<sup>13</sup> Preoccupation with gender in the study of Kahana-Carmon’s work began, in fact, only in the 1990s, largely instigated by the writer herself. In a series of provocative feminist articles that she published in the daily newspapers and literary journals in the 1980s and 1990s, Kahana-Carmon presented a daring engagement with questions regarding women’s writing in Hebrew and the exclusion of women from the Hebrew and Israeli canons. In the wake of these articles, feminist literary scholarship began to focus on new aspects of Kahana-Carmon’s work, particularly her concern with the repression and subjugation of women that had been neglected by earlier critics.<sup>14</sup>

What then, was Kahana-Carmon’s role in the mainstream intertextual process of her generation, in light of the subsequent feminist studies of her work? Most of the feminist scholars who wrote about Kahana-Carmon’s early prose returned to the traditional view of women’s writing as isolated from the male literary intertextual heritage. Thus, Lily Rattok’s essay “Kol isha” recognizes the intertextual aspect of Kahana-Carmon’s early stories to be cut off from the feminist themes, which preoccupied her. Other feminist scholars, among them Rivka Feldhay and Tova Cohen, view Kahana-Carmon’s rich and illusive language as undermining the masculine father language, whether as a part of a semiotic engagement with the pre-Oedipal relationship between daughter and mother, as suggested by Feldhay, or as an attempt to serve personal, anti-nationalistic purposes, as argued by Cohen.<sup>15</sup>

It seems, however, that these scholars reaffirm the traditional Oedipal model of literary influence. Both Feldhay and Cohen accept the privileged position of an authoritarian literary father, with a subjugated, marginal daughter left to seek literary refuge with her weak—and actually nonexistent—literary mother.

I challenge both the view of Kahana-Carmon’s intertextuality as a

form of the male, Oedipal process of her generation, as well as the feminist claims that it is a feminine, pre-Oedipal alternative. I would like to suggest, instead, an intersexual model for her early writing, one that is based on Kahana-Carmon's cross-gender identification with her precursors' texts, which allowed her to move freely between various poetic and gender identities.

### **Beyond the Female Oedipus: Intersexuality as Cross-Gender Identification**

In order to describe Kahana-Carmon's unique alternative to the Oedipal model of literary influence prevalent in Israeli literature of her time, one must reexamine the gender problem in the female Oedipus complex as it arises in Freud's own work. One may recall that Freud's later theory of female sexuality, as it appears in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*—"Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes," "Female Sexuality," and "Femininity"<sup>16</sup>—lumps the male and female Oedipus complexes together with the castration complex, even though the outcomes in each case are opposite. Because of the risk of losing his penis, the small boy, who fell in love with his mother and wanted to remove his father, now instead identifies with the father, replacing his early hostility toward him with the formation of a severe superego. The little girl, on the other hand, whose life up to that point has been a "boy's life," discovers that she has been castrated, and the castration complex equips her to grapple with her Oedipus complex rather than destroy it. She then develops hostility and contempt toward her castrated mother, and turns to her father as a love object in the hope of regaining the desired phallus. This penis envy can in fact be "solved" only once the girl chooses a husband who resembles her father in his social status and superiority over her. The birth of a baby boy completes the female Oedipus cycle since "a mother is only brought unlimited satisfaction by her relationship with a son." The mother perceives the son as a remnant of her relationship with her own father from whom she had to break away.<sup>17</sup>

As is well known, Freud's theory of the female Oedipal complex provoked fierce opposition among female analysts and feminist literary critics working in the second half of the twentieth century. While some

theorists have focused on the pre-Oedipal relationships of the daughter with her mother,<sup>18</sup> others present a further option, conceptualizing cross-gender identifications of the father function by women, thus challenging the foundations of the Oedipal model itself. Let us return, in this context, to Judith Butler's *Antigone's Claim*. There, Butler presents a new insight into cross-gender identification with the father via Antigone, the eponymous heroine of Sophocles's play. Antigone, who defies Creon's authority by insisting on burying her beloved brother with the proper rites, proclaiming her deed publicly, appears to be a manly heroine. However, she does not truly assume this manhood. In fact, her autonomy is gained through an assimilation of the authoritative voice of the one she resists. This simultaneous refusal and assimilation of paternal authority, however, also changes Creon, the father figure. As her addressee, he becomes unmanned by her defiance, so that neither retains their original gender status.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, Butler's notion of cross-gender identification that goes beyond Oedipus echoes in the background of Kahana-Carmon's early prose through her intersexual dialogue with the canon of Hebrew literature. Kahana-Carmon's acceptance by the male group of the Statehood Generation authors revealed her closeness to her contemporaries on the one hand and her cultural castration as a female author on the other. As opposed to Hendel, who conducted an intersexual dialogue with Agnon, employing a melancholic process of internalizing the mother within the father, Kahana-Carmon looks straight into the eyes of the father figures of modern Hebrew literature: identifying with them, seeking to take part in their groundbreaking poetic processes, while at the same time unmaning them—challenging their authority and primacy.

As in the case of Hendel and Agnon, intersexual dialogue is present in the prose of Kahana-Carmon both in the thematic and metapoetic dimensions. The stories of *Bi-khefifa ahat* have women protagonists who identify with father figures in an attempt to share their sexual and intellectual autonomy. These identifications, however, are also inseparably intertwined in the intersexual dialogue that Kahana-Carmon herself conducts with the grandfathers of modern Hebrew literature, among them Agnon, Gnessin, and Berdichevsky.

The first part of this chapter is devoted to Kahana-Carmon's most studied and popular story, the story that became, in time, the one most

identified with her: “Ne’ima Sasson kotevet shirim” (“Ne’ima Sasson Writes Poems”).<sup>20</sup> This text was understood by most critics to be first and foremost an Oedipal love story between a young student and a teacher she reveres. Instead of this traditional Oedipal interpretation, I suggest reading “Ne’ima Sasson kotevet shirim” as a short female *Künstlerroman*, centered on a dialogue based on cross-gender identification with a literary father who facilitates the female author’s entrance to a world of Jewish texts from which she is excluded. This intersexual dialogue, which begins with references to the Bible and the Talmud, reaches its peak with an evocation of S. Y. Agnon, the great grandfather of Kahana-Carmon’s generation. I will therefore focus on Agnon’s well-known novella, “Bidmei yamehah” (“In the Prime of Her Life”), which is in itself, as is revealed through the dialogue in “Ne’ima Sasson kotevet shirim,” a subversive female *Künstlerroman*.

The second part of the chapter will focus on Kahana-Carmon’s novella, “Lev ha-kaits, lev ha-or” (“Heart of Summer, Heart of Light”), which centers on a love affair between a young, depressed mother and her son’s pediatrician. The love affair eventually leads to the creation of a fictional text based on both the literary collaboration between mother and son, as well as the intersexual dialogue that Kahana-Carmon herself conducts with the grandfathers of Hebrew literature, including Gnessin and Berdichevsky. The last part of the chapter will focus on the definitive ars poetica stories of *Bi-kheftfa ahat*: “Muskalot rishonim” (“Wisdom of the Elders”) and “Hitrosheshut” (“Impoverishment”), which supply an almost theoretical discussion of intersexual dialogue in Kahana-Carmon’s early prose.

### **Toward a Female *Künstlerroman***

“Ne’ima Sasson kotevet shirim” is to a great extent a classic *Künstlerroman*. The young poet Ne’ima Sasson, who decides, “When I grow up . . . to express wonder in writing . . . otherwise this is no life for me” (“Ne’ima Sasson,” 146), is described—like Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus or Mann’s Tonio Kröger—as someone whom life’s disappointments, particularly in love, drive to writing.

The story tells of the protagonist’s first forays into literature while still a student at a religious school for girls. She writes love poems to her mar-

ried teacher, Ezekiel de Silva, who rejects her advances as well as her poems. Her romantic and literary failure inspires her to write her first prose, which turns out to be the actual text of the story. In the end, Kahana-Carmon depicts her agonized heroine, alone in her room, writing “with halting pen, writing and stumbling, writing and erasing” (“Ne’ima Sasson,” 151) the story of her love for her teacher Ezekiel, which opens with the same words as Kahana-Carmon’s text.

Despite the fact that the story is that of a typical *Künstlerroman*, with the triumph of the writing plot over the love plot, most Hebrew literary scholars chose to address “Ne’ima Sasson” as an Oedipal love story between a young student and the teacher she reveres. Thus, for example, Avraham Raz argues that the story deals with forbidden and impossible love finding its resolution in the alternative world of creativity,<sup>21</sup> while Shalom Luria identifies “the love experience of an adolescent girl” as the main subject of the story.<sup>22</sup> In 2006 the story was even included in a collection of Kahana-Carmon’s love stories, *Pgishah, hatsi pgishah* (*A Date, Half a Date*), on the cover of which the editor, Menahem Peri, writes that these are “among the most beautiful love stories ever written in Hebrew literature.”<sup>23</sup>

Problems arising from description of the story as a *Künstlerroman* have filtered into more recent feminist studies of the novella. Lily Rattok, for example, writes that this is not a *Künstlerroman* in the usual sense, and even repeats earlier interpretations that “writing poems was for [Ne’ima Sasson] merely a means to express her love for her teacher Ezekiel.”<sup>24</sup> Even Yael Feldman, who paraphrased the title of Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in this connection, found it hard to allow the story to transcend (love) life in art, and argued that the protagonist learns “to distinguish between her creative talent and her immature, unrequited infatuation with her teacher.”<sup>25</sup> One exception is Hannah Naveh, who makes a general yet significant observation, that Ne’ima is reborn as an artist by the end of the story. However, Naveh does not elaborate on the poetic process that led up to this point.<sup>26</sup>

In general, feminist readings referring to Ne’ima’s relation to Ezekiel vary between two approaches. One pole, exemplified by Rattok, presents Ezekiel as a spiritual guide to whom Ne’ima turns out of “a fierce longing for purity.”<sup>27</sup> The seemingly opposite approach is suggested by Rivka Feldhay, who describes Ezekiel as a desirable man who is “all body” and

who “pushes Ne’ima to erotic awakening.”<sup>28</sup> While these two readings appear to be contradictory, they actually both fit into the Oedipal narrative. The dialogue between Ezekiel and Ne’ima has been described in traditional discussions of the story, as well as in feminist criticism, as an Oedipal encounter between an authoritarian, patronizing father and a castrated daughter who longs for him. Nevertheless, in spite of these readings, which address the writing plot as a superfluous side product of the love story between Ne’ima and Ezekiel, an alternative literary initiation emerges from the story. Thus, Ne’ima’s literary maturation is illustrated through the transition from longing for the father figure—as reflected in her early poetry—to a dialogic writing in prose, which reflects cross-gender identification with a literary father who is being unmanned.

### “Ne’ima Sasson Writes Poems”

The first stage in Ne’ima Sasson’s literary initiation is the writing of poetry. In the first line of the story, the reader is told of her poem “My Dear Teacher,” printed in the school newspaper:

Our teacher, Mr. Havdalah, said among other things:

“Our student Ne’ima Sasson gladdened us with her nice poem, ‘Dear Teacher,’ which appears on the front page of the latest issue of our school newspaper.” All of Ohel Sarah School will read the poem. Then we went up to the classrooms. I passed by our teacher Ezekiel, who was standing with the principal . . . I heard him say in that special voice of his, a vital voice, despite its being croaky, like Louis Armstrong’s, “should be easy to do.” . . . I see him . . . like a prince in the ballet, a profile like Ivor Novello’s. (“Ne’ima Sasson,” 136)

Despite the fact that Kahana-Carmon does not show the reader the exact content of the poem, the sensual descriptions of Ezekiel emerge from a multitude of popular images like Louis Armstrong and Ivor Novello, hinting at the immaturity of her writing at this point. At the same time, Kahana-Carmon deliberately describes the state of mind from which the writing emerges as turbulent, a “sickness”: “And I am a foolish girl. Sick

this whole year. I sort of decided blindly to fall ill, say, with a kind of flu. Flu with a high fever. And I have no wish to recover” (137). This is a decidedly female description, which stands in contradiction to the Hebrew writer as he appears widely in classical Jewish literature, as a physician, healer (Miron, *Ha-rofe ha-medume*, 1995). Indeed the feminine lyrical-confessional-exposing characteristics of the poems are also hinted at in Ezekiel’s response. Having read the poems, he lectures Ne’ima: “I read a couple of pages. And fell asleep” (146). This is a scathing, surprisingly cruel response hinting at his difficulty coping with the intimate and revealing content of the poems.

Indeed, Ezekiel’s harsh response results in a drastic change in Ne’ima’s writing. She turns her back on lyric-confessional feminine poetry in Hebrew literary critical terms, typical of her first attempts at writing, and devotes herself, instead, to writing prose. The move to prose not only changes her writing, but also signals a new stage in her relation to Ezekiel. Ne’ima begins to treat Ezekiel as an object of gendered and poetic identification, rather than the object of longing he was at the beginning of the novella. This shift enables Ne’ima to rearrange the hierarchical basis of their relationship, establishing it anew as a dialogue of mutual recognition.

### *Ezekiel Revealed*

The meeting with Ezekiel is described as a mystical experience,<sup>29</sup> casting Ezekiel as a holy figure taken from the “company on high.” Meeting with him leads to religious ecstasy culminating in a loss of consciousness:

I keep all my evenings free for Mr. Ezekiel. I sit at the iron table on the back balcony of my parents’ house. At night, the eucalyptus trees rustle like tin leaves . . . I see Mr. Ezekiel rise up between heaven and earth. All eyes, cloaked in a flaming garment. And every night, reading the terrible letters inscribed on the crown on his head, my heart stops. I know that the moment has come, and behold, I seem to fall on my face and swoon. . . . All this, I, Ne’ima Sasson, write in my poem book, from which I sent the poem “Dear Teacher” to the school newspaper. (“Ne’ima Sasson,” 140)

This scene, with its explicit allusion to the prophet Ezekiel, evokes the figure of a seer: Ezekiel's gaze is not only that of the religious seer, however, but also the penetrating male gaze, which taints Ezekiel the teacher with heretical associations.

Thus, the phrase "all eyes" in the text recalls the forbidden and dangerous erotic gaze mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud. The story of Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel who gazed "at a most beautiful gentile woman" ends with the moral: "And you should be kept from harm—a man should not look at a handsome woman whether married or single or even ugly."<sup>30</sup> This attitude is consistent with Ne'ima's description of Ezekiel later in the text as other: a title linking him to the figure of Elisha ben Abuya, the talmudic other who cut off saplings and rejected the Torah.

At first glance, the dangerous, sexual gaze is at odds with the deeply penetrating gaze of the seer. Both, while seemingly contradictory, give Ezekiel a new role, that of a man who recognizes Ne'ima's intellectual and sexual autonomy. In fact, describing Ezekiel as "all eyes" directly opposes the Ne'ima's real-life accusation that he does not see her. "I only exist so that you will see me and you do not want to see me" (141), she says after the revelation scene, when all her attempts to attract his attention have been in vain.

Ezekiel's non-gaze appears in this context as an inseparable part of masculine control. His refusal to see Ne'ima is not only a refusal to recognize her as an erotic object, but also as an autonomous intellectual and creative entity. Indeed, Ezekiel blatantly ignores Ne'ima's writing, and even when Ne'ima demands that he read the poems, he tells her that he fell asleep over them.

The scene of "Ezekiel's revelation" thus distances the teacher from the figure of the Oedipal love object, whether he is a spiritual guide as Rattok believes, or a desirable man as Feldhay puts it. Instead, the scene establishes him as an alternate father, who evokes identification: a father who is at once the embodiment of religious-spiritual authority and simultaneously an observer forced to recognize his daughter's poetic and erotic subjectivity.

Moreover, "Ezekiel's revelation," as Shalom Luria calls the scene,<sup>31</sup> may refer to Ezekiel's discovering himself, as well as evoking Ne'ima's own rediscovery of Ezekiel, hence a new mutuality emerging between the two. It is not only Ezekiel who appears to be a prophet or seer in the



scene. Ne'ima too, from whose own eyes a veil is removed, becomes a kind of seer or prophetess who has visions at night, thus blurring the gender hierarchy between herself and Ezekiel. Ne'ima's gaze blocks the omnipotent male gaze — that of the prophet as well as that of the desiring man — creating a dialogue, and reestablishing the relationship between herself and Ezekiel as one of mutual recognition.

At the same time, Ne'ima's reclaiming of Ezekiel's gaze for herself and hence the recognition he denied her is inseparable from the ultimate act of establishing of the self, becoming a writer. The last sentence of the passage, in which Ne'ima tells of her reworking of her vision into a literary text, links Ne'ima the seer with the figure of the Hebrew writer as an observer of the house of Israel. This analogy is created in the very declaration of establishment of the self via writing: "All this, I, Ne'ima Sasson, write in my poem book from which I sent the poem 'Dear Teacher' to the school newspaper" (140). The act of writing drastically changes the relation between herself and the heretofore indifferent teacher, who is also an Oedipal father substitute, and enables Ne'ima to share in Ezekiel's subjectivity and become a part of his world of religious texts from which Ne'ima and her classmates were in many ways excluded.

In order to demonstrate the full significance of the cross-gender identification dialogue between Ne'ima and with Ezekiel, one must take into account the text she writes, inspired by him. "Ezekiel's revelation" is only a fragment of that text, the first stage of Ne'ima's training in prose. The second and better developed stage begins the moment she writes the long text which is the novella itself, "Ne'ima Sasson kotevet shirim." This stage is an ambitious metapoetic enactment of the cross-gender identification with the male canon. Kahana-Carmon conducts here a complex literary dialogue with Agnon's "In the Prime of Her Life," which also involves a kind of *mise en abyme* at the heart of which stands a parallel dialogue with a male father text.

### *"Ne'ima Sasson kotevet shirim" in Dialogue with "In the Prime of Her Life"*

The self-reflexivity of writing, which emerges only episodically in the "Ezekiel's revelation" scene, recurs more explicitly at the end of the novella. The rejected Ne'ima, whose advances went unrequited and

whose poetry was ignored, purchases a new notebook. In the evening, as Jerusalem sleeps, she opens the notebook and with “halting pen, writing and stumbling, writing and erasing” begins to write the story which constitutes the novella itself, opening with the words: “Our teacher, Mr. Havdalah, said among other things” (“Ne’ima Sasson,” 151).

The cyclical structure of the story, whose end is its beginning, has not escaped critical notice.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, interpreters of the story have neglected the extensive *ars poetica* implications of the closing scene. The scene in fact unravels the hierarchy established in the beginning between the love plot of the novella and its writing plot, and reestablishes the novella as a *Künstlerroman* based on a dialogic process of cross-gender identification with the male literary text.

This dialogic process can best be illustrated in the intertextual affinity between the final scene of “Ne’ima Sasson kotevet shirim” and that of Agnon’s “In the Prime of Her Life.”<sup>33</sup> In the famous closing scene of Agnon’s novella, Tirtza, the heroine, disappointed in her failed marriage to Akaviah Mazal—the rejected love of her dead mother—sits in the solitude of her room to write the story of the failed love, which is the text of the novella itself:

In my room at night whilst my husband would bend over his lore and I feared lest I disturb him in his work, I would sit and write my memories. Sometimes I would ask myself, for what purpose have I written my memories, what new things have I seen, and what do I wish to leave behind? Then I would say, it is to find rest in my writing, so did I write all that is written in this book. (“In the Prime of Her Life,” 216)

The final paragraph of “In the Prime of Her Life,” like that of “Ne’ima Sasson kotevet shirim,” suddenly reveals the heroine as the writer of the text itself, and everything that has appeared up to this point has been chosen and edited by her.

Indeed, Kahana-Carmon’s story is closely linked—both thematically and stylistically—to Agnon’s novella, as both texts have at their center a young female student of Hebrew, whose failed love affair with her teacher is ultimately overshadowed by her literary initiation. Both Agnon and Kahana-Carmon depict this literary initiation in detail—as it results

in a complex female rewrite of a male, biblical, enlightenment-like text then revealed to be the actual text of both stories.

Ironically enough, another thing the two works have in common is the way they were received by Hebrew literary critics, who tended to ignore, in each case, the *ars poetica* aspect of the works, and to focus on the love plot. This love plot has been perceived, in the case of Agnon as in the case of Kahana-Carmon, in definitive Oedipal terms as revolving around the relations between the young, inexperienced female protagonist and her father or father substitute. Thus, Avraham Band described Tirtza as a naive and confused young woman, who falls victim to her unconscious longing for her biological father, Mintz. Adi Tsemach described her as an intellectually challenged young woman who does not acknowledge her inferiority to Mazal, the substitute father, and A. B. Yehoshua described her as being unknowingly led by her guilt-ridden father to the arms of Mazal.<sup>34</sup>

Only in the last few decades have a number of scholars, including Ruth Ginsburg, Nitza Ben-Dov, and Michal Arbel, stressed the importance of the discovery that Tirtza is in fact the writer of the novella, which reestablishes the text as a work of *ars poetica* concerned with its own creation.<sup>35</sup> Even these studies, however, do not consider the far-reaching implications of the discovery, which turns the heroine of the novella into a pioneering Hebrew woman writer at a time when women were excluded from Hebrew studies and from intellectual circles in general.

“In the Prime of Her Life” takes place during the late phase of the Jewish Enlightenment when, as a result of the awakening of Zionism and the growing fear of assimilation of women, there was a certain increase in the number of girls who began to learn Hebrew. Nevertheless, as shown in the text, the study of Hebrew was still considered male at that time, so the demand that women internalize the language of the father, which had heretofore rejected them, was paradoxical: “The teacher, following my father’s urging . . . taught me the Hebrew tongue, the rules of logic, and the interpretation of Man’s Profits. I was left breathless” (“In the Prime of Her Life,” 173).

Indeed, Tirtza’s studies are at first accompanied by harsh feelings of alienation. Nevertheless, she persists in studying the father’s text. Early on, she succeeds in reading the books of Joshua and Judges fluently, and

later her fluency in Hebrew allows her to read Mazal's memoirs, which are written in the high-blown biblical Hebrew typical of the Enlightenment period.

Tirtza finds Mazal's text and reads it for the first time at her friend Mintshi's house. Mintshi copied out the text, which is styled as a journal: "a diary like the diaries educated girls possessed a generation ago" (178–79). As it turns out, the Enlightenment-like text, full of biblical and talmudic allusions, serves as inspiration for the text which Tirtza herself writes. Tirtza's novella highlights the intertextual connection between the diary and Tirtza's own text by repetition of the biblical articulation: "all that is written in this book." This phrase first appears when Tirtza is about to read Mazal's diary—"and in the morning I read all that is written in this book"—and recurs at the end of the novella, when she is about to write her own memoir: "so did I write all that is written in this book." Indeed, the text of the novella that Tirtza writes suggests a return to Mazal's own text, in which he tells the story of his falling in love with Tirtza's mother, Leah, who was also his student.

At first, Mazal's text, in René Girard's terms, functions as a kind of mediator text for Tirtza,<sup>36</sup> a literary model of passion—Tirtza's mother's passion for Mazal—in light of which her daughter's own passion for him develops. Thus, Tirtza, who identifies with her dead mother, strives to correct the wrong of her mother's life while at the same time overcoming the initial, forbidden desire for her father and marrying his substitute. This narrative stems from the accepted psychoanalytic understanding of a daughter as a double of her mother, which recurs frequently in the usual interpretations of the story describing Tirtza as a passive woman who marries a father substitute. One of the surprising discoveries in the novella, however, is that Tirtza, in her rewriting, does not situate herself in the place of her mother, but rather takes up a poetic, erotic stance identified with that of Mazal, the desiring and writing subject.

Thus, Tirtza reconstructs writing in the first person, as Mazal did, and even casts herself in the role of the active male in their courtship, a role hinted at in her name, which is linguistically associated with female desire and vigor.<sup>37</sup> In fact, Tirtza's energy is not only expressed at the erotic level, but also and perhaps most importantly in the literary context. Contrary to her mother, Leah, who is portrayed as a passive consumer of

texts,<sup>38</sup> Tirtza is not only sexually proactive, but someone who takes on the male role poetically. Writing in the first person resonates, as argued, with Mazal's own writing, which is a Haskalah-like text, rich with biblical and talmudic allusions.

At the same time, this very text—identified with Mazal—is stereotypically feminine, a kind of memoir, “like the diaries educated girls possessed a generation ago” (178–79), made up of short fragments. By contrast, the text which Tirtza herself writes—in dialogue with Mazal's dialogic text—is male: broad, sweeping, and structured like a short novel. It is, in fact, the Agnonic text, whose “copyright” Agnon chose to bestow upon Tirtza, in a parallel process of cross-gender identification with his female protagonist.<sup>39</sup>

This Agnonic process is reminiscent of the literary dialogue created between Kahana-Carmon and Agnon's novella. In Kahana-Carmon's story, which takes place in 1950s Jerusalem, girls are no longer excluded from access to religious texts in Hebrew. Nevertheless, the analogy between “Ne'ima Sasson” and “In the Prime of Her Life” highlights Ne'ima's own complex relations with the male Hebrew canon from which she is excluded, into which she hopes to be accepted, and which she seeks to challenge.

Like Tirtza, whose text resonates with Mazal's male Enlightenment writing, Kahana-Carmon evokes the gender narrative laid bare in “In the Prime of Her Life.” Thus, the story “Ne'ima Sasson kotevet shirim” establishes—structurally, thematically, in the choice of characters, and in its archaic style, rich in biblical and talmudic allusions—a literary resonance with Agnon's novella.

At the same time, the dialogic encounters led by both Kahana-Carmon and Agnon's female heroines with their teachers reflect the metapoetic dialogue between Kahana-Carmon and Agnon, the great grandfather of the Statehood Generation authors whose literary manhood is undermined by Kahana-Carmon. Thus, the Agnonic prose to which Kahana-Carmon refers is the same prose resonating in the minds of her literary peers, A. B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz, in their early stories. Nevertheless, in her dialogue with Agnon, Kahana-Carmon reveals the hidden gendered aspects arising from Agnon's novella, and thus reexamines the gender boundaries of the major Oedipal intertextual process of her generation, which she helps take beyond Oedipus.

## *The Secret That Makes a Hero of the Weak*

Toward the end of “Ne’ima Sasson,” Kahana-Carmon describes the poetic strategy of cross-gender, intersexual dialogue as a kind of revelation, as Ne’ima’s epiphany. When she attempts to show Ezekiel, the embodiment of the male Hebrew canon, her knowledge of the biblical sources, Ezekiel confronts her directly with the imperative of obeying the law of the father:

Today it’s school. Tomorrow it’s life. Listen and remember. There are rules. A person cannot just do what he wants. Ne’ima Sasson is an individual; Ezekiel de Silva is an individual; they need to adhere to the rules. And by our own free will. (“Ne’ima Sasson,” 149)

In reply to the demand that she obey the text of the father, and without attempting to cast off his rules altogether, Ne’ima Sasson comes up with a solution based on writing that glides freely between religious sources and borrows materials from them as needed, assimilates the authoritarian stance of the father, while at the same time unmanning him. The result is a dialogic text, which repeats subversively, almost parodically, the forced, formal delivery of the teacher Ezekiel:

Oh, my heart burned within me. Oh, I said in my heart, if he brings me the notebook I will say: you see the trash can over there. Throw it in there. Oh, if only I hadn’t written the poems, I said in my heart and through my tears I could not stop myself, the name of a play I saw once on the notice board comes to mind: *The Taming of the Shrew*. And a record album in a shop window, with a drawing of a whip garlanded all around with roses. I was seized with the panic of a sudden realization—as though I had been pulled up by the roots of my hair and wafted to a different level—and already pulses of light struck my eyes: I have said it. The secret that makes a hero of the weak. I knew it. I always knew. How come I didn’t know that I knew . . . The light which once began to shine through, as soft as the wild moon, grows ever brighter, blinding. (149)

Ne'ima's dialogic text brings together quotations from the book of Job, Shakespeare, and everyday expressions, intertwined with Ezekiel's own words: "by our own free will." Ne'ima internalizes the text of the father until at the end of the passage she becomes the father: the Hebrew writer, the observer for the house of Israel, the omnipotent voyeur. Her gaze, as it is described in the final lines, is so penetrating and powerful that it becomes "blinding," a historical extension of the blind seer. At the same time, the subversive repetition of the father's words causes Ezekiel to lose his primal and authoritarian validity and renders him open to dialogue.

The "secret that makes a hero of the weak" is embedded, as the passage hints, in the possibility of joining with the canonical text, while at the same time suggesting a new use for it, rather than submitting to its authority. The wish to hurl the notebook of poems into the trash can, positioned next to the allusion to Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, expresses a repulsion from the submission to authority as reflected in Ne'ima's early, lyric-confessional poetry which drives her to the margins of the literary canon. Instead of this feminine writing, Ne'ima seeks to create an intersexual dialogue with the canon of father, to share in his subjectivity and thereby transform herself from weak to heroic.<sup>40</sup>

The text of the story—based on Kahana-Carmon's cross-gender correspondence with the male Jewish canon, of which Agnon is the most prominent member—demonstrates her success in transforming herself from weak to heroic. The literary student who starts off writing poems is described at the end of the novella, as in many *Künstlerromans*, in terms of a rebirth: "A moment of birth. What is born. And if all the heavens were scrolls and all the world scribes and all the forests quill pens, they would not suffice to write all I have learned from my teachers" (150).

The traditional motif of rebirth is illustrated by means of another dialogic process of correspondence with the fathers. Ne'ima Sasson evokes the words of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai with regard to his studies with his teacher, Hillel HaZaken: "If all the heavens were scrolls and all the forests quill pens and all the seas ink, they would not suffice to write down the wisdom I have learned from my teachers."<sup>41</sup> Ne'ima—or is it Kahana-Carmon's variation on Yohanan ben Zakkai's words—situates her within the Jewish dynastic tradition, which is passed from father to son. Moreover, she takes on ben Zakkai's role of a son who himself becomes a father. As ben Zakkai's literary father Hillel HaZaken observes, ben Zakkai in turn served as "the father of wisdom and father for generations."<sup>42</sup>

However, Ne'ima and Kahana-Carmon do not merely transform themselves into a new literary father, but also challenge the authoritarian fatherhood of the literary fathers who came before them, exposing their gender fluidity, as Kahana-Carmon's reading of "In the Prime of Her Life" suggests. In fact, not only are the literary sources of the text being unmanned. Kahana-Carmon also reinterprets the male addressees of the story, whose role it is to lend validity to Ne'ima's status in a male literary sphere.

Kahana-Carmon thus suggests that Ne'ima's actual father, who is mentioned only briefly in the story, is being unmanned as well. In a conversation between Ne'ima and Mr. Havdalah, the school principal, she describes her father as being "sick," thus implicitly identifying the father with her own feminine stance, as "a foolish girl . . . Sick this whole year . . . no wish to recover" (136–37).

Even Mr. Havdalah, a supposedly definitive representative of the male establishment, is presented throughout the story in a surprising light. Although Mr. Havdalah is an ostensibly insensitive man, who does not notice Ne'ima's love for Ezekiel to such an extent that he fails to see that Ezekiel is the real addressee of the poem "My Dear Teacher," Mr. Havdalah turns out to realize what neither Ezekiel nor previous readers of the novella could. Mr. Havdalah is not interested in the personal, Oedipal aspect of Ne'ima's poems—hence his ignorance of the addressee of the poem—but rather in Ne'ima's writing *per se*. He explicitly expresses his interest in the scene in which he questions Ne'ima about her reading habits and her extracurricular activities, as well as in the scene in which he gaily announces: "The entire staff room is talking about it: our Ne'ima Sasson is a poet" (148). Here, the symbolism of his name—"Mr. Separation" in English, alluding to the prayer uttered on Saturday evening to separate the holy Sabbath from the secular weekday—may be read as an attempt to separate the *ars poetica* level of the story from the Oedipal love plot, that same love plot which is not, as Kahana-Carmon herself declared in response to her enthusiastic reviewers, "the point."

### *Ne'ima Sasson Writes Prose*

Why, then, does Kahana-Carmon entitle her story "Ne'ima Sasson Writes Poems" when the central text is in fact in prose? The writing of



the story's own text is the completion of Ne'ima's literary initiation. The young woman writing poems becomes a prose fiction writer. Moreover, the prose that Ne'ima writes may in the end be identified with Agnon, the father or, more accurately, the grandfather of contemporary Israeli literature. Nonetheless, the blurring of boundaries between poetry and prose is most typical to the story, and later became a typical characteristic of Kahana-Carmon's writing in general. Many of her lyrical, nonrealist works are like prose poems, which often deeply influenced poets, most prominent among them Dahlia Ravikovitch, whose late poems are scattered with allusions to and quotations from Kahana-Carmon's prose.<sup>43</sup>

The fact that the story is entitled "Ne'ima Sasson Writes Poems" despite the centrality of prose within it indicates the challenging and ambitious nature of Ne'ima's writing as well as that of Kahana-Carmon, as it evolves throughout her debut collection of stories. Her writing stretches the poetic and gender boundaries of the male canon, challenges its demand for clear-cut distinctions between various literary genres, and hence between masculine and feminine writing.

Ne'ima Sasson, who envelops the male Hebrew canon in her juvenile love affair with her teacher, Ezekiel, thus demonstrates the far-reaching implications of the intersexual dialogue: a multidirectional textual encounter between the female author and the literary tradition from which she draws her materials while reading them anew. The prose to which she returns is the same Agnonic prose employed by her contemporaries Oz and Yehoshua. Nevertheless, in her dialogue with Agnon and with her other grandfathers, she broadens the gender boundaries of the intertextual process of her generation, thus extending it beyond Oedipus.

Indeed, "Ne'ima Sasson kotevet shirim" provides the poetic platform for other stories included in *Bi-khefifa ahat*, many of which revolve around cross-gender, intersubjective, and intertextual dialogues. Thus, for instance, one can compare "Ne'ima Sasson" with a story written in the same period, "Im na matsati hen be'eineha" ("If I Have Found Favor in Your Eyes").<sup>44</sup> In the latter story, a female teacher who falls in love with her promising male student replaces Ezekiel. Nevertheless, as the story progresses, it is the teacher who struggles to enter the gates of the Jewish canon which are, ironically enough, more open to her male student. Toward the end of the story, however, she does enter by—once again—conducting an intersexual dialogue with the holy sources, reading them

anew, while unmanning her learned male student. It seems, however, that this intersexual dialogue reaches its peak in one of the late novellas in the collection, “Lev ha-kaits, lev ha-or” (“Heart of Summer, Heart of Light”).<sup>45</sup>

### **My Husband Is Revived at Night: Intersexual Dialogue in “Lev ha-kaits, lev ha-or”**

As M. Y. Berdichevsky writes in his story “Ba’emek” (“In the Valley”):

Hulda was of a capricious nature. Sometimes she helped willingly with all the chores, milking the cows, and even mixing fodder for the horse before the servant came; but sometimes she did nothing . . . She could neither read nor write because she had not been taught . . . She expressed the music in her soul only by skipping and dancing, or by rolling down the hillside.<sup>46</sup>

This quotation does not merely resonate in Kahana-Carmon’s novella “Lev ha-kaits, lev ha-or” due to the protagonist’s name, Hulda, who is also Berdichevsky’s female protagonist. Berdichevsky’s Hulda—who had not been taught how to read or write although she had “music in her soul”—is key to one of the prominent themes that Kahana-Carmon develops throughout her novella: the relationship between the potential female writer and the Hebrew male canon.

Although “Lev ha-kaits” was understood in Hebrew literary criticism mainly as a psychological love story, another narrative emerges from the text, offering a metapoetic discussion of the attempt to establish a female dialogic literary tradition. This metapoetic narrative, first outlined in the dramatic encounter between Hulda Sokolov, the mother of the protagonist, “Ronen the old child,” and Dr. Bruhin, son of “the Tehiya generation author,” as he is referred to in the text—is fully realized in Kahana-Carmon’s intersexual dialogue with the canon of Hebrew literature. This intersexual dialogue begins with a literary correspondence with the turn-of-the-century authors—or, as referred to in traditional literary historiographies, the Tehiya generation authors—among them Berdichevsky and Gnessin. It reaches its peak with an evocation of Bialik, the great-grandfather of modern Hebrew literature.

## Ronen the Old Child

The coexistence of the romantic narrative—the love story of the novel—with the metapoetic dimension is evoked, first and foremost, through the unique function of the narrator, Ronen. On the one hand, Ronen functions as a witness narrator, reporting the main events taking place in the text to the reader and thus supplying a realistic justification of the novella. On the other hand, the dreamlike, poetic vision that is being revealed to him—“Heart of summer, heart of light, the splendor, everything”—adds the metapoetic dimension of a self-aware narrator. However, his know-it-all, too-bright-for-his-age character also conveys greater intertextual implications.

The figure of the “precocious old child”—who is also, in fact, the “wise child”—is deeply rooted in Hebrew literary tradition. As shown by Avner Holtzman, many turn-of-the-century authors’ prose works focus on characters who are children and carry within them “the seeds of uprootedness.” Among these prose works, Holtzman discusses short stories by M. Y. Berdichevsky, Y. D. Berkovitch, and Gershon Shofman, in which mentally over-developed children discover life’s unbearable hardships at an early age, as well as their own parents’ shortcomings. One must also consider the *ars poetica* implications of embracing the old child literary pattern of the *talush* stories, as most of these texts were autobiographical.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, Kahana-Carmon’s protagonist Ronen, the old child, is able to see the very things that the grown-ups seek to keep from him, while possessing a rare capacity for compassion and identification, whose gender implications I shall further explore. In the context of the *talush* literature, one can then see Ronen’s character as the alter ego of Kahana-Carmon. Indeed, the text suggests that the love story between Hulda and Dr. Bruhin is in fact a literary text written by Ronen, the representative of Kahana-Carmon. This possibility becomes clearer toward the end of the novella:

I stared at them, wondering. Have I fabricated the whole thing? She already forgot. How could she ever forget? This is what I do not understand. Maybe she forced herself to forget. Maybe I made it all up. When I think of it, I realize that I have no proof.

From Hanukah to Purim, maybe I was the sick one, hearing voices and seeing visions. Orphanhood came over me, and a sudden realization. What have I made up and what haven't I made up? One can never tell. ("Lev ha-kaits, lev ha-or," 232)

Ronen's confession draws attention to the fictional aspect of the love story between the mother and Dr. Bruhin, while stressing the dialogic nature of this fabricated text, invented by Ronen. As the novella suggests, this metapoetic discussion revolves around the encounter between the potential female writer and the tradition of Hebrew literature.

### *My Husband Is Revived at Night*

Throughout the novella, the relationship between Hulda Sokolov and Dr. Bruhin is established in a metapoetic context. From his first appearance in the text, Ronen identifies Dr. Bruhin with the Tehiya generation:

Neither mother nor I had ever seen him before. But there was something in his appearance, how so? At the nape of the neck, the side of his skull? Something which reminded us of his father, the famous writer, the Tehiya generation author, whose photo in black-and-white hung, among others, in the central hall of our school. (193)

The photograph of the Tehiya generation author, Dr. Bruhin's father, hanging in Ronen's school, evokes one of the texts most associated with that literary generation: Gnessin's story "Hatsida," discussed in the introduction to this study, at the end of which the protagonist, Nahum Hagzar, an author suffering from writer's block, recalls the portrait of Peretz Smolenskin hanging in the Strashun Library in Vilna. Smolenskin's portrait signifies for Hagzar the past of modern Hebrew literature, a past filled with hopes and dreams, the very opposite of his depressing, creatively infertile present.

The encounter between Hulda Sokolov and Dr. Bruhin also signifies a traumatic dialogue with Hebrew literature's past. Kahana-Carmon's text, however, revolves around the gender trouble of this very dialogue. The male nature of the connection to the past is manifested in the clear

identification between Dr. Bruhin and his father, the Tehiya generation author. Kahana-Carmon writes, “She [Hulda] shivered when he [Dr. Bruhin] spoke; there was an old man standing in front of her” (193). Toward the end of the novella Dr. Bruhin and his father merge into one:

When did he and his father—the famous Tehiya author—become one? One of those boys to whom the other children would refer as: “Born in Minsk. Graduated from Pinsk. Participated in the first congress. Left exile on the day of a pogrom. Came to Tel Aviv and wrote the poem: ‘And happily you draw water from the waters of the Laundromat’ . . .” (233)

The merging of Dr. Bruhin and his father, the Tehiya generation author, gains strength later on in the scene of a party held at the Sokolov’s residence, with the participation of Dr. Bruhin and his wife, Mrs. Bruhin.<sup>48</sup> The wife testifies that: “My husband is revived at night. Only at night: writing his manuscript, chewing his pencil, from 6 P.M. to 6 A.M.” (211). This statement clearly associates Dr. Bruhin with other figures of writers who appear in the stories of *Bi-khefifa ahat*. Ne’ima Sasson also writes “in the evening, as Jerusalem sleeps,” and Mr. Lucci, the protagonist of “Muskalot rishonim,” experiences his own creative epiphany at the crack of dawn. The reference to writing at night as a “revival” is thus a continuation of the romantic perception of writing as a rescue from tedious, deadly everyday life.

The phrase “my husband is revived at night” creates, however, beyond its thematic implications, yet another metapoetic association between Dr. Bruhin and the Tehiya, which means “Revival” in Hebrew. Indeed, the reference to the son as the one who follows in his father’s footsteps lays the foundation for the critical debate on intergenerational relations in Israeli literature, as it emerges from a conversation that takes place between guests at the party. The conversation, which at first appears to be pseudo-intellectual living room small talk about the state of contemporary Israeli literature, gradually becomes the very expression of the gender blind spot at the heart of the Hebrew canon. This blind spot persists, according to Kahana-Carmon, even after the rise of the New Wave of Statehood Generation literature.

Thus, the conversation begins when Mrs. Bruhin confesses that since

she cannot sleep at night her daughter supplies her with the recent best-selling books, transforming her into an “expert on contemporary Israeli literature” (212). In response, one of the guests, the unlearned Liphshitz, wonders if “Hebrew literature still engages with the Palmach?” Mrs. Bruhin updates him on the change that Israeli literature has been undergoing since the 1960s:

This week my daughter gave me a book called *Lisanda’s Death*. The plot, if you will, revolves around one not-so-polished Naftali Noy, who lives in a Tel Aviv that I don’t know and don’t wish to know and creates an imaginary girl—together they commit murder . . . and if you will, the plot revolves around this divorce, Naftali Noy who lived with a woman, the divorcée of a sailor, a woman of experience. The relationship is lacking and gradually goes downhill until one evening the protagonist, as mentioned, kills this divorcée. As you may say—this is the spirit of the time—it is I who was left behind . . . Who are these people? (212)

At first, Kahana-Carmon seems to reveal, through the figure of Mrs. Bruhin, the conservative nature of the Israeli readership. Mrs. Bruhin is a decade older than her husband and the rest of the guests. The text identifies her with the 1948 Palmach generation, which has difficulty coping with the New Wave literary revolution, which promoted personal, libidinal narratives instead of national ones.

In his reading of the Sokolovs’ party scene, Hannan Hever argues that Kahana-Carmon’s discussion of her generation’s literature exposes the political blindness of the Statehood Generation, which did not truly represent the actual realities of Israel during the 1960s, first and foremost, the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank.<sup>49</sup> But does Mrs. Bruhin’s critical stance toward her generation’s literature necessarily stem from conservative motives?

In light of the gender debate developed throughout the novella on the possibilities of female writing vis-à-vis the male canon, it can be argued that Mrs. Bruhin’s criticism of the Statehood Generation literature reflects a subversive standpoint, associated with that of Kahana-Carmon herself. Thus, Mrs. Bruhin’s question—“Who are these people?”—seems to reflect Kahana-Carmon’s ambivalence toward the literature of her gen-

eration, suggesting that the ostensibly dramatic literary revolution taking place during the 1960s did not significantly alter its male hegemony.

Kahana-Carmon's focus on Yitzhak Orpaz's novel *Mot Lisanda* (*Lisanda's Death*), which was published two years before "Lev ha-kaits, lev ha-or," also sheds light on this interpretation. Orpaz's novel is a typical male *Künstlerroman* depicting the woman—the protagonist's love interest, the divorcée—as an obstacle, and once that obstacle is removed, writing begins.<sup>50</sup> Kahana-Carmon's decision to put Orpaz's misogynist artist novel at the center of her critical debate on the Statehood Generation suggests, then, that the male point of view was upheld even in the so-called New Wave literature, which neglected the collective-national agenda of the 1948 generation altogether. "Who are these people?" asks Mrs. Bruhin, expressing her own isolation from this new male protagonist who does not reflect her world nor her point of view any more than the previous male protagonists of the Palmach generation did.

Indeed, Mrs. Bruhin's reading of the Statehood Generation literature precedes later readings that sought to undermine the ideological factor involved in the New Wave literary revolution.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, Mrs. Bruhin, who complains about the dominance of the male point of view in the New Wave literature, foreshadows Kahana-Carmon's later feminist essays from the 1980s, in which she harshly criticizes the male subject at the center of her contemporaries' prose, and even holds Yizhak Orpaz specifically responsible.<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, one cannot overlook the close affinity between the character of old Mrs. Bruhin and Kahana-Carmon herself, who was considered the "elderly" member of the Statehood Generation group and belonged chronologically to the previous generation. This autobiographical affinity, which drifts throughout the text from the character of Ronen, the old child to the old Mrs. Bruhin, helps to illustrate the problematic female dialogue with the literary past. At the same time, however, it highlights the gender fluidity of Kahana-Carmon's own poetics, as she wanders back and forth between different gender standpoints. Unlike her alter ego, Mrs. Bruhin, however, Kahana-Carmon is not content with a critique of the Oedipal process of her generation, but aspires to go even farther. For this purpose, she uses another character, another alter ego, Hulda Sokolov.

At first, Hulda does not appear as an actual or potential writer in the

text. Ronen himself stresses his mother's remoteness from the literary world when he states that "she will never read a book" (178). Hulda's intellectual and creative state of paralysis is associated, in the text, with the internalization of a passive-feminine position within the family. She is described as a prisoner in her own house, ruled over by her vicious mother-in-law, who is referred to in the text as "the witch," a representative of the old patriarchal world. Similar to Berdichevsky's Hulda, mentioned in the opening quote from "Ba'emek," who commits suicide once she is destined for a loveless, arranged marriage,<sup>53</sup> Hulda Sokolov's reaction to her home imprisonment is "death in life," a state of melancholic depression that does not allow her to love or care for others.

In relation to the discussion of Statehood Generation literature, the similarities are noteworthy between Kahana-Carmon's Hulda Sokolov and another well-known female protagonist, Hannah Gonen, the heroine of Amos Oz's *My Michael* published shortly after "Lev ha-kaits, lev ha-or." Like both Berdichevsky's and Kahana-Carmon's Hulda characters, Gonen is depicted by Oz as a "poetess who never writes poems," and as a woman immersed in existential depression that does not allow her to love or care for her husband and son.<sup>54</sup> Hulda Sokolov can thus be viewed as a bridge between Berdichevsky's Hulda and Oz's Hannah, implying that it was Kahana-Carmon who pioneered the process of returning to the grandfathers, not Oz, who is traditionally seen as Berdichevsky's natural follower in contemporary Israeli literature.<sup>55</sup>

Unlike Oz, however, Kahana-Carmon allows her female protagonist to resist her "death in life" state and overcome her creative paralysis. She does so as a result of her relationship with Dr. Bruhin, the representative of the Tehiya generation. At first, their relationship seems to be a typically hierarchical one between a female student and her mentor. In their first meeting, Hulda is described as standing before Dr. Bruhin like "a disciple before her rabbi" (193). Later on, Hulda asks Dr. Bruhin for a prescription to cure her son, but it seems that it is she who is in need of a prescription—being herself a sick, depressed, and dysfunctional woman. Nevertheless, as her romantic expectations of Dr. Bruhin are disappointed and their relationship gradually sours, she changes her passive stance, and her own creative ambitions become clear.

Thus, the allusion to Berdichevsky's Hulda evokes connotations of feminine creativity seeking expression through practice. Indeed, toward



the end of the novella, Hulda offers to join her husband's business, which she refers to as a creation: "Look, you built up a life's work all by yourself. Your creation," she tells the somewhat surprised husband. He dryly answers, "I never knew that you considered my business a creation" (224). Hulda's attempt to express herself creatively—even through the mediation of others—intensifies toward the end of the novella when she gradually loses her stereotypically feminine traits and the distinction between herself and her son, Ronen, is blurred.

### *Role Reversal of Mother and Son: Hulda as Narrator*

Although Ronen seems to function as the all-knowing narrator who controls his mother, his female protagonist—by putting words in her mouth, interpreting her deeds and motives—the text also implies that the hierarchy between them is not so stable. In this context, it is interesting to note that the text does not only allude to Berdichevsky's Hulda, but also to Dvora the prophetess, who is described in the Hebrew Bible as the only woman able to speak for God and interpret holy texts.<sup>56</sup> This biblical allusion brings attention to Hulda Sokolov's role as a mediator of her son's text, who becomes, at a certain point, the creator of the text itself. At the novella's close, the mother fulfills her creative potential through an actual act of writing. Note that the original Hebrew text up to this point is written in the male first person. In a sharp shift, it changes to the female first person, coming from Hulda herself:

What now. Here I am. Looking at the street . . . It is morning outside. It is evening. I am searching the street with a straying look. Searching for something lost . . . Dr. Bruhin, a riddle—what is it? Black, shiny. Placed on a table or located in the wall . . . Just to hear you. Just to see you. Just to know that you exist. And perhaps people attribute powers to doctors which they do not possess. (228–29)

The text—a love letter addressed to Dr. Bruhin—at first appears to be a product of Ronen's feverish imagination, as he writes a fabricated letter on his mother's behalf, an attempt at bringing the doctor and mother together again. However, both the style and content of the letter present

a clear shift from Ronen's own writing. Not only is the text written in the female first person, but the unequivocal hierarchy between the mother and Dr. Bruhin is also destabilized. Thus, unlike Ronen's previous description of the mother as an object of the narrator's all-seeing gaze, here Hulda herself takes the male position of the active voyeur: "I am searching the street with a straying look." At the same time, Hulda's passive, childish stance toward Dr. Bruhin changes and she becomes more active and dominant in the courtship. At the end of the text she states that "perhaps people attribute powers to doctors which they do not possess," thus hinting at Dr. Bruhin's powerlessness to cure her, and perhaps also—in keeping with the metaphor of the Hebrew writer as doctor—his inability to "write her."

Moreover, by positioning Dr. Bruhin in the role of the son who only partially succeeds in following in his father's—the Tehiya generation authors'—literary footsteps, Kahana-Carmon alludes again to the gender blind spot of the Statehood Generation. This blind spot, she suggests, can only be removed through female mediation. Indeed, later on in the text Dr. Bruhin himself refers to Hulda as the author of the letter, and implicitly as the author of their love story: "Dear Hulda," he tells her in response, "You are the one who made the decision, not me. You wrote the letter, not me" (229).

In fact, the revelation that Hulda is the writer of the letter opens the possibility that she is not only the mediator of her son's text, but that she herself is the writer of it. This possibility goes hand in hand with the intersexual dialogue at the heart of the novella. As we have seen, Kahana-Carmon's engagement with literary influence in Hebrew literature is constantly accompanied by intertextual references to the grandfathers of Hebrew literature, including Berdichevsky and Gnessin. The role reversal between Ronen and his mother lends a significant gender component to the process, which culminates toward the end of the novella in a powerful literary dialogue between Kahana-Carmon and Bialik's *ars poetica* verse:

Colors stream and trickle? Tears flow from her eyes. I would expect her to wipe her tears. She does not wipe her tears. I exaggerated. How did I exaggerate? I pondered . . . When I am the one who touches my eyes, and they are dry. (229)

This paragraph, written from Ronen's point of view, depicting his mother crying for her son toward the end of the love affair with Dr. Bruhin, is a dramatic change in the textual relationship between Ronen and Hulda. At the beginning of the novella Ronen articulated feelings that the mother could not express, while here the mother articulates emotions that the son can no longer contain. Looking at the quote from Hulda's love letter, one might argue that Hulda writes the ending of the love story that Ronen himself is not able to complete, and perhaps—in a broader context—she writes the feminine element missing in the masculine text. The gender implications of this process come to the foreground when considering the poetic connotations of the tear in modern Hebrew literature in general, and the significance of the tear in Bialik's poetry in particular. Indeed, the previous quote from "Lev ha-kaits" evokes the last stanzas of Bialik's well-known poem "Le'vadi" ("Alone"):

And when my heart yearns for the window, the light,  
And when the space under her wing is too narrow,  
She drops on my shoulder her head, and a tear  
Falls on my tome, my *Gemara*.

In silence she weeps over me, leaning upon me,  
Her broken wing like a hedge about me is thrown:  
All of them the wind took, all have flitted away,  
And I am left alone, alone!

And like the close of a very ancient dirge,  
And like a prayer of pleading and of fear,  
Falls on my heart this silent, sultry weeping,  
This passionate tear.<sup>57</sup>

Bialik's poem depicts a state of deep, symbiotic identification between the speaker and the divine spirit, described as his mother. Dan Miron has already pointed out that the mother is intimately familiar with the speaker's anxieties and desires, and they are also physically close to each other throughout the poem. Miron refers to the tear as the ultimate embodiment of this physical symbiosis: the tear is that of the speaker, which

streamed from his eye and fell on the *Gemara*, the same tear that Bialik describes as the mother's. The speaker understands the mother's need to cry because this is his own need, and in this respect she cries for herself as much as she cries for him.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the tear—as the embodiment of the symbiosis between mother and son—also constitutes the act of writing. Writing ostensibly begins with the *Gemara*—the male religious tradition—however, it draws its strength, as the poem suggests, from the tear associated with the feminine, motherly foundation.<sup>59</sup>

Similarly, in the novella “Lev ha-kaits, lev ha-or” it is the mother's tear that enables the child's act of writing. Hulda's tear expresses the sorrow shared by mother and son at the ending of the love story. The tear, however, also signifies the moment in which the love story becomes a literary text. The evocation of the Bialikesque tear draws attention, then, to the metapoetic process at the heart of the novella. Whereas Bialik evokes the motherly origins of male writing, Kahana-Carmon employs the metaphor of the tear as the source of creation, drawing attention to the cross-gender, antihierarchical dimension of intertextual relations. The tear, streaming from the mother's eye and becoming the son's creative expression, signifies the dialogic, fluid nature of the text. This text is created by way of literary collaboration between different authors—fathers, daughters, mothers, and sons—who all lose their fixed gender identities, thus establishing a new mode of writing and literary influence.

The tear, as an emblem of the symbiosis between mother and son who reverse roles, presents, then, an option for solving the crisis of female oppressed creativity through an intersexual, cross-gender dialogue with the canon. This is the very male, Hebrew canon that Kahana-Carmon embraces but undermines at the same time.

The intersexual dialogue with the Hebrew canon in this story—culminating in the poetic dialogue with Bialik, who is traditionally considered to be the greatest Tehiya poet—revolves around *ars poetica* questions about the future of fiction writing in Hebrew. These questions, significant as they were for modern Hebrew literature at the pivotal time of the turn of the century, further engage Kahana-Carmon in the 1960s, a period when Israeli literature underwent great changes, laying the foundation for the rise of Israeli women's prose fiction.

Indeed, Kahana-Carmon's early writing questions the future of female

prose in Hebrew: What form should this prose take? Or as the title of one of her most celebrated essays suggests: What does it mean “to be a woman writer”?<sup>60</sup>

### Toward a Cross-Gender *Ars Poetica*

The answer, as this chapter suggests, can be found in the cross-identity and cross-gender intersexual dialogue outlined in Kahana-Carmon’s early prose, of which “Ne’ima Sasson kotevet shirim” and “Lev ha-kait, lev ha-or” are prominent examples. This very process is laid bare in Kahana-Carmon’s definitive stories of *ars poetica*—“Muskalot rishonim” (“Wisdom of the Elders”) and “Hitrosheshut” (“Impoverishment”), both written after “Ne’ima Sasson kotevet shirim” and “Lev ha-kait, lev ha-or.”

At first, the female characters in both stories are excluded from the role of writer, thus giving proof for the argument of Lily Rattok and others that Kahana-Carmon’s concern with the masculine in the *ars poetica* theme is directly opposed to the feminine themes in her work. For example, the story “Muskalot rishonim,” which closes the collection *Bi-khefifa ahat*,<sup>61</sup> focuses on the character of an aging writer named Mr. Lucci. He is the first in a series of male, elderly writer figures who appear in her later works, including Mr. Hiram in “Ve’yareah be’emek Ayalon” (“A Moon on Ayalon Valley”)<sup>62</sup> and Zevulun Leipzig in “Kan hadar ha-hadashot” (“Broadcasting News”). The character of Mr. Lucci, however, is a representation of the cross-identity and gender poetic stance that Kahana-Carmon articulated in her earlier stories.

Thus, Mr. Lucci, like Ne’ima Sasson, is an artist alone, finding relationships with people difficult. Mr. Lucci’s biography as it emerges from the story is also reminiscent of Kahana-Carmon’s own. Like the author, Mr. Lucci began writing relatively late in life and until that time was occupied with the business of life: children, other unsatisfying jobs, non-literary, everyday types of writing. However, the moment he decided to devote himself to writing, all the rest vanished. “I have no friends. Not one,” writes Mr. Lucci, echoing Kahana-Carmon herself, who testified in an interview close to the time of writing of “Muskalot rishonim”: “Writing is my connection with the outside world . . . I don’t have what is generally called a social life.”<sup>63</sup> Mr. Lucci admits that he has “nothing but my books,” and later “it’s like getting blood from a stone” and even “at times

I think it has become a nightmare,” but to cease writing is impossible (“Muskalot rishonim,” 234–43).

Kahana-Carmon does not only speak through the character of Mr. Lucci, however. As in “Ne’ima Sasson kotevet shirim” and “Lev ha-kaits, lev ha-or” she exposes the gender problematic of the primal, authoritarian, absolutely autonomous male writer. Instead of this male stance, which—as becomes apparent later in the story—is doomed to literary failure, Kahana-Carmon proposes a dialogic alternative for literary work within the canon.

The story opens with Mr. Lucci’s optimistic monologue, presenting writing as the only refuge of the artist who cannot cope with life, but it ends on a bleak note of disappointment with writing. The main addressee of the monologue, the journalist who comes to interview Mr. Lucci, is unable to read the text that Mr. Lucci has written. She declares to Mr. Lucci that she doesn’t know the language, that she’s the wrong person for the job, and Mr. Lucci himself is forced to admit that he has not reached his readers, that he remains distant and isolated from them (243). At the end of the novella, Mr. Lucci tries to articulate the reason for his failure with the help of one of Omar Khayyam’s poems which he translates freely: “There was a door, but I could not find the key. A blindfold I could not see through. You and I were surrounded by vain conversation. And you, I, are a forgotten memory” (243).

The inability to find the key to the door is a metaphor for literary failure, the inability to communicate with readers, to enter into their world. But what kind of key would this be? And what does the door represent? Another *ars poetica* story from the same period, “Hitrosheshut,” written shortly before “Muskalot rishonim,” explains further.<sup>64</sup> Like “Muskalot rishonim,” “Hitrosheshut” is a theoretical, almost philosophical discussion about the quality of literature and especially the work of writing. Unlike “Muskalot rishonim,” however, the *ars poetica* discussion in “Hitrosheshut” is hidden and elusive. First and foremost, the female protagonist does not pronounce herself a writer, and is perhaps not entirely aware that she is one. In fact, one may say that whereas “Muskalot rishonim” sets up a classic, male *Künstlerroman* including the renouncement of life for the sake of writing and the price the protagonist thus pays for this sacrifice, “Hitrosheshut” veers onto the only path open for escape from this dilemma: feminine, dialogic writing.

Instead of writing as an utterly autonomous act, in “Hitrosheshut” Kahana-Carmon presents the opposite view, one of sacrifice of literary assets, of impoverishment. The protagonist, Osnat, is, like Ne’ima Sasson, caught up in a disappointing romantic encounter with a man who rejects her. Unlike the other stories, however, which maintain shaky plots, here Kahana-Carmon forgoes the illusion of writing a “story” altogether. The text has no plot or story line. It presents, in fact, a dismantling of all these categories. The encounter between the man and the woman slowly disintegrates, with no explanation given, and the characters have no identities. Osnat is everywoman. Kahana-Carmon describes her as “neither young nor old” and apart from her work as a compiler of indices to holy writings, we know nothing about her, nor about the man she meets.

In her analysis of the story, Rivka Feldhay argues that “Hitrosheshut” describes a psychotic state, a process of disintegration of the object and negation of the subject,<sup>65</sup> but the stripping down of traditional literary structures produces a new textual solution which leads, paradoxically, to a way out of the emotional crisis the protagonist is suffering. The solution is to be found in Osnat’s work as a compiler of indices for sacred works.

At first, this work appears to be of secondary importance in Osnat’s world, immersed as she is in her unsatisfying love life. This work on the side increasingly takes over the story of the protagonist’s life, ultimately usurping the text itself. The main part of the story consists of a list, five and a half pages long, of words taken from the various indices which Osnat is editing that bring her into contact with holy books, Jewish sources, and ultimately to the sources of Kahana-Carmon’s own work.

Only at the end of this long list—the end of the process of compiling the indices—does writing begin. As in “Ne’ima Sasson kotevet shirim,” here, too, writing begins with a kind of mystical epiphany: “And then there will be, indeed there will be again: like someone randomly awakened from sleep, or who gets up to draw the blinds, a sky washed pure, distilled. Like the lily of the valley, the night is all opened up. A secret world redeemed” (Hitrosheshut, 174). This epiphany is depicted as a festive, special moment which helps the writer prepare for the work of writing, and even as a result to become purified for it. Writing does not come out of the blue straight onto the paper through a sudden burst of supernatural inspiration as in the manner of the romantic artist, how-

ever. Writing is described as hard work, sitting quietly and persistently at one's desk, an exhausting process of reshaping everyday materials into a work of art:

I will now sit at my desk. A relic from the chaotic past which now knows no compromise. Only my head works feverishly. Nevertheless, scatterings: the events of the day. Who whispered an invitation . . . There is always preparation. For what, I don't know, just preparation. (174)

Kahana-Carmon returns in this paragraph to the idea of writing as a process of reworking everyday events, the raw materials. A huge intellectual effort is required, as Osnat testifies: "only my head working feverishly," and is the culmination of the process of finding the right textual keys to the literary past and to the sources of Hebrew literature. The repetition of the phrase "I will sit" at the beginning of the paragraph evokes the famous closing sentence of "In the Prime of Her Life": "I would sit and write my memories" ("In the Prime of Her Life," 216).

This final scene is also reminiscent of that in which Agnon's protagonist, Tirtza, seated at her desk, attempts to sublimate the storms of her life in writing, while conducting a dialogue with earlier works written by others, and seeking her own voice within them. Moreover, the culmination of Osnat's search for keys in the final scene of "Hitrosheshut" brings us back to the failure of Mr. Lucci, the protagonist of "Muskalot rishonim":

I never imagined that I had fathers from each one of the centuries gone by, my nameless son. A man loves the offspring of his generation. His offspring, including me. Could it be? There could be one of them that I resemble. I will never know. I am all alone here. ("Muskalot rishonim," 235–36)

Mr. Lucci's failure, as the text implies, is not his isolation from people, which he declares at the beginning of the story, but in his literary isolation, his disconnect with the past and its literary heritage, the mistaken feeling that he is "alone here." Unlike Mr. Lucci, Osnat, like Ne'ima



Sasson, like Ronen and Hulda, reveals that dialogue with her Hebrew literary past is in fact the only key to the hallowed halls of the closed world of the Jewish canon.

Creating keys to other books: is this, for Kahana-Carmon, the significance of women's writing in Hebrew? When she refers to her protagonists, and therefore indirectly to herself, Kahana-Carmon shows that the ability to seek out the most useful keys to the Jewish literary past is of prime importance for the poetic process of the Statehood Generation of writers, whose target was a rereading of the writing of the grandfathers. The revelation of the "secret which makes a hero of the weak" that Ne'ima Sasson declares, may therefore be read not only as the expression of an attempt to become masculine, and hence to be accepted by the "Statehood Generation club." The secret lies instead in the ability to find the right keys, to serve as the best conduit between writers of one's generation and the literary past and the Jewish canon.

Writing, for Kahana-Carmon, cannot be seen merely as successful interpretation of the literary past. Her writing not only reconstructs the canon but stretches its boundaries, shakes it up, forces it to reexamine its poetic and gender assumptions. Perhaps for these reasons she has become less and less popular over the years, persisting with uncompromising totality in the same self-aware, dialogic writing in her late stories as well as her novels. By contrast, other Statehood Generation authors, particularly Amos Oz and A. B. Yehoshua, have moderated their intertextual processes of *ars poetica*, and turned their backs on the modernist approach that characterized their early work.

This could be the reason that Amalia Kahana-Carmon, whose writing is so clearly marked by the fathers, has been understood, more than any other Hebrew woman writer, to be one of the most influential mothers in Israeli literature. Many Israeli women writers admit to having been influenced by her, and her name comes up in almost every feminist discussion of women's writing. Kahana-Carmon's prose demonstrates, then, the radical potential of intersexual dialogue, undermining literary and gender hierarchies, rescuing the female text from its splendid isolation within the Hebrew canon, while at the same time unmanning the canon itself.

## CHAPTER 3

# Spoiling the Stories

## *Rachel Eytan Revisits the Hebrew*

### Künstlerroman

Rachel Eytan . . . appears not to be taking up the baton of existing prose—but rather scouts around far-flung linguistic regions . . . seeking to achieve some sort of primacy.

—YEHUDIT ORIAN

### Where Has Rachel Eytan Gone?

In an episode of the 1990s television program *Leshon ha-marot* (*Mirror Language*), Gershon Shaked discussed 1950s and 1960s women writers, including two subjects of this book: Yehudit Hendel and Amalia Kahana-Carmon. The poet Dahlia Ravikowitz wrote a furious column in response to the program in which she protested the omission of Rachel Eytan from the list. “If I may be permitted to take a guess,” she wrote, “Gershon Shaked did not discount Rachel Eytan’s work, he simply didn’t remember it. Why? Because she’s dead, and not just dead, but killed in an accident in New York. How could one possibly remember someone killed in an accident in New York?”<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, unlike Yehudit Hendel and Amalia Kahana-Carmon, who were accepted sooner or later into the Israeli canon, Rachel Eytan ultimately remained outside of it. She was awarded the Brenner Prize for her first book, *Ba-rakia ha-hamishi* (*The Fifth Heaven*),<sup>2</sup> published in 1962, transforming this anonymous housewife who had grown up in orphan-

ages into one of the most talked about and promising women writers of the 1960s. Her second book, *Shida ve'shidot (Pleasures of Men)*,<sup>3</sup> written a decade later, was not well received and she never published another full-length novel<sup>4</sup> before her sudden death in America in 1987.

Nevertheless, Ravikowitz's sarcastic remark that Eytan had simply escaped Shaked's memory is noteworthy, first and foremost because he was one of the leaders of the literary establishment that put Eytan on the burgeoning Israeli canonic map in the first place. It was Shaked himself who included Eytan as part of the New Wave of the 1960s, specifically as a major example of Hebrew literature's "return to the grandfathers," as he put it. When her first book appeared, he grouped her with prominent New Wave authors, among them A. B. Yehoshua, Amos Oz, and Amalia Kahana-Carmon, arguing that she "opened a small, new window for Hebrew literature" and that she "brought to fruition stylistic possibilities scarcely to be found among earlier novelists, and gave them a new direction."<sup>5</sup> How then, might one explain the fact that Eytan slipped Shaked's mind and perhaps also the collective Israeli literary mind of which Shaked himself was a major documenter? Where has Rachel Eytan gone?

The question could apparently be answered by the hostile reviews *Shida ve'shidot* received, effectively blocking the development of Eytan's literary career. In hindsight, however, the novel's critical failure is surprising because *Shida ve'shidot* offered an extremely sophisticated form of the literary intertextual process which so defined Eytan's first novel and which gained her the admiration of the Israeli literary establishment.

Indeed, the negative critiques of her second novel focused on that same intertextual writing technique. Yet *Shida ve'shidot* was described by most critics of the period as a pretentious and shallow novel, which extensively employed quotations and allusions to previous sources as cover for literary poverty of the worst kind. Alex Zehavi for example, commented, "Close examination of [Eytan's] citations and allusions demonstrates that they are merely superficial attempts to impress."<sup>6</sup> Dan Miron went even further, comparing the novel to "a polished, well painted, plastic veneer" covering "clitoris-pleasing, pseudo-confessional literature."<sup>7</sup>

Generally speaking, it seems that the Israeli press focused mainly on the sensational details of Eytan's biography. Endless articles appearing in Israeli newspapers between the 1960s and 1980s described the aban-

doned child who grew up to become a noted beauty in the Tel Aviv jet set of the 1960s, until her husband, the architect Dan Eytan, left her for the poet and mystic Rina Shani.<sup>8</sup> They reported how, following this abandonment, Eytan followed her second husband to the United States where she completed her second novel, *Shida ve'shidot*. In fact, the press tended to explain Eytan's second novel's failure, for which they themselves were largely responsible, as resulting from her biography—or, rather, the geography that dictated the way her literary development panned out.

Yoram Kaniyuk, for example, wrote in 1986 in the *Yediot Aharonot* daily newspaper, “It is a pity that she's living in America . . . the fact is she's not managed to write anything since. And that's a pity because she could have been one of the most important women writers in the country. It's difficult to be a Hebrew writer abroad. This is a young country, still emerging, and detaching yourself from it cuts you off.”<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, Kaniyuk himself spent many years in the United States, and often testified that he paid the price of social exclusion and disappearance. His comment exposes the ambivalent response of Israeli society and culture in the 1960s and 1970s toward Israelis who left the country. This attitude is reflected linguistically, as those leaving Israel are known as *yordim*, which means “going down”—as opposed to new immigrants, who are referred to as *olim* or “going up.” This ambivalence toward the *yordim* was reflected in several major works of the period, such as Aharon Megeed's *Al etsim ve'avanim* (*On Trees and Stones*) and Avraham Heffner's groundbreaking 1972 film, *Le'an ne'elam Daniel Wax? (Where Has Daniel Wax Gone?)*.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, in Eytan's case, it appears that the harsh response to her second novel was not merely a function of anger at her leaving Israel, but also of the fact that her living in the United States enabled her to write, from a safe distance, provocative content unpalatable to the Israeli public.

Thus, the novel features unflattering portraits of members of the Tel Aviv jet set of the 1960s and was viewed as her reckoning with the literary and social elites of the period as well as with her ex-husband. The then editor of Am Oved publishers, Hayim Be'er, described the harsh atmosphere surrounding the publication of *Shida ve'shidot* as follows:

She came to Am Oved with the book and we were very excited.  
She brought it in on Thursday but by Sunday there was a gloomy

atmosphere at the publishers. This was not the child we had wished for. The editors were themselves part of the rotten society described in the book . . . there was a sense of “how could she do this to us?” Then they said, well, this is a book by that abandoned woman.<sup>11</sup>

Like Eytan herself, both Hayim Be’er and Yoram Kaniyuk were thought of as stepchildren of the Statehood Generation literature, and their comments demonstrate the mood contributing to Eytan’s disappearance from the Israeli literary scene. Nevertheless, their verdicts perpetuate the exaggerated focus of the literary establishment on Eytan’s persona, which preoccupies the press to this day, with profiles of Eytan’s turbulent life still appearing from time to time. By contrast, Hebrew literary criticism after Shaked’s *Gal hadash ba-siporet ha-Ivrit* has almost entirely ignored Eytan’s work.<sup>12</sup>

Rather than explaining Rachel Eytan’s tragic reception in personal, biographical terms, in this chapter I will present a literary discussion of her work. As I argue, the turnaround in her writing in the 1970s—which ultimately resulted in her being banished from the Israeli literary scene—was inextricably linked to the intersexual dialogue she conducted with the Hebrew literary canon. This intersexual dialogue reached a peak with *Shida ve’shidot*, the novel that sealed her literary fate.

While Yehudit Hendel’s early prose proves intersexual dialogue to be a first opportunity for women’s writing in a male literary generation and Amalia Kahana-Carmon challenges the gender limits of the intertextual model of her peers, Eytan employs intersexual dialogue to develop a new *ars poetica* language: one that is based on ongoing engagement with the traditional male *Künstlerroman*.

The theme of female literary initiation, at the center of both her first and second novels, becomes part of the return to the male literary past. Eytan’s protagonists—abandoned girls, battered wives, frustrated career women—are survivors of a familial trauma either violent or sexual or both, during childhood or marriage. But more than anything else they are survivors of a literary canon that refuses to acknowledge them as artists. The formative experience of Eytan’s prose is therefore the painful encounter between women artists and the male literary canon that excludes them.

Rather than embrace the rules of that canon, and identify with patriarchal literary discourse or reject it altogether, Eytan in her work uses what I refer to, following Kristeva, as “reduplication.” Kristeva describes reduplication as “a jammed repetition,” a distorted resonance with the voice of the other in order for the self to establish its own unique voice. Kristeva’s reduplication is also associated with the notion of the imaginary father, whose various incarnations have been examined throughout this book. Reduplication in fact enables that jammed dialogue with the other, the father, while reimagining him as a loving, motherly father.

Indeed, Eytan’s poetics are based on a disrupted, jammed repetition of the Hebrew canon and one of its most prevalent genres: the *Künstlerroman*. Thus, Eytan reads the Hebrew *Künstlerroman* anew, challenging its gender bias and eventually adopting some of its imaginary fathers.

This process becomes increasingly clear when one compares Eytan’s intersexual dialogue with the canon from the 1960s to the 1970s. The first part of this chapter will discuss Eytan’s first novel, *Ba’rakia ha-hamishi* (*The Fifth Heaven*) which put her on the Hebrew literary map as part of the return to the grandfathers identified with Statehood Generation literature and in which she first laid out the foundations of her dialogic poetics. Eytan articulates this poetics via a narrative of literary initiation, which describes the coming of age of Maya Hermoni, a future author written in the image of Eytan herself. Maya is in fact a portrait of the artist as a young woman who passes through the painful initial stages of her coming of age as a writer, entailing separation from literary father figures and from the expectation of shelter in their shadow, and the adoption of a jammed intersexual dialogue with the canon.

The disrupted, jammed intersexual dialogue conducted with the canon in *The Fifth Heaven* constituted an alternative literary model that would continue to serve the writer in her later work. Eytan’s own literary initiation reaches its poetic and ideological-gender fruition in her second novel, *Shida ve’shidot*, which exemplifies this model in the intensive intersexual dialogue it conducts with the male, Hebrew *Künstlerroman*. At the same time, though, the intersexual dialogue that drew Eytan into the heart of the Israeli canon with her first novel takes a new turn in the second, more ideologically radical and explicitly feminist work, indirectly leading to her exclusion from the Israeli literary scene.

As part of the intersexual dialogue conducted in *Shida ve’shidot* with

Hebrew literary tradition, Eytan chooses to reject the national narratives at the core of novels written by her peers during the period of burgeoning masculinity prior to the Yom Kippur War. Instead, she adopts an *ars poetica* narrative centering on the tension between writing and one's love life. Her protagonist is a young writer torn between her creative endeavors and the demands of her marriage, in keeping with the *Künstlerroman* tradition and its deep roots in modern Hebrew literature. At the same time, in her new version of the Hebrew literary past, Eytan alludes to two modernist Hebrew works, both of which outline a withdrawal from the traditional Hebrew *Künstlerroman*: Gnessin's "Hatsida" ("Sideways")<sup>13</sup> and Fogel's *Hayei nisuin* (*Married Life*).<sup>14</sup> These two works feature a male protagonist of a type previously unknown in the Hebrew *ars poetica* tradition: a promising young Hebrew writer who gradually gives up writing as his erotic obsession increasingly saps his creative powers. My discussion of *Shida ve'shidot* focuses on the dialogue Eytan conducts with Gnessin and Fogel, thus adopting them as literary imaginary, motherly fathers who enabled Eytan to articulate the problematic relation between writing and gender.

### ***The Fifth Heaven: Toward a Subversive Künstlerroman***

*The Fifth Heaven* describes the Jewish Yishuv in British Mandate Palestine, while offering an anachronistic alternative to the national-historical plots of the Statehood Generation writers. The novel put center stage marginal, cast-off figures—new immigrants and inmates of an orphanage—who feature in earlier works by such noncanonical authors as Nissim Aloni and David Shachar, or in Yehudit Hendel's early stories. The story centers on Maya Hermoni, the daughter of negligent, divorced parents, who is sent to a home for abandoned children called "The Fifth Heaven."

Tamar Mishmar argues that the center of gravity in the novel is Maya Hermoni's coming of age, culminating, as is typical of a *Bildungsroman*, in the closure of a heterosexual romantic relationship.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, at first glance it seems as though Maya's coming of age is completed when she enters into a normative, patriarchal, family order. At the start of the novel she is described as part of a community of girls abandoned by their parents in the orphanage, among whom lesbian-like relationships are com-

mon, but by the end, she joins the heterosexual order. She falls in love with an orphanage counselor and even when let down by him she obeys his directives by getting together with another boy, one of the orphans, and appearing to set up a new nuclear family with him.

Instead of the female *Bildungsroman* suggested by Mishmar—culminating in marriage and family based on the law of the father—I would like to focus on the *Künstlerroman* narrative, based on the abandonment of social and family frameworks for the sake of art. In my reading of *The Fifth Heaven* as a *Künstlerroman*, it is loaded with gendered significance, inextricably intertwined with the intersexual dialogue with the Hebrew canon.

Eytan describes the Fifth Heaven orphanage—a name that alludes to the fifth heaven in Tractate Hagiga of the Babylonian Talmud—as a heterotopic space.<sup>16</sup> This is a place outside of culture, society, or any family structure, outside of the law of the father—a space in which sexual and status-related taboos are broken, facilitating forbidden couplings like those between the orphanage girls, and between the girls and those supposed to be taking care of them. The wild and subversive story, which documents the unraveling of the patriarchal-Oedipal, nuclear family is set in motion within this heterotopic space. At the same time, Maya's literary initiation as constructed in the text sketches out the opposite motivation, expressing her need to readopt the law of the father.

The novel portrays Maya's repeated attempts to adopt substitute fathers. These attempts are inextricably intertwined with her development as a writer, seeking out male literary patrons and a male, authoritative canon under which to shelter. The narrative of Maya's literary initiation moves, then, between adopting the Oedipal narrative to breaking it, thus enabling a third, dialogic possibility, based on a jammed return to the canon family. Thus, Maya realizes early in her stay at the Fifth Heaven orphanage that to get used to it and to be accepted by the other girls, she must develop a convincing biography of her short and traumatic life:

She was aware from the start of the tragic beauty of her story and the impression it made on others. Here the one whose “sufferings” are most intense stands the best chance of melting the barrier of suspicion and hatred. Her prestige would improve, just as in the hospital the greatest prestige always goes to those with high



temperature and terminal diseases. “We’ll put together my bed and Hedva’s,” Bat-Sheva commanded. “You lie in the middle and tell us, and you can’t move until you’ve finished.” She watched them at work, savoring the importance of the moment, like an actress waiting for her props. (*The Fifth Heaven*, 81)

The story, then, is a means of survival at the Fifth Heaven orphanage, a way of gaining the admiration of the ringleader Bat-Sheva, of achieving social status and avoiding abuse and exclusion. The story also includes an explicitly erotic aspect, beginning with the sexual interaction between the girls at the orphanage, which is revealed early in the book via the game they liked to play called “A Tour of the Country,” an initiation rite with clearly lesbian overtones. In it, Bat-Sheva orders the girls, and particularly the new girls, to draw a map of Eretz Israel on her body while she lies in her bed (62–69). A scene in which Maya later tells the girls the story of her stepmother resonates strongly with this erotic initiation rite. The new girl Maya also achieves social status by satisfying the girls’ and especially their leader Bat-Sheva’s desire in a violent, sexually oriented situation. The story itself substitutes for physical pleasure, including as it does a heady mix of family tragedy, violence, and sex which excites the girls’ literary imaginations:

My stepmother stood beside me and said to me: “Your mother’s wicked! Your mother’s wicked! Say that your mother’s wicked!” And I stood in my wet pajamas, trembling with cold . . . Suddenly I saw my mother beside the bed. I closed my eyes so the dream wouldn’t stop. Suddenly I heard the voice: Mayinka, I heard that you were very ill. I came running to you straightaway. “I don’t give a damn about them! I have the right! I have the right!” Suddenly there were two mothers beside the bed, one of them a stepmother, shouting in Yiddish: “This is my house!” Then they both shouted: “This is my house!” They started throwing things at each other and yelling. Suddenly the room was full of people . . . One of my uncles tried to grab my mother. (No, it wasn’t like that, not so *quiet*. There was a terrible noise, shouting, people running, chasing, scared and twisted faces, furniture overturned, a deep well of suppressed emotions turned upside

down.) . . . A woman was crying: 'Police!'—the sublime intoxication of the words swept her along—“and then they threw my mother off the balcony.” Tears choke the gullet, as is necessary in such cases. How can they know, the tears? (83)

At the heart of Maya's sad story lies the traumatic encounter with the mother who returns to the house she abandoned. This moment is tied up in her memory with the experience of witnessing that beloved-hated mother's humiliation at the hands of her new stepmother. The scene is not centered, however, on an accurate reconstruction of the event, but on the telling of it, which gradually becomes an end in itself. In the literary context of the novel that later depicts Maya's first attempts at writing, the stepmother story appears to be the moment Maya first realizes her sweeping powers as a storyteller, which resonate with the wild and limitless space of the orphanage, and the inter-female, violent-erotic situation of a telling that challenges the normative family order.

The content of the story also documents the unraveling of an Oedipal family order: the biological mother who is thrown out the window, the daughter who collaborates with the stepmother behind the mother's back, and the father's voice which is not heard at all. At the same time the storytelling itself is jammed, consisting of a sequence of disrupted passages and swift transitions from subject to subject. Even taking into account Maya's youth and the limitations of oral storytelling, this passage constitutes the first incarnation of Eytan's own poetic language based on reduplication: a jammed repetition which disrupts the natural course of the narrative while drawing attention instead to the very act of telling.

Eytan's (ars) poetic language is at its most ambitious as a literary language derived from repetition of the literary father, reimagining him. This process is fully realized only later on in the novel, when Maya begins writing texts. Eytan describes Maya's turn to writing as an inextricable part of the search for an authoritative father who will provide an alternative to the subversive, inter-female environment of the orphanage.

Maya chooses to adopt Yosef, a counselor at the orphanage, as a symbolic father, seeking unsuccessfully to shackle her erotic relationship with him to her writing. Yosef, however, experiences his relationship with the thirteen-year-old Maya as erotic and taboo. The problematic nature of his relation to Maya is laid bare in light of the allusion Eytan

makes to the biblical story of Potiphar's wife who tries to impose forbidden relations on her naive subject, Joseph, who is in turn punished for her crime.<sup>17</sup> In Eytan's novel, however, Yosef is the responsible, powerful adult and Maya is the helpless, vulnerable child he seduces. Nevertheless, Yosef sees himself as the successor to the biblical Joseph, seduced by Maya, whom he describes as a kind of destructive *femme fatale*. Maya, for her part, understands their sexual relationship in literary terms, as being between a young artist and her literary patron. She wants to interest Yosef in her writing, and even asks him to buy her first notebook for her. He refuses:

“You must be very careful,” his face became serious. “If I was your father, I wouldn't sleep peacefully at night.” He closed his eyes as if to prove this, and when he raised his lids, two brown slits opened before her. Something inside her told her again and again she mustn't understand him thus, he meant something else. “I'm going to town,” he said and slapped his back pocket. “What shall I bring back to you?” She was perplexed by the strange, unconventional offer . . . “A notebook!” she replied hastily, just so he'd ask why. “A notebook?!” He twisted his face into a scornful leer. “That's what you ask of a man who offers you half his kingdom?!” (370)

Yosef, in denying Maya's writing, insists on understanding their hierarchical father-daughter relationship in terms of its forbidden, sexual aspect. Thus he restores the gendered order, which Maya sought to upend by her demand to subjugate eros to writing. Unlike the traditional Hebrew author who puts life aside in order to write, Maya wants to break into the male territory of writing and is thrown out of it back to eros.

At first glance, it seems that Yosef's refusal to acknowledge Maya's writing hurls her back into the mother model evident at the start of the novel. Maya persists in her search for a notebook to write in, and it is Shoshanna, an older female counselor volunteering in the orphanage who ultimately obtains an old, used one with a “simple paper cover and soft, absorbent war-standard paper” for her (413). Shoshanna does not become a literary patron, however, perhaps because at this point Maya still thinks of writing in explicitly patriarchal terms:

So many times she has seen before her eyes the notebook that he'll bring with him! She'll give it back to him full of writing, in laborious and rounded script. She has seen . . . the poetic formula that will illuminate the basement of each stanza. Every time he opens the book, he'll see her differently, through the lines. (414)

This fantasy of beginning writing is linked in Maya's imagination with "the poetic formula" enshrined by the male literary canon. Writing produced in light of that canon is also aimed at a male addressee, Yosef. Perhaps with the mediation of the "poetic formula," Yosef will at last be able to see Maya "differently," to view not only her sexuality, which arouses in him the erotic, forbidden, response, but also to acknowledge her as a writer, as part of the "formula." The fact that it is Shoshanna who obtains the notebook for Maya implies that female correspondence with the male canon depends on unrecompensed female mediators like Shoshanna whose existence facilitates the ongoing tradition of women's writing, even if their influence may not be directly evident.

Copying the poetic formula in this context appears to be the only option for someone never given the chance to have literary ownership in her own right, someone left not only outside the canon but also outside the entire social, familial system, outside history and culture. But this copying of the poetic formula does not constitute only submissive obedience to a male canon. Later on, we discover that the copying is also of a subversive nature, as is evident in the scene toward the end of the novel in which Maya visits Yosef at home.

The visit begins with a humiliating encounter with Yosef's mother, who ignores Maya, and goes from bad to worse when Yosef's friends make fun of her, with Yosef standing by all the while. Maya has brought her notebook of poems, written according to the poetic formula in a last, desperate attempt to excite Yosef's interest in her writing. In an act of protest against the behavior of this disappointing, nonfunctioning, symbolic father, who does not lift a finger to defend her, Maya rips up the notebook and throws it into the municipal lavatory:

Thus it was, until she reached the public lavatories . . . she collapsed inside and unwrapped the brown paper. Avidly, angrily,

she began ripping out one by one the pages of the notebook, the lovely letters, so carefully rounded, the words that had intoxicated her as she copied them, crumpling them and throwing them one by one into the bowl . . . After she had stood thus for a long time without moving, she felt her cheeks wet with snot and tears, and she hurriedly wiped them with the cover. The stitching scratched her face. She threw the cover after the pages and saw how the water rose and was absorbed in it, turning it black. “It’s a good thing I’ve got another copy,” was her first thought, panting to stop herself from choking. “It’s a good thing I’ve got a copy back at the hotel.” (431)

The disappointed Maya throws away the book of poems prepared for the literary patron who lets her down, and gives up all expectation of being sheltered under his shadow. Nevertheless she does want to preserve the text he has inspired her to write.

On one level, one might argue that the “copy back at the hotel” embodies a victory of story over life. At the last minute, Maya has to admit to herself that the notebook means more to her than love, and is comforted by the thought that it is not actually lost even if what remains is only a copy of the poetic formula. Nevertheless, this correspondence, this copying is not “by the book,” hence according to the law of the male canon. Maya’s rude awakening from her relationship with Yosef after which she perpetrates a violent act against the poems indicates her burning need to substitute her obedient and authorized return to the Oedipal model with a different sort of return, one which is blocked, jammed, destructive. This possibility arises in a subtle, surprising manner in the closing scene of the novel, in which Maya goes back to the oral tale with which her literary initiation began. This time, however, she suggests substituting the individual-associative female story with a new, dialogic mode of story, based on jammed and “spoiled” correspondence with the literary canon itself.

### *Always Spoiling the Stories*

In the final scene of *The Fifth Heaven*, the orphanage has been emptied of its inhabitants, each of whom has been taken away by their own relatives or placed in foster families. Suddenly Maya is left in charge of the

house. This final scene is shrouded in an apocalyptic atmosphere, as Maya remains alone in the empty orphanage with another, younger child called Ketzele, as sole survivors of a shared catastrophe. The toddler Ketzele curls up in Maya's arms, and asks her to read him a story. She tells him the following tale:

“Once upon a time there lived a king and a queen,” she intoned mechanically. “Once upon a time there lived a king and a queen. The king was wise, strong and brave and the queen was as beautiful as the sun and as fair as the moon. One day the king went away to war. The queen sat and waited in the palace in her dress of gold and pearls, and the king didn't return,” she said drowsily, her eyes hurting. “Why not?” his voice demanded, as if from far away. “Why! Why he didn't return?” “I don't know why. I don't know anything.” “You're always making up things like that,” he murmured heavily. “Always spoiling the stories. Make up something else.” “The queen sat in the palace in her dress of gold and diamonds and waited, and waited . . .” Her voice faded in the thickened darkness. She felt her eyelids fluttering, until her head sunk to the rhythmic breathing of the boy and the rustle of the straw pillow. (444)

This scene, with Ketzele curled up in the older girl's arms, positions him as Maya's son, who replaces the patriarchal literary fathers she has encountered throughout the novel. Like those disappointing fathers, Maya cannot provide the defenseless child in her arms with any security, protection, or even a comforting, supportive text, but only a pessimistic, “spoiled” fairy tale.<sup>18</sup>

The scene seems to expose once again—this time on the part of the female writer—the problematic nature of authoritative literary parenting. In response to this difficulty, the closing scene of *The Fifth Heaven* hints at the only possibility left to a female writer abandoned by her patriarchal literary family: rather than becoming an authoritarian parent herself, she imagines her literary parents anew, destabilizing their gender identities. Only thus, in their “spoiled,” destabilized version, can she conduct meaningful dialogue with them. This is a dialogue with the potential to rewrite not only the present but also the past, indeed the canon itself.

The fairy tale that Maya tells Ketzale constitutes another stage in her literary initiation, which reached a peak when she confronted the poetic formula. Here too, Eytan suggests returning to a formula, the familiar fairy tale ending, “and they lived happily ever after.” Maya adopts this formula but “spoils” it, as Ketzale says. The optimistic, linear fairy story beginning with a courtship and ending safely in a marriage is given a new blocked, spoiled narrative, unpinning the foundations of the Oedipal family model. This is evident in the thematics of the text, which describes a fundamental family trauma: the father’s leaving, the undoing of a marriage, and the breakup of the family. The disruption is also evident in the writing itself, offering another development of the language of reduplication, which Maya begins to undertake early on with her stepmother story. This writing includes an obsessive repetition of sentences of expectation—“The queen sat and waited . . . and waited”—forgoing the familiar, optimistic closure of the fairy tale in favor of an ongoing present.

Rereading the novel, it is interesting to examine the way in which the language of reduplication, which Eytan deploys in the final scene, infiltrates the intersexual dialogue that Eytan conducts with the Hebrew canon throughout the text. As we have seen, the Fifth Heaven orphanage is depicted as a kind of heterotopic space outside of society and indeed of civilization. Eytan describes it as a space that nurtures creativity, itself a product of being taken out of context, of exclusion from the normative family model. At the same time, the talmudic reference evoked by the orphanage name—*Ba-rakia ha-hamishi*—implies that removal from the (literary) Oedipal family novel does not necessarily mean forgoing the canon and its assets, but rather facilitates correspondence with them. This possibility is particularly apparent in the second part of the novel. Besides referencing Jewish sources such as the Talmud and the Bible, this portion of the novel also suggests correspondence with the exilic grandfathers, especially Agnon, whose influence is apparent throughout.

This constant reference to the Hebrew literary past hints at a fruitful creative space, destined to produce a far-reaching intersexual dialogue with the canon, which Eytan was to establish in her next novel, *Shida ve’shidot*. Indeed Eytan’s turn, mediated by her future-writer protagonist, to Jewish sources and an Agnonic style, would seem to reflect her peers’ process of abandoning the literary fathers of the 1948 generation in favor of a new, different kind of imagined, exilic parenting. But the unique

significance of this cross-generational process in the context of the problematic family situation portrayed by Eytan throughout the novel is striking. Eytan's model challenges the patriarchal nuclear family, which is exposed as unfit and nonfunctioning, as one that must be reimagined in a different way.

Indeed, where in her first novel Eytan laid the foundations for intersexual dialogue as a strategy of women's writing within the male canon, in her second, *Shida ve'shidot*, she proposes an ambitious realization of the process. The second novel centers on an adult writer—a later incarnation of Maya Hermoni—and seeks to return to the Hebrew literary tradition in an attempt to reimagine two of its most fascinating fathers, Gnessin and Fogel, while “spoiling” one of its main stories, the *Künstlerroman*.

### ***Shida ve'shidot*: The Hebrew *Künstlerroman* Revisited**

Eytan's second novel was published after a decade of personal and political upheaval. It was completed in 1973, a few months before the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, and published one year later, in 1974. It is set in late 1960s Tel Aviv and centers on a promising young playwright, Aviva Shatz. Her husband, Amnon, a senior official in the Ministry of Agriculture, and well connected among the military and government elite, beats her and is publicly unfaithful at every opportunity, ultimately leaving her altogether for another woman. In the spirit of the 1960s sexual revolution, Aviva responds with several affairs of her own, but is repeatedly thrust back into her husband's arms, sustaining herself with murderous fantasies upon which she never acts. Unlike *The Fifth Heaven*, whose anachronism and stylistic and linguistic pluralism was seen as a forerunner of the antirealist trend of the 1960s New Wave in Hebrew prose, *Shida ve'shidot* was a contemporary, realistic novel.

The story centers on a single social milieu, the Tel Aviv jet set, consisting of the best and brightest offspring of the new immigrants who featured in *The Fifth Heaven*. These offspring emerged as the Statehood Generation, who grew up in the military and government elites and now travel abroad extensively, bringing back with them to “our import-restricted country . . . Irish desert boots by Clarks” and “Levi's jeans.”<sup>19</sup> Eytan's jet set is entirely homogenous, and operates according to a group



mentality. Even if they seem to be living in a multilingual world, using a mixture of Hebrew and Yiddish slang with touches of Hebraized English and French, in actuality they all speak the same pseudo-intellectual language, replete with puns and literary witticisms.

Moreover, in the social and cultural world of Eytan's novel, it seems as though everyone is somehow involved with writing or art. At the parties held at the Israeli radio presenter and later peace activist Abie Nathan's California restaurant or in the Casbah club in North Tel Aviv on the eve of the Yom Kippur War, the military and political elite, some of whom have published articles in literary journals, rub shoulders with artists and writers who serve them as allies and spokespeople. Amnon Shatz, the man from the Ministry of Agriculture, critiques his wife the playwright's work morning, noon, and night. Even the artillery commander who is wooing Aviva has published poems in a literary magazine. When they first meet in a café, he and Aviva argue about W. H. Auden and T. S. Eliot; at their next meeting, as part of their verbal foreplay, the senior officer reports that he intends to write an article about the IDF for *Le Monde*, in bed, "like Proust" as Aviva puts it (*Shida ve'shidot*, 75).

In this sense, it can be argued that *Shida ve'shidot* reflects the regrettable outcome of the melting pot described in Eytan's earlier novel: a polished cultural elite speaking a single language of the national majority, perpetuating gendered power relations, identifying masculinity with nationalism, and nationalism with art. In fact the one character who remains permanently outside the tight relationship between art and nationalism is the female protagonist herself, who looks on in wonder at her peers who "puff out their shirt-fronts when they fly the flag on their rooftops: who always know the right time to capture a military position, road, or cucumbers" (*Shida ve'shidot*, 70). Nevertheless, the apparently foregrounded national narrative of the novel, run through with quasi-realistic military and political figures, is abandoned in favor of an erotic subjugation, which is progressively laid out for the reader.

Thus, *Shida ve'shidot* constitutes a detailed, penetrating record of a sadomasochistic marriage. The text reports Aviva and Amnon's intense and violent sexual relationship directly, unemotionally, including Amnon's repeated betrayals, which he calmly shares with Aviva, and his outbursts of violence when other men pay court to her. In the last part of the novel, Amnon leaves Aviva altogether for another woman, taking their children

on holiday with his new lover without prior notice. Aviva responds with mostly failed attempts at conducting extramarital affairs herself, but repeatedly submits once more to a sadomasochistic relationship with her husband, up until the chilling final scene in which Amnon beats her in front of Michel, the French pianist Aviva turned to when Amnon left her.

The violent, erotic narrative of a sadomasochistic marriage in *Shida ve'shidot* alienated Eytan from the prestigious club of the Statehood Generation authors she was once recruited to by Gershon Shaked. Promotion of the erotic at the expense of the national plot was a significant digression from the ideological poetics so important in the prose written in the late 1960s by Eytan's peers, in which any individual and especially erotic plot was conscripted as an allegory for political issues.<sup>20</sup> Indeed this nationalizing of eros reached a peak in works published around the time of the writing of *Shida ve'shidot*; one recalls in this context, for example, the violent, libidinal outburst experienced by Hanna Gonen, the protagonist of Amos Oz's *My Michael*, which is directly linked to her relationship with the Arab twins Aziz and Halil.

Eytan's book, on the other hand, not only does not subjugate the erotic to the national, but actually sets the eros—of both the pleased body and the miserable, humiliated body—center stage, thus questioning the relations between sexuality and nationalism as portrayed in the Statehood Generation literature. Moreover, Eytan problematizes the relationship between nationalism, gender, and writing as repeatedly represented in modern Hebrew literature. The events of the novel take place against the backdrop of the sexual liberation of the late 1960s and the national euphoria that followed the Six-Day War. The erotic plot in *Shida ve'shidot* is not, however, conscripted to a national allegory as a means of liberating nationalist fervor. On the contrary, the national events described in the novel serve to highlight the erotic subjugation plot, which is described in almost clinical detail, devoid of allegorical camouflage.

More important, Eytan promotes the erotic plot not only at the expense of the national plot, but also at the expense of the literary one. Thus the erotic story of a sadomasochistic marriage is inextricably caught up in the novel with another crisis, one of writing itself. Aviva Shatz is described as a writer at the threshold of her career as a playwright, having gained a degree of recognition as her first play was staged. At present she is having difficulty reconciling her inner compulsion to write with

the physical and emotional demands of her sex life, which ultimately consumes her to such an extent that she stops writing altogether. Thus, where Eytan's preference of the erotic plot over the national one sets *Shida ve'shidot* apart from the Statehood Generation's national allegories, the novel's foregrounding of the erotic plot at the expense of the literary one sets it at odds with the *ars poetica* topos centering around the conflict between eros and writing.

### *Eros or Writing?*

Aviva Shatz's subjugation by her husband is expressed not only in his betrayals, in his violence against her, or in the sexual enslavement he imposes on her. The fatal blow is delivered to his wife's career as a playwright. Thus, Amnon constantly belittles Aviva's writing, patronizing her despite not being knowledgeable about theater himself. "I must point out that you are gradually becoming a person," he says as he leafs through her writing. "Your responses to things are changing. One can see a movement . . . in the direction of an adult having insight. I'm sure that I'll love you again at some point" (*Shida ve'shidot*, 13). But when the play, with the loaded title *Afsayim* (*Nothingness*), is finally produced on stage, Amnon "refuses to go to see it because he doesn't have the time," while in response, Aviva "without her husband's knowledge, absented herself from the premiere, as though she had committed an impure act" (49).

Aviva understands art to be "an impure act," thus continuing the long tradition of women writers who viewed writing as a deviant, inappropriate behavior, or even as "selfishness," as Linda Huf, one of the first feminist scholars of the *Künstlerroman*, put it.<sup>21</sup> In a broader sense, though, women's difficulty in devoting themselves to writing is the outcome of the ostensibly universal artist's dilemma—so typical of the *Künstlerroman*—between "life" and "writing." This dilemma, ostensibly universal, but in fact gendered, puts the male artist center stage, while concealing women at the "life" end of the equation. Indeed, like other women writers before her, Aviva Shatz seems to be choosing life, and eros in particular, over writing. Eytan does not reveal what happens to her play in the end, and the writing plot, which had appeared so important at the beginning of the novel, is gradually set aside until even Amnon comments toward the end that "perhaps you need to be free of me in order to write" (275).

Even if Aviva Shatz's renunciation of writing in favor of destructive erotic subjugation falls in line with feminist scholarship of the problematics of women's writing in the Western *Künstlerroman*, in the context of Hebrew literature, it is groundbreaking. Indeed, the Hebrew *Künstlerroman* traditionally propagated the very gendered preference of writing over life, despite the ostensibly feminine characteristics of literary figures of Jewish intellectuals and writers of turn-of-the-century Hebrew fiction.<sup>22</sup>

So which literary model of influence could Rachel Eytan find in Hebrew literary tradition when approaching her *Künstlerroman*? As we shall see, other, different voices emerge from the dominant male *ars poetica* tradition, acting within the Hebrew version of the *Künstlerroman*, but proposing substantial digressions from it. Gnessin's novella "Hatsida" ("Sideways") and Fogel's *Hayei nisuim* (*Married Life*) both seem at first glance to be works belonging to the male *ars poetica* tradition of Hebrew literature which centers around the young, effeminate male writer caught up in a conflict between writing and love. Gnessin, one of the most influential literary fathers of modern Hebrew literature at the turn of the century, was most identified with the figure of the sexually passive intellectual Jew, while Fogel, working two decades later, proposed a more extreme development of the same male figure. Nevertheless, the work of these two writers reflects the fragility of the familiar male *ars poetica* structure, a process with which Eytan's novel resonates.

### *Literary Anti-initiation in "Hatsida"*

*Shida ve'shidot* alludes to Gnessin with a brief quotation: "The whole world of women is only a single woman" (157), which appears as an epigraph to one of the early chapters describing rehearsals for Aviva Shatz's first play, *Gualman be'mosad sa'gur* (*Gualman in an Institution*) (116). At first glance, Eytan's allusion to Gnessin seems to be merely stylistic. Her virtuoso use of language and mastery of Hebrew composition and her occasionally impressionistic writing point to Gnessin as an obvious source of influence, as he was for other of her peers. There seems, however, to be little thematic affinity between a 1960s Israeli playwright and Gnessin's early story about the romantic and professional trials of a young Jewish writer from Vilna at the turn of the century. Nonetheless, the deep affinity between the two works must be understood against the

background of the radical digression Gnessin proposes from the male, Hebrew, *ars poetica* model.

Gnessin's protagonist Nahum Hagzar, like Aviva Shatz, is a promising writer at the outset of his career who abandons his literary dreams for the sake of a romantic, erotic entanglement that saps his creative powers. Hagzar comes to a small eastern European town ostensibly in order to devote himself to his writing and to other literary activity, but things do not turn out as planned. He meets a group of young women during his stay in the town, including two sisters who live together under the same roof—"the beautiful house"—and who draw him in with their charm, ultimately distracting him from his literary work.

At the outset, Hagzar is described as looking forward to "tomorrow, and to steady work and to a life full of substance." He "hurries to prepare his second article" ("Hatsida," 135–36), but his new liaisons gradually put him off his rhythm. He sinks into a spiritual and intellectual crisis, leaves off working, and spends his days with the empty-headed youths who "sit and drink tea and gossip and laugh and throw peanut shells at each other" ("Hatsida," 136), evoking Aviva Shatz's circle of friends in *Shida ve'shidot* who "desperately mess around, giggle, and make out" (*Shida ve'shidot*, 53). The rest of the time he spends dozing, lying around at home, humiliated by his need for the women who surround him and belittle his passive masculinity. Critics have focused on the protagonist's unrequited relationship with Rosa, one of the sisters who appears to be in love with Hagzar. Nevertheless, a close reading of the text yields another possibility, in which the woman responsible for Hagzar's deterioration is Rosa's sister Manya, a cold, mocking, blatantly sexual young woman with whom he has a sadomasochistic relationship:

Manya would always look at him first with half-lidded eyes, slowly bringing close her wicked face which had broken his heart and belittled it. She would nonchalantly swing one leg from side to side, and give the occasional cough as if to say, "It's nothing to do with me." ("Hatsida," 139)

Like Aviva Shatz, who is trapped in a sadomasochistic relationship with her husband, Hagzar is completely rapt under Manya's debilitating, destructive spell. He complains to Rosa about "the ugly wickedness

which his soul always abhors” (“Hatsida,” 136). But this wickedness contaminates him too. He cannot return to his literary work, nor can he form a creatively fruitful relationship with the gentle Rosa who, unlike Manya, takes an actual interest in his writing. Eventually Hagzar gives in to the vulgar, erotic existence surrounding him, and disappointed by the cruel object of his desire, he is swept up in a bland, loveless sexual liaison with the fat Hanna Hillir, sinking, as Dan Miron puts it, “into a soulless eroticism, whose ugliness shocks even him.”<sup>23</sup> At the end of the novel we see Hagzar at the depths of his depravity, bed-hopping in the sisters’ house, unable to write or even to discuss his writing. As in *Shida ve’shidot*, the frame story of the novella, the writing plot is abandoned in favor of a destructive eros.

The view of Nahum Hagzar as a precursor of Aviva Shatz, who has difficulty reconciling her writing with her stormy love life, is further supported by Hagzar’s conspicuousness against the backdrop of the male, Hebrew *ars poetica* tradition. Unlike the literary protagonists of such writers as Brenner or Berdichevsky, who sublimate their erotic frustration into their work, Hagzar’s problematic and frustrating relationship with the vindictive, seductive Manya is no catalyst to his writing. His connection with Rosa, the positive female alternative in his life, does not prove conducive to writing either. In “Hatsida” erotic failure leads only to further erotic attempts, putting ever further distance between the protagonist and his literary work.

In fact, Hagzar’s renunciation of his writing for eros distances him from the only redemption left to their protagonists by the fathers of modern Hebrew literature: literary, intellectual salvation, in keeping with the preference of Jewish tradition in general and the Hebrew *Künstlerroman* in particular for the spiritual over the material world. Unlike them, Hagzar becomes addicted to a destructive eros, sinking into a sick, debilitating physical existence that takes over his spiritual-intellectual world and shakes its very foundations. Ultimately he is described as “talk[ing] all the time about a rotting contagion and consumptive, heart-sickening illness” (161). Even when he does attempt to write, his pen “spits out crooked, shaky and trailing letters—morbid ad nauseam” (151).

The morbid, trailing letters spat out by Hagzar’s pen are a grotesque but at the same time inspirational negative of the dominant male figures of Hebrew stories who are portrayed as doctors, with Hebrew writing as

their cures. This grotesque characterization approaches the masochistic-feminine experience, which Gnessin identifies with a loss of humanity. Thus, Hagzar experiences himself at the climax of the story as “a crushed worm wallowing in its own filth” (151). This description evokes the self-ruin typical of Eytan’s protagonist too, who imagines herself at moments of pain at the hands of her husband as though “her skin were peeling off her, her flesh were disintegrating, her spine cracking” (*Shida ve’shidot*, 17).

Nevertheless, it seems as though Hebrew literary criticism has chosen to turn a blind eye to the gendered aspect of Hagzar’s failure to write, which is inextricably bound up with his enslavement to a similar masochistic, erotic existence. Dan Miron, for example, refers extensively to Hagzar’s inability to work but relates his erotic-romantic liaisons as a subplot, having no direct connection with the writing topos. Thus, he argues that Hagzar’s recourse to women is merely an excuse for his inability to write, and in general that “Hagzar’s sexual experiences only interest the author insofar as they lead to his protagonist’s decline.” According to Miron, it is this degeneration which lies at the heart of a story that is essentially a “behavioral-psychological description of a person.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Miron’s reading blurs the interdependence created in the story between the “antiliterary initiation” and the sadomasochistic passion plots, thus obscuring the feminine theme of the story, the obsessive erotic love which decimates creative powers.

Other critics do take note of the erotic context in which Hagzar leaves off writing, but without acknowledging its gender significance. Ada Tzema-ch, for example, challenges Miron’s claim that “the beautiful house” is simply an excuse to stop writing, and admits that it is a “site of seduction” whose “force of attraction is stronger than that of writing . . . The sisters’ beautiful house seems to invade the privacy of Hagzar’s room too, enveloping him in its erotic atmosphere, in the very place where he is supposed to write his articles on Hebrew literature.”<sup>25</sup> But Tzema-ch regards the erotic context in which Hagzar renounces writing as normative in terms of gender. She confines the erotic plot of the story to Hagzar’s unconsummated relationship with Rosa, arguing that it is not the attraction to eros “itself . . . which saps Hagzar’s creative powers” (Tzema-ch, 132). What does so, she argues, is his giving in to desire, his dissatisfaction in his relationship with Rosa. Tzema-ch thus associates creativity—

the urge to write—with masculinity as marked by sexual potency. Thus, her reading, like Miron's, preserves the traditional link between writing and masculinity, blurring Gnessin's subversion of it in "Hatsida," a story which centers around a protagonist whose sexual explorations indirectly expose the clash—viewed in literature as feminine—between eros and writing.

Unlike these scholarly approaches, it seems that Gnessin's writing testifies to the power of the radical gender process described in "Hatsida." In fact, not only is Hagzar an exceptional character in Hebrew literary tradition, but he also constitutes a turning point in Gnessin's own writing. "Hatsida" is Gnessin's first story to focus explicitly on the figure of a writer and on the writing process itself. It is striking, then, that in this particular story Gnessin chooses to upset the conventional male pattern, which gives priority to writing over eros. Moreover, this process in turn influenced Gnessin's approach to the relations between writing and gender in his later texts, which also resonate within Eytan's dialogic novel.

Thus, in some of his later works, Gnessin began to feature women writers whose writing constituted a further stage in the problematization of the relation between eros and writing begun in "Hatsida." In the novella "Etsel" ("Beside"),<sup>26</sup> Dina Barabash, one of the story's female protagonists, expresses her turbulent feelings for Ephraim Margalit via an act of writing. Like other Gnessinian female protagonists, Dina Barabash is portrayed not as a professional writer, but as a woman who has written a single work inspired by turbulent romantic feelings. But given my reading of "Hatsida," it can be argued that unlike Nahum Hagzar, Dina Barabash adapts the erotic plot of her life into a work of art.

This idea is further supported when one takes into account the origins of the poem Gnessin attributes to Barabash in the story: "If It Be That He Should Return from His Wanderings" ("Besides," 234–35). This is a stunningly powerful, erotic poem that describes the speaker's passionate desire for a cruel man. For many years the poem was attributed to Gnessin himself, but it was actually written by his lover, the Yiddish poet Celia Dropkin. Dropkin sent Gnessin the poem in Yiddish as a personal gesture; he translated it into Hebrew, adapted it, and presented it as his own when he attributed it to Dina Barabash in "Besides." Dan Miron, who dedicated an entire discussion to this literary affair, admitted that it conveys "an in-depth study in the sociology and ethics of the cultural and



literary relations between men and women at the turn of the century.”<sup>27</sup> However, it seems that Miron himself has not fully acknowledged the implications of Gnessin’s purloining of Dropkin’s poem. This plagiarism could, in fact, be read as Gnessin’s internalization of Dropkin’s feminine voice, turning him in the most concrete sense into the imaginary father Kristeva describes. He is simultaneously the origin and reduplication of an earlier female voice, the beneficiary of a prior literary mother.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, in this act of purloining—or, better, reduplicating—Dropkin’s poem, Gnessin appears to acknowledge, albeit indirectly, the limitation of the existing male topos of *ars poetica*, the cracks of which first began to appear in “Hatsida.” Gnessin’s use of Dropkin’s poem indicates in this context that only intersexual dialogue, the sort which Eytan herself would use several decades later, can redeem the Hebrew *ars poetica* prose tradition from the writing–eros dichotomy. Instead of this dichotomy in which writing ultimately prevails while its pessimistic, feminine version culminates in a renunciation of writing, Eytan’s novel allows for a new *ars poetica* that does not conceal eros but rather opens it up for dialogue. The power of Eytan’s process is amplified by her affinity with another imaginary literary father, Fogel, whose novel *Hayei nisuin* (*Married Life*)<sup>29</sup> was published in 1929. This novel takes the antiliterary initiation process portrayed by Gnessin to a grotesque extreme.

### *Sendril the Housewife as a Famous Writer: Fogel’s Married Life*

Where Gnessin acquired the canonic status of literary father, influencing generations of writers who came after him, Fogel could be seen as the ultimate imaginary father who entered Hebrew literature via the back door.<sup>30</sup> This is in part because of the way his poetry centers on a non-nationalist, non-heroic, gender-fluid self, alien to the poetic agenda that the Shlonsky-Alterman generation set out.<sup>31</sup> Although Fogel’s poetry has been cited as a source of influence on women Hebrew poets,<sup>32</sup> the affinity between his prose—of which *Married Life* is one of the most powerful manifestations—and women’s Hebrew prose has yet to receive scholarly attention. This is in spite of the fact that *Married Life* would seem to be an obvious model for female *ars poetica*, given its critical, almost parodic treatment of the male model of *ars poetica*.

Unlike “Hatsida,” *Married Life* is not directly cited in *Shida ve’shidot*,

although it is reasonable to assume that Eytan knew it well. *Married Life* was first published in Palestine in 1930, edited by Asher Barash, and was in the main negatively received by critics. The general reading public became acquainted with Fogel's prose only as late as 1986, when *Married Life* was reprinted in a new edition edited by Menahem Peri, but the novel had enjoyed a certain reputation in literary circles for some time before that, once Fogel was adopted as a poet by Dan Pagis and the Likrat group in the 1950s and 1960s. A series of major reviews of *Married Life* by critics such as Gabriel Moked, Gershon Shaked, and Ehud Ben-Ezer published in Hebrew in the late 1960s and early 1970s attests to the widespread interest excited by the novel during the period of writing of *Shida ve'shidot*.<sup>33</sup>

Notwithstanding the lack of direct citation, *Married Life* is strongly implicated in *Shida ve'shidot* in terms of plot, structure, and themes, particularly in its radical digression from the normative male model of ars poetica. Like *Shida ve'shidot*, *Married Life* sketches a detailed, penetrating portrait of a sadomasochistic marriage. The character parallel to the abusive husband in *Shida ve'shidot* is Baroness Thea von Takow, the vicious Austrian wife of Jewish intellectual Rudolf Gurdweill. She betrays him at every opportunity, beats him, and broadcasts her actions to all his friends and relations.

Structurally, *Married Life*, like *Shida ve'shidot*, features increasingly intense descriptions of abuse and humiliation interspersed with various asides to its dramatic continuity in which the protagonist encounters other, apparently secondary characters who all shed light on the marriage. The escalation in abuse continues—in both *Shida ve'shidot* and *Married Life*—up until a critical event that is the last straw for the abuse victims. In *Married Life* Thea has sex with Gurdweill's friend Heidelberg in front of her husband, while in *Shida ve'shidot*, Amnon beats Aviva in the presence of the French violinist Michel. In both novels these events lead to an inevitable, tragic, murderous end, or at least a fantasy of murder. *Married Life* ends with the description of a dagger shining in Gurdweill's hand, and he later declares to his friend Ulrich, "Thea died last night" (*Married Life*, 486), while *Shida ve'shidot* ends with Aviva Shatz's monologue in which she pleads justified homicide of her husband in front of an imaginary judge: "My Lord,' she heard herself say, 'limited, mortal members of the public, in a world in which we cannot explain our

actions, murder is—for now—a pure, dramatic act, finally dispelling all doubt” (*Shida ve’shidot*, 297).<sup>34</sup>

The thematic affinity between the two novels is closely linked with the historical-cultural reality they each describe. Although set in radically different periods of twentieth-century Jewish history, they both describe hedonistic, unraveling societies, which in hindsight stand on the brink of a catastrophe that the novels appear to foretell. In *Married Life*, the blonde Austrian baroness Thea “who’ll start a pogrom against us one day” (54), as Gurdweill’s friend Lotte half-jokes, half-prophesies, seems to prefigure events taking place in Europe just a few years later. The military men and government officials who “desperately mess around and giggle and make out” in Abie Nathan’s Café California in *Shida ve’shidot* embody to a great extent the national euphoria which followed the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza following the Six-Day War. Fogel’s male protagonist, like Eytan’s female one, is described as completely cut off from the loaded national atmosphere surrounding him. It seems as though neither Gurdweill’s Jewishness nor Zionist reawakening preoccupy him at all.<sup>35</sup> Like Eytan’s Aviva Shatz, he is utterly given up to the erotic plot, to the story of passion and abuse that is placed center stage.

The feminine self that Gurdweill adopts is directly analogous to the novel’s alienation from the emerging corpus of national Hebrew literature: “He has pale, slender, feminine hands” (*Married Life*, 49) and “he was the only man . . . who understood anything about feminine attire” (41). During his violent sexual encounters with Thea, Gurdweill takes on a stereotypically passive, feminine role. Thea lifts him up, shakes him, and throws him on the bed, just like Amnon Shatz, who would “throw Aviva down any old place and take her fierce and fast” (*Shida ve’shidot*, 19). The affinity between *Shida ve’shidot* and *Married Life* does not revolve merely around the foregrounding of the erotic plot at the expense of the national one, however. It also consists in the promotion of that erotic plot at the expense of the writing one.

Gurdweill, Fogel’s masochistic, sexually enslaved protagonist, is in fact a promising young writer who gradually leaves off writing as a stormy relationship with a woman takes over his life. Before his marriage, the editor of a literary journal sends him fifty marks with a letter heaping praise upon him, and urging him to send a story for the next issue. Early in their relationship, Thea herself, albeit mockingly, introduces Gurdweill to an

acquaintance, whom we later learn is one of her lovers, as a writer destined for greatness. Ultimately Thea turns out to be herself the greatest obstacle to his work. The physical and emotional endeavors he invests in their relationship make it difficult for him to concentrate, and when he wants to take some time in order to write, Thea prevents him, even tearing up a manuscript of an almost completed story (132). Gurdweill ultimately gives up writing altogether, sinking, as Fogel describes it, into “a mist of eroticism, powerful and tormenting” (110).

Far from being a late development of the Hebrew writer who prefers intellect to eros, Gurdweill seems to be a parodic negative of such a character. His devotion to eros, like his masochism and feminine traits—especially his motherly devotion to his infant son, which stands in contrast to Thea’s criminal neglect—also set him up as a stereotypically nonmasculine figure. Indeed the explicit interdependence in *Married Life* between the weakening of the writing plot and the empowering of the erotic plot, has provoked, as in the case of Gnessin’s “Hatsida,” significant unease among critics reading the novel ever since its publication in 1930, including after its recent reprinting. Nevertheless, while in Gnessin’s case critics have tended to ignore the gendered aspects of the process, in Fogel’s case literary scholars—among whom Fogel has been perceived as far more problematic—interpreted the belittling of the writing plot in *Married Life* as evidence of the psychological and structural weakness of the novel.

Thus, for example, in the 1987 article “Matai nechdal legalot et Fogel?” (“When Will We Stop Discovering Fogel?”), Miron listed a number of problems in Fogel’s prose in general and in *Married Life* in particular, including a lack of “true, organic psychological continuity.” Miron locates this “lack” in the characterization of Gurdweill, arguing, “We do not believe for a moment in the combination of Gurdweill the writer with Gurdweill the idiotic victim of his own neuroses and of his wife’s sadism.”<sup>36</sup> The source of Miron’s difficulty may be found in an earlier article by the writer and critic Moshe Shlanger, which appeared soon after the first publication of Fogel’s novel in 1930. Shlanger refers to Gurdweill’s “insufferable effeminacy,” thereby perpetuating modern Hebrew literature’s automatic association of writing with masculinity.

“This Gurdweill,” writes Shlanger, “is according to the author a fairly decent writer, who receives commissions from various journals . . . which

allegedly attests to his talent, everyone relating to him as a first rate author, apart from his wife Thea who mocks him at every opportunity . . . I have nothing against Herr Gurdweill's literary talent; on the contrary, I would that all writers were talented, but for some reason it is inconceivable that this idiot, good for nothing of a Gurdweill is a writer." Shlanger goes on to compare Gurdweill with Sendril, Mendele Mocher Seforim's infamous protagonist of *Ma'sot Benyamin ha-shlishi* (*The Brief Travels of Benjamin the Third*) who dresses as a woman: "It would never have occurred to Mendele or Shalom Aleichem to imagine 'Sendril the housewife' as a famous writer."<sup>37</sup> But portraying Sendril the housewife as a famous writer—or more accurately as a famous playwright—did occur to Rachel Eytan.

*"Do You Need to Be Free of Me in Order to Write?" Shatz, Hagzar, and Gurdweill*

Eytan, revisiting the sadomasochistic, erotic narratives of "Hatsida" and *Married Life*, adopts Gnessin and Fogel as imaginary literary fathers, who provide a jammed repetition of the traditional, male *Künstlerroman*. At first glance, it appears that Eytan's work merely reconstructs the problematic relations between eros, femininity, and writing implicit in Gnessin's and Fogel's work. She even embraces their pessimistic solution to the conflict between eros and writing. Aviva Shatz, like Nahum Hagzar and Rudolph Gurdweill, is slowly but surely eliminated from the world of writing and creativity, which in *Shida ve'shidot*, as in the works with which it conducts a dialogue, is revealed as the binary opposite of a world of eros and love.

But if it is eros which brings down Gnessin's and Fogel's protagonists—turning them, in their own eyes as well as in those of Hebrew literary critics, into "crushed [worms] wallowing in [their] own filth"—then it is writing, not eros, which is the shameful secret for Aviva Shatz. As a woman, writing is the "impure act" which brings Aviva to absent herself, together with her husband, from the premiere of her own play. In this sense, the study of Eytan's intersexual dialogue in *Shida ve'shidot* with Gnessin's and Fogel's works actually emphasizes the difference between them, as also reflected in the difference in their reception. The antagonism that Hagzar's and Gurdweill's "insufferable effeminacy" provoked among crit-

ics, giving up their writing for the sake of a demanding and destructive love affair with a woman, underscores the extent to which this sacrifice is seen as natural and inevitable in Aviva Shatz's case.

Indeed the gradual receding of the writing plot in *Shida ve'shidot* has not been read as a literary aberration. Critics who sought to blur the gender aspect of the phenomenon in "Hatsida" and deliberately ignored it in *Married Life* do not even allude to its existence in *Shida ve'shidot*, despite their attacks against almost every other aspect of the novel. Most critics refrain from mentioning that Aviva Shatz is a woman writer, focusing instead on her love and adultery issues, generally seeing her as a kind of bored Madame Bovary, rather than as a frustrated artist or alternatively as a battered and abandoned wife.<sup>38</sup> The attenuation of writing, presented in the case of male writers as a systems breakdown, an unbearable disruption of the logical and psychological structure of the novel and of its protagonist, is seen as a natural, almost obvious stage in the development of the woman writer.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, Eytan's book implies that the demand that a woman writer renounce her literary initiation is no more unnatural than the demand that she realize it. Aviva will never be able to step into the shoes of the male Hebrew writer, the observer for the house of Israel. Despite the initials making up the name "Shatz"—in Hebrew the acronym shin + tsadik [SH + TS] stands for *shlikh tsibur* or cantor, one who mediates for the congregation in the synagogue—Eytan describes Aviva Shatz as unable or perhaps even refusing to be a spokesperson for the collective. When asked her opinion about current affairs, Aviva has difficulty answering because she feels that "all that has nothing to do with her or her life or Amnon." In sharp contrast with those whose "shirt fronts puff up when they fly the flag on the roof of their house" (*Shida ve'shidot*, 70) Aviva Shatz experiences herself as someone who "is wiped out and falls from a height, finding herself at the bottom of a negative world: female, an orifice, an empty vessel" (*Shida ve'shidot*, 70). Aviva makes no attempt, however, to escape that negative world, insisting instead on creating from within it.

At first glance, the name of Aviva's second play, *Afsayim* (*Nothingness*) refers to the experience of emptiness and social and cultural decline depicted in Eytan's own novel. But in a gendered context, the title of Aviva's play alludes to her positive choice to write from within and about

the negative world allotted to women, as opposed to the collective national demand she has failed to fulfill. The novel's title, *Shida ve'shidot*, is striking in this respect, as it is taken from the verse in Ecclesiastes: "and the treasure of kings and of the provinces: I acquired men singers and women singers and the delights of the sons of men, women very many."<sup>40</sup> "Shida" means, among other things, a beautiful woman taken captive. Aviva Shatz's captivity consists to a large extent in her very womanhood, and perhaps her beauty, which undermine the ability of the men around her—including her readers and critics—to relate to her as a serious writer.

Nevertheless, Aviva, like Eytan herself, does not at all try to escape her feminine captivity, choosing rather to write from within and about it. This choice also links Eytan with Gnessin and Fogel, who place at the center of their works of *ars poetica* a feminine narrating self, who experiences, to his cost, the conflict between eros and writing. But at the same time, the dialogue Eytan conducts with Fogel and Gnessin is liable to reveal the extent to which Eytan went further, beyond the pessimistic feminine process that they undertake. In fact, in her intersexual dialogue with Gnessin and Fogel, Eytan not only imagines the male *Künstlerroman* genre anew, but actually disrupts or jams Gnessin's and Fogel's own texts, in suggesting an optimistic way out of her pessimistic dialogue with them.

Gurdweill's and Hagzar's choice to abandon their writing for the sake of their relationships with cruel, evil women and the undoing of gender, which critics noted as part of this process, is sharpened given the fact that both protagonists are presented with another, more normative option from which they both shy away. The female alternative to Manya, the object of Hagzar's desire and misery, is her sister Rosa. Unlike the masculine, overtly sexual Manya, Rosa is beautiful, gentle, and feminine, and her love for Hagzar seems honest. Rosa also, unlike her abusive, solipsistic sister, takes an interest in Hagzar's work. She is described as having literary insight thanks to her studies of holy scripts as a child, "shoulder to shoulder with her brothers" ("Hatsida," 142). She is impressed by Hagzar's literary talent and goes with him "to the library to choose 'another lovely thing' to read the next night" (149). Hagzar is even able to tell her, albeit hesitantly, about his work torment, or more accurately non-work torment: "I am in these past days . . . not able to devote myself to writ-

ing at all . . . it seems you do not know what happened, as it were, nothing at all” (154). Nevertheless, Hagzar does not realize his relationship with Rosa, and any tentative attempts to touch each other do not go well:

On one such occasion, Rosa told him her hands were freezing and that she had not brought gloves. He took one of her hands in his and told her to put it in the pocket of his coat, but the pocket was too narrow for both their hands so that his hand ended up holding onto the end of her sleeve. They both soon felt how unnatural it was because they had to limp along like cripples so she withdrew her hand without saying a word and they walked on together in silence, seething inwardly. (154)

In *Married Life*, Fogel also offers a female alternative to the abusive Thea in Lotte, Gurdweill’s friend, who is described as a beautiful, gentle young girl, hopelessly in love with Gurdweill. As testimony to her love, Lotte protests against the emasculation Gurdweill suffers in his relationship with Thea, because of the gender disruption it entails.<sup>41</sup> Lotte even takes a consistent interest in Gurdweill’s work, protesting against its regression in parallel with the tightening of his relationship with Thea (*Married Life*, 132). Toward the end of the novel, before her death by suicide, and in a last ditch attempt to win his heart, she suggests that he run away with her abroad, at her own expense, to a place where he would have space and absolute freedom to work:

Will you leave her and go with me to some other country? We could leave in three or four days . . . We’ll have a little money too. Papa will give me some . . . We’ll go and stay in some little town on the Italian or French Riviera . . . Perhaps later on you’ll be able to divorce her . . . the main thing is that we love each other . . . You’ll be able to work in peace and forget everything she did to you. (438)

But Gurdweill, like Hagzar, is unable to respond to a normative female alternative. “You are dearer to me than anything in the world,” he replies, but he knows immediately that he is incapable of separating from Thea (438), and his relationship with Lotte is tragically cut short.



In the intersexual dialogue Eytan conducts with “Hatsida” and *Married Life*, she presents a male parallel to the characters of Rosa and Lotte in Michel, the French violinist whom Aviva befriends after her husband leaves for good. Michel is the diametric opposite of Amnon Shatz, and he would seem to constitute a positive romantic alternative in Aviva’s life. He is described as a mild, refined, elegant man who adores Aviva. But unlike Gnessin’s and Fogel’s female alternatives, Michel does not encourage Aviva to write; neither, ultimately, does he offer a respite from her relationship with her husband. Like Yosef, the disappointing father figure of *The Fifth Heaven*, who does not protect the young girl in love with him, Michel stands calmly by while her husband beats Aviva before his eyes. His own parting speech to Aviva reads as a cynical, comic counterpart to Lotte’s romantic self-sacrifice in *Married Life*:

Get real. You want to put me in the driver’s seat now, you want me to say to you right now come to me, *chérie*, because we’re destined to be together for ever? And so what if we are. And then there are the children. And all the rest. I am just a lover and a lover has no rights. You want me to play the rescuing hero. I’ve done that before once or twice and look where that got me. You know I’d be happy to sleep with you from time to time with great pleasure. And I won’t sleep a wink tonight. *Allez!* (*Shida ve’shidot*, 296)

Whereas Fogel’s and Gnessin’s effeminate, masochistic protagonists do encounter normative women who are willing to give up everything in order to enable them to go on writing, no such alternative is available to their female incarnation, Aviva Shatz. In her attempt to break free from her abusive husband, Aviva has to settle for an inadequate lover, who does not take any interest in her work either. In this sense, *Shida ve’shidot* sheds an ironic light on the passage from “Hatsida,” which Eytan quotes as an epigraph to one of the chapters of her book. “The entire world of women is only one great woman,” ponders Nahum Hagzar at the climax of his story (“Hatsida,” 157), expressing his frustration and disappointment in all the women in his life, whom he sees as responsible for keeping him from his literary destiny. But Gnessin’s text shows that Hagzar is mistaken. The various women he meets during his stay in the small

town actually represent the multitude of romantic alternatives open to a male protagonist, ranging from those wielding a totally destructive eros to those promising a secure life, which would ensure that the writer could work undisturbed.

Despite the range of options open to him, Hagzar chooses the first, destructive, masochistic, feminine solution, entailing giving up writing and sinking into eros. Aviva Shatz, on the other hand, learns that the world of men surrounding her is indeed all “a single man,” if only because none of the men in her life, without exception, encourage her to write, or even show interest in her writing. Nevertheless, Aviva Shatz, unlike the creatively paralyzed Hagzar and Gurdweill, continues to conduct an exchange with her abandoned writing that bursts forth toward the end of the novel, into the erotic plot that has taken over her life.

In the last part of *Shida ve’shidot*, describing Aviva’s desperate, failed attempt to break off relations with her husband, Eytan’s writing leaves behind the realistic, ostensibly objective reportage of the events taking place in the protagonist’s life. Instead, this final part is written as a dense, intense stream of Aviva’s consciousness, laying pieces of her life before the reader using theatrical language and imagery, casting the people around her as characters in a play, in which she plays the lead. “I want to live inside works of art and I will live inside works of art!” Aviva yells at Michel, the lover who demands that she “get real” (*Shida ve’shidot*, 291).

Indeed, at the end of the beating scene which closes the novel, Aviva stands alongside her husband and her lover before a crowd of curious onlookers who gather round and watch them as though they were indeed three characters in a play—one of the onlookers even “[sighs] with theatrical longing.” Left alone with her husband, Aviva thinks, “the articulation, choice of words, structure of the monologue, is all that matters from this moment on” (*Shida ve’shidot*, 296). In her final monologue, Aviva turns to her imaginary audience as though to a jury, and provides a theatrical—or perhaps metatheatrical—justification for the future murder of her husband: “Dear limited, mortal members of the public, in a world in which we cannot explain our actions, murder is—for now—a pure, dramatic act, finally dispelling all doubt” (*Shida ve’shidot*, 296–97).

Aviva Shatz’s closing monologue is delivered at the height of her erotic enslavement, but seeks to justify the suspension of that plot in artistic terms, argued by a playwright who places above all else the need for

dramatic effect. Eytan's female protagonist appears to stop writing, but is unable to silence the creative urge ostensibly abandoned under the influence of her husband. The optimistic fantasy of rebirth and the triumph of Aviva's creative urge expressed at the end of *Shida ve'shidot* differs significantly from the pessimistic ends experienced by Gnessin's and Fogel's protagonists:

In the early hours, on the floor, listening to the rhythmic breathing coming from the beds, she feels herself journeying inwards. Her lids are unblinkingly open, she collapses, falls into herself, into a dark, tunneled hole. Permeating and streaming, permeating and streaming, until in the end she emerges in a kind of restrained joy on the other side, into another, utterly different universe, in which the voices are like silent snow falling. (*Shida ve'shidot*, 298)

Aviva's wish to be reborn in an "utterly different universe" evokes the search for a new literary space, within which female writing may flourish. As Eytan suggested already in her first novel, this would be writing based on dialogue with alternative, imaginary, literary fathers, able to replace the authoritarian fathers of the existing male canon. On the other hand, the fantasy of rebirth which Eytan describes as a "self-birth"—"she collapses, falls into herself, into a dark, tunneled hole . . . until she emerges . . . on the other side"—is different from the wish to exchange one literary world with another, or to find alternative parents within the existing tradition. In fact, it is the opposite fantasy, expressing the artist's desire to birth herself anew, to be her own literary parent. These apparently conflicting fantasies create the tension within which intersexual dialogue exists: between self and other, between a female and male text, between original and rewrite.

Returning to the artists' eternal dilemma—eros or writing?—it can be argued that Eytan's self-rebirth as an artist, the moment in which she separates from her imaginary literary fathers, is embodied in the possibility that her late work suggests of a new kind of relation between writing and eros. Unlike Gnessin's and Fogel's work, which turn the writing–eros opposition on its head, while still preserving its binary structure, Eytan seeks to break the binary. She seeks to establish a new mode of writ-

ing from within eros, within sexual experience, and within the relations between the sexes, ultimately creating a new literary language, based on the jammed, distorted return to the Hebrew male *Künstlerroman*.

Indeed, *Shida ve'shidot* seems to suggest that the answer to Amnon Shatz's self-righteous question—"Perhaps you need to be free of me in order to be able to write?"—is not necessarily affirmative. Rather than attempting to break free altogether from the male canon, or alternatively to expose it as a repressive force paralyzing female creative powers, Eytan proposes conducting a selective, intersexual dialogue with it. A loaded, complex dialogue of this kind allows her to reject certain structures in the canon, while adopting others, which she revisits in a jammed, disrupted return, lending her own linguistic style its unique stamp.

### Rachel Eytan Returns

Although *Shida ve'shidot* proposes a more optimistic possibility of intersexual dialogue with the Hebrew canon, it paradoxically became the novel most identified with Eytan's tragic exclusion from the Hebrew literary scene. It is perhaps inevitable, however, that one reread *The Fifth Heaven* in light of *Shida ve'shidot*. In some senses it could be said that both novels conduct similar dialogic relations of resonance and return with the Hebrew canon. Aviva Shatz may be read as a later incarnation of Maya Hermoni, the writer at the start of her career, while the intersexual dialogue Aviva Shatz conducts with the male Hebrew canon suggests a reworking of Maya's earlier correspondence with the poetic formula. Eytan's own return to her previous novel is conducted in the language of reduplication. It is a disrupted, jammed return, compelling us to reassess the earlier, apparently canonical novel, including those gender aspects overlooked by the Hebrew literary critics who embraced the young Eytan in the first place. At the same time, *Shida ve'shidot*, the novel that seemed to put an end to Eytan's literary career, ultimately signals an optimistic process of release in the broader historical context of Israeli women's literature. It heralds a release from the trauma of feminine writing, from the female captivity in which women authors have been held for generations.

Indeed, I believe that only today, after the 1980s and 1990s boom in Israeli women's writing, may one truly appreciate Rachel Eytan's place as

an author who signaled an important new direction for the development of female writing in Hebrew. Above all, she nurtured an alternative, more selective and complex relation to Hebrew literary tradition — neither total submission to its authority, nor rejection of it as male cultural discourse petrifying and shutting down women’s creative powers.

Working in the context of the male Statehood Generation, Eytan distanced herself from the nationalist, allegorical writing of her peers. Instead, she chose to adopt imaginary, motherly literary fathers committed to plots dealing with crises in writing and erotic enslavement, thus laying bare the powerful and insoluble conflict between gender and writing. Eytan situated this conflict at the heart of her prose, and as a result was banished from the central literary arena of her contemporaries. But this move is largely responsible for the formation of her identity as an author — not the wunderkind of Israeli fiction, the amazing but marginal inventor of empty neologisms and stylistic innovation, but a complex, daring writer who initiated powerful poetic, stylistic, and ideological processes in Israeli literature.

In the framework of the inevitable psychological and poetic discussion of literary fathers and mothers one could, perhaps, think of Rachel Eytan herself as a kind of mother–father. Not a lesser copy of the original, authoritarian literary father against whom one must rebel, but rather a mother who is herself a reduplication of prior imaginary father figures, while at the same time an original, influential writer herself. Eytan’s work invites us to consider the women writers who come after her not as appendices to a male generation nor as a sociological and cultural phenomenon, but as writers who have chosen, according to Eytan, to pursue an intersexual dialogue with the canon of modern Hebrew literature, rejecting its major national-collective plots but borrowing repressed materials from it, writing into it the female libido, which has in fact always been there, absent–present.

Most of all, Eytan’s work revisits Hebrew literature’s most resonating narratives and creates from within them a new prose: far-reaching, bold yet self-aware, without the need to break free from the canon so as once again to spoil its stories.

## EPILOGUE

### The Past That Cries Out for Change *New Directions in Intersexual Dialogue*

“Israeli women’s fiction: is there such a thing?” wonders the supposedly sophisticated talk-show hostess in one of the most memorable sketches to appear on the Israeli satirical television show *Eretz ne’hederet* (*What a Wonderful Country*) in 2009. Although the look of amazement does not leave the hostess’s face, it seems that the creators of the sketch do believe that there is “such a thing” and even know exactly what it is. Israeli women’s fiction, the sketch suggests, is contemporary, realistic, popular fiction of the journalistic kind. In fact, there is not much difference between that and self-improvement books for women, as one of the female writers interviewed in the talk show claims to have written the book *How Would You Know That Your Husband Cheats on You?* This is a best-selling, easy read at the center of which are issues such as marriage, divorce, and adultery, alongside more local matters like secrets from the bedrooms of Orthodox couples.

The sketch, which was crowned in the media as one of the show’s most popular, can be used to illustrate the Israeli consensus about the questionable status of Israeli women’s prose fiction. *Eretz ne’hederet* has been one of Israeli culture’s most sensitive seismographs, and it reflects the deeply rooted assumption that Israeli female fiction is not only popular, escapist literature, but also ahistorical. It is treated as a literature with no past nor history, literature born from the sea—or, to be more accurate—from the country club swimming pool.

Indeed, Israeli women’s prose fiction at first glance seems to have been

born in the feminine era of the 1980s: new social, cultural, economic, and political conditions enabled the rise of a number of female prose authors, some of whom even gained critical acclaim. Nevertheless, Israeli female fiction of the 1980s did not come out of nowhere: rather, as we have seen throughout this book, it had already begun to develop three decades earlier, in the works of Yehudit Hendel, Amalia Kahana-Carmon, and Rachel Eytan. Indeed, it can be argued that the poetic and gender innovations of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s female authors were what made the rise of the authors of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s possible. The work of the earlier writers helped remove various barriers for the later ones: ideological and social barriers as well as psychological and emotional ones, such as the guilt and fear that prevented female authors from stepping confidently into the well-fortified territory of male fiction. How did intersexual dialogue develop, then, in the so-called feminist era, an era in Israeli prose fiction that no longer seemed to have to turn to the literary past in order to survive?

Generally speaking, the 1980s signified a major change in the relationship in Israeli literature with the past and with Israel's historical heritage. While the local publishing industry began to follow the American economic model of the best seller, thus allowing more popular, contemporary subgenres such as detective fiction and the romantic novel to come to the fore, canonical literature began to reflect—at least outwardly—the weakening of the Zionist metanarrative.<sup>1</sup> Although, as argued by Hannan Hever, Israeli literature was still dominated by the earlier Statehood Generation authors who further adhered to the national ideology,<sup>2</sup> the bon ton of Israeli literature became associated with what Hannah Naveh referred to as “putting the unified and engaging aspect of Zionism under scrutiny.”<sup>3</sup>

One result of this process was the rise of Thin Writing: minimalistic, intentionally poor, and implicitly detached from the modern Hebrew literature of the past. Naveh argues that “Thin Writing”—a term associated in the past with women's literary and cultural poverty—became a part of the zeitgeist of the 1980s and 1990s and as a result “underwent a process of universalization, masculinization and empowerment.”<sup>4</sup> The female author whose work is most significant in this respect is Orly Castel-Blum, who coined the term *blistoria* (without history) thus claiming “the bankruptcy of all metanarratives” as Yael Feldman put it.<sup>5</sup>

What, then, happened to intersexual dialogue in the *blistoria* time,

that postmodernist and post-Zionist era which ultimately undermined the validity of the literary past and the different gender and national narratives that had created it? At first, it seems that intersexual dialogue with the Hebrew literary past became—from the 1980s onward—almost redundant, an archaic remnant of poetic processes that had already been utilized to the fullest by the authors of the 1950s through the 1970s.

However, alongside the trend of Thin Writing in Israeli women's prose fiction, an opposite trend was beginning to evolve, based on new developments in the literary strategy of intersexual dialogue. The first to embrace this trend, were, not surprisingly, the first Israeli female prose authors, who in their late works proposed internal intersexual dialogues with their own earlier works, while further developing a literary dialogue with the imaginary fathers of modern Hebrew literature.

Thus, in 2002, Yehudit Hendel published *Te'rufo shel rofe ha-nefesh* (*Crack Up*),<sup>6</sup> a short novel in which she develops the intersexual dialogue she began with Agnon more than fifty years earlier in her novella "Almanato shel Eliezer." The later novel, centered on the character of psychiatrist Elhanan Gill who marries his dead friend's wife and calls his newborn son after the deceased, only to develop an obsessive jealousy toward the latter—recaptures the dialogic-melancholic process of Hendel's early writing. Here too, she internalizes the Agnonic model, which became in time the embodiment of poetic and gender otherness in the literature of the 1948 generation. She reemphasizes the gender-fluid aspects of Agnon's story when she describes one of the encounters between Elhanan and his wife, Racheli, after the birth of their son:

And he pressed for a moment his face to her eyes and it seemed to him as if Yoel's face was being reflected through her eyes, and just like before the baby's face peeped out from them as a sort of a montage and he stood up in a frenzy. It seemed to him as if the whole room was absorbed with this longing for Yoel and he felt this longing pervade his own body . . . How quickly time goes by, he told himself, bringing everything together and then falling apart, fragmenting reality all of a sudden, incurably. (*Te'rufo shel rofe ha-nefesh*, 59)

The "montage" which immerses the dead friend into the face of the newborn baby offers a broad implementation of the cross-gender melan-



cholic internalization, which Hendel exhibited in her early intersexual dialogue with Agnon. The repressed homoerotic aspect of his past relationship is pronounced in the longing for the dead friend, which “pervades [Yoel’s] body” and does not allow him to “move forward” in his present relationship with his wife.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the term “montage” hints at the new validity that the techniques of the postmodern era—with its emphasis on literary montages, including the use of quotes, rewrites, and stylistic shuffling—bring to intersexual dialogue.

Nevertheless, in spite of the novel’s contemporary aspects, Hendel’s reference to Agnon ultimately enables her to return to her own imaginary, motherly literary foundations that were repressed by her critics, who acknowledged her along with other female authors only after the rise in popularity of women’s writing in the 1980s. Indeed, Elhanan Gill, the psychiatrist who experiences difficulty in diagnosing the source of his patients’ illness is, ironically enough, the closest character to the failing Agnonic doctor from “The Doctor’s Divorce,” which first excited Hendel’s literary imagination in the late 1940s. Indeed, following the Maskilic model of the Hebrew writer as a doctor—a model that was already ridiculed by previous authors—Gill becomes the ultimate embodiment of the failing Hebrew writer. Throughout the novel, Hendel associates Elhanan’s medical failure—his inability to cure his patients—with his writer’s block:

And the blue notebook lies closed on the table, and he opens it and it’s all empty and he thumbs through it, back and forth and it’s all empty and he turns one page after the other and it’s all empty, and again he is seized with fear, leaves the notebook open to the first page and says: this is it, how do I begin? Haven’t I written a few studies already, why can’t I write the opening sentence? (125)

Thus, Hendel’s ongoing intersexual dialogue with Agnon’s “The Doctor’s Divorce” ends with a metapoetic comment on writing itself. Hendel’s starting point is—as in her early works—absence, failure, the empty page, the missing pen, the difficulty to write or say something new, original, *ex nihilo*. However, Hendel’s dialogic poetics does not resist difficulty nor try to bypass it but rather puts it at the forefront. Elhanan Gill as

a fake doctor-author is a reversed mirror image of Hendel herself and the dialogic, incorporating, symbiotic-melancholic relation to the past, identified with both of them, is in fact what enables Hendel to write: to write herself into Agnon, to write Agnon into herself, to write the past into the present, and to write death into life. Hendel's *Te'rufo shel Rofe ha'nefesh*, the ultimate embodiment of "self-intertextuality" in the late works of the first Israeli prose fiction authors, is a testament, then, to the ongoing significance of intersexual dialogue even in the so-called feminist era.

Other definitive dialogic works from the 1950s through the 1970s also became sources of influence for a new generation of Israeli female authors who chose to imagine their literary foremothers anew in the spirit of intersexual dialogue. Thus, in Yehudit Katzir's 2003 novel *Hineh ani ma'thila (Here I Begin)*<sup>8</sup> the unrequited love of Ne'ima Sasson for her teacher Ezekiel, the same love story based on cross-gender identification with the father's textual processes, evolves into a lesbian love affair—reciprocal and fulfilled this time—between student and teacher. Even the text within the text—the poem "My Dear Teacher" that Ne'ima writes to Ezekiel and whose exact content was not revealed to the reader in the original story, is given this time in a new, subversive interpretation: a lesbian, humorous, bawdy poem also entitled "My Dear Teacher":

### My Dear Teacher

I love to watch you dress up  
I love to watch you comb your hair  
I love to watch you put on your makeup  
But most of all I love to watch you undress for me  
I love to hear you speak  
I love to hear you play  
I love to hear you pee  
But most of all I love to hear how hard I make you come.

(*Hineh ani ma'thila*, 134)

The direct, explicit poem parodies the lyrical and flowery style of Kahana-Carmon, while the content of the poem reveals the difference between the prominent relationships in each text. Contrary to the aloof Ezekiel, who rejects Ne'ima Sasson, Katzir's protagonist's "dear teacher" recip-

rocates her student's gestures of love. Thus, Katzir allows the juvenile, one-sided love poem from Kahana-Carmon's novella to become an overt, self-aware text that documents a very real romantic and sexual encounter.

The differences between the texts also paradoxically highlight their mutual engagement with the theme of gender fluidity. In fact, it seems that Katzir's novel is a far-reaching implementation of intersexual dialogue with the literary past, established by Kahana-Carmon herself. Thus, for instance, the lesbian love affair between the young student and the older teacher in Katzir's novel can be read as a new interpretation of the strong mother-daughter bond at the center of Agnon's "In the Prime of Her Life." Although the figure of the mother is missing from Kahana-Carmon's "Ne'ima Sasson," the story indirectly evokes this female bond through the cross-gender dimension of Ne'ima's relation to Ezekiel, who is being unmanned and thus becoming an imaginary, motherly father to Ne'ima. In this context, it can be argued that Kahana-Carmon's story—which mediates, or, in Kristeva's terms, reduplicates, Agnon's novella, becomes in itself an imaginary father text for Katzir.

One of the most prominent and impressive texts that returned to the literary strategy of intersexual dialogue on the verge of the 2000s was undoubtedly Zeruya Shalev's novel *Hayei ahava (Love Life)*.<sup>9</sup> Shalev's second novel, *Love Life* is, on the one hand, an exemplary summation of intersexual dialogue in Israeli women's prose, and on the other hand a courageous and self-aware contemporary commentary on Hebrew literature and gender.

The novel, which tells the story of a young woman's obsessive pursuit of her mother's old lover, presents an encounter between two prominent narratives that have been examined in the previous chapters: a subversive, almost distorted Oedipal narrative which resonates with Agnon's "In the Prime of Her Life," and a sadomasochistic narrative which resonates with Fogel's *Married Life*. As we shall see, Shalev structures her novel according to these two formative narratives and the Hebrew texts that resonate with them. The question of revising the personal and the literary past also stands at the center of the novel as the female protagonist, Ya'ara Korman, a student of the Talmud, tries to find a new interpretation for talmudic legends about the destruction of the temple while attempting to revise her own family history.

The central plot of *Love Life* hints at the affinity between the novel

and Agnon's "In the Prime of Her Life." Ya'ara Korman, who is being drawn by forces unknown to her toward Aryeh Even, her mother's long-lost lover, seems like a literary double of Tirtza, Agnon's heroine. Agnon's novella highlights the Oedipal closeness between Mazal, the poor and underprivileged lover of Tirtza's mother, and the wealthy Mintz, Tirtza's father, who ultimately married her mother instead of Mazal. Shalev's novel also emphasizes the affinity between the father and the lover. While Ya'ara is staying in Aryeh's house, she finds an old photograph of her young father and Aryeh standing next to each other. While gazing at the photo, she asks herself which of them she would have chosen, had she been her mother:

I identified Aryeh easily, tall and black-haired, with a broad smile exposing white teeth, a smile I didn't like, too confident, too arrogant, a little stupid in his arrogance, and next to him a short fair boy, with a pale, almost spiritual smile, so different from that of his friend, and nevertheless there was expectation in his face, the expectation of happiness, and the more I looked at him the more difficult it was to part from him, and I wondered which of them I would have chosen if I had been alive then, if I had been my mother. (*Love Life*, 205)

The scene clearly resonates with the ending scene of "In the Prime of Her Life," where Tirtza—now married to Mazal, and pregnant with his child—sits with her husband and father, realizing all of a sudden that "by dint of their love and compassion, each resembles the other" ("In the Prime of Her Life," 244). This same scene appears to offer a far-reaching implementation of Freud's well-known resolution of the female Oedipus complex, which obliges the daughter to choose a husband who resembles her father.<sup>10</sup>

Shalev's novel draws attention to the Oedipal interpretation that arises from Agnon's novella, but undermines it at the same time. Not only is Aryeh incapable of becoming Ya'ara's lawful husband—since they are both married—but he is also sterile, which is the reason Ya'ara's mother did not marry him in the first place. At the same time, Aryeh's wild, hedonistic lifestyle stands in opposition to the Oedipal model. The reunion with the father and the father substitute through marriage and birth, as

outlined in Agnon's novella, is grotesquely portrayed in one of the most provocative scenes in the novel, where Ya'ara takes part in a threesome with Aryeh and another old friend of her father's, a judge named Shaul. The final scene of "In the Prime of Her Life," where Tirtza sits between her father and his substitute becomes, in Shalev's novel, a grotesque orgy. Aryeh, in the role of the father substitute, has intercourse with Ya'ara, while Shaul, portraying the father—with whom the daughter cannot have sex because of the prohibition of incest—relaxes and reassures her while "delivering" her to his replacement (*Love Life*, 55–57).

At the same time, Shalev presents a contemporary, humorous interpretation of the gender-fluid aspect of Agnon's novella, which is realized—as the second chapter of this book indicates—in Tirtza's cross-gender identification with Mazal. Like both Agnon's Tirtza and Kahana-Carmon's Ne'ima Sasson, Ya'ara Korman also adopts the gender stance of her male love object whom she persistently courts in a masculine style, preferring distanced sex games to the gentle, feminine gestures of love her husband showers on her. The novel offers an almost Butlerian implementation of cross-gender identification in the scene where Ya'ara enters a dressing room in a clothing store where Aryeh had been changing clothes just minutes before, and puts on his clothes that are still hanging there:

And the shop assistant asked, where's the girl who wanted the dress in the window, and in a husky voice I answered, here, and held out my hand. She hung the dress on my hand, and I quickly got undressed, mixing my clothes with his, but instead of trying on the dress I put on the trousers he had taken off, and they felt cool and exciting, as if his smooth skin were stuck to them, and I heard footsteps approaching and the shop assistant said, it's occupied, someone's trying on here, and his deep voice said, but I'm trying on here. (13–14)

Not only does Ya'ara "mix" (*me'arbevot*) her clothes with those of Aryeh—a verb which is associated in the Jewish sources and in Agnon's works with gender disruption<sup>11</sup>—she also literally "wears the pants" as she prefers Aryeh's trousers to the dress offered to her, while speaking in a "husky voice." Tirtza's cross-gender identification with Mazal in Agnon's novella becomes, therefore, in Shalev's novel, a definitive act of

performance, which challenges, following Butler, the cultural opposition between desire and identification.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, alongside the Oedipal narrative, which Shalev takes to the extreme while challenging it at the same time, another narrative emerges from the novel, at the center of which is Ya'ara's masochistic, passionate subordination to Aryeh.

Thus, Aryeh Even—"Even" means "stone" in Hebrew—is described throughout the novel as a classic sadist who takes advantage of Ya'ara's emotional and physical codependence, rejects her love, and puts her in compromising situations while provocatively sharing with her his relationships with other women. The novel exemplifies the ongoing escalation of emotional abuse and sexual subordination which reach their peak toward the end, when during the shiva (seven days of mourning) for his dead wife, Aryeh locks Ya'ara in his bedroom until she becomes a prisoner in his house. This sadomasochistic drama shatters Ya'ara's life. She increasingly neglects her marriage, until the final blow she deals her husband, Yoni, when she joins Aryeh instead of going with Yoni for a planned romantic holiday in Turkey. Her stormy relationship with Aryeh also jeopardizes her position as a teaching assistant at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She begins missing appointments, cannot concentrate on her scholarly writing, and is unable to find a topic for her thesis, until the situation reaches a point where it seems that her promising academic career is in imminent danger.

This sadomasochistic narrative—the escalating erotic subordination, the gradual collapse of intellectual and creative life—resonates with the sadomasochistic drama depicted by Fogel in *Married Life*, a novel whose title is clearly evoked by the title of Shalev's novel, *Love Life*. Like Rudolf Gurdweill, Ya'ara is another protagonist whose intellectual and creative life is almost destroyed by her love life. As opposed to Fogel, who locates the sadomasochistic drama within marital life, Shalev at first seems to refer to marriage as a place of security and warmth rather than of destructive eros. Throughout the novel it becomes clear, however, that married life is no less dangerous and undermining to the self than the erotic realm. Thus, for instance, the marriage of Ya'ara's parents seems like an ongoing sequence of mutual infliction of pain, resulting in the transformation of Ya'ara's mother into an icon of masochistic self-sacrifice. Ya'ara's own marriage is also portrayed as deadly, resulting in emotional emptiness and misery.

Nevertheless, Shalev's return to Fogel's novel, like her return to Agnon's, is parodic and amusing more than it is dramatic or tragic. Thus, the text repeatedly highlights the performative aspect of the so-called sadomasochistic relationship at its center. Ya'ara describes, for instance, her role in her threesome with Aryeh and the judge thusly: "I had never had an audience before, and I knew that it imposed an obligation . . . My ambition increased from one minute to the next, I wanted to astonish my audience with my performance" (55). Other scenes also emphasize the performative nature of the relationship between Aryeh and Ya'ara: When Ya'ara comes to Aryeh's house during the shiva, she packs a suitcase filled with "stimulating accessories" (150). At first she meant to take those accessories along on her romantic vacation with her husband in Turkey, in an attempt to spice up their marriage, but as her relationship with Aryeh grows more and more intense, she reaches the conclusion that these accessories would be much more suitable for sadomasochistic games with her lover. Shalev diminishes, then, the violent radicalism of Fogel's sadomasochistic drama—ending in *Married Life* with the murder of the abuser by the protagonist. In *Love Life* this same drama becomes a bourgeois, harmless sex game played by bored wives and their husbands, or lovers, for that matter. Even Ya'ara's imprisonment in Aryeh's bedroom—the act which ostensibly embodies her subordination to him—is revealed to be imaginary. At the end of the episode, Ya'ara realizes that the bedroom door was actually open the whole time.

On the one hand, Shalev's revision changes the abusive relationship into a feminist issue, revolving around women's subordination to men, much like the process outlined by Rachel Eytan in her pioneering *Shida ve'shidot*. On the other hand, however, Shalev allows Ya'ara Korman the self-awareness and freedom of choice that Eytan denied her subordinated female protagonist Aviva Shatz.

When Ya'ara expresses her wish to attend a meeting at the university, Aryeh bursts out: "How can you say that a meeting at the university is more important to you than me?" (268), attempting once more to subordinate her to his sadomasochistic eros, distancing her from her academic career. However, the novel leaves the obsolete eros-intellect dichotomy to Aryeh, who is part of the old generation and not aware of the feminist revolution. Ya'ara's response is a ready-made feminist one: "Why do I have to choose?" she queries, resenting his demand that she choose between a love life and intellectual endeavor in the era of free choice

for women. Nevertheless, Ya'ara does have to choose. Her choice is very close in spirit to that of her precursors, Kahana-Carmon and Eytan: this is the choice to transform life and especially love life into a literary—and most significantly, dialogic—text.

The process begins in the scene where Ya'ara packs the suitcase with “stimulating accessories” on her way to Aryeh's house. She throws into the suitcase a book that her thesis advisor had lent her about talmudic legends of the destruction of the Temple. When she browses through the book, just before leaving, she finds a series of violent family stories, bloody illustrations of the main themes composing her own life. The legend which sticks in her mind is the one on which she would eventually base her thesis, that of the carpenter's wife. That same legend is mentioned later in the text when Ya'ara remembers the time her father told her the story at bedtime. This is a genuine talmudic legend, which appears in Shalev's novel in the same format as it appears in Bialik's *Se'fer ha-agada* (*Book of Legends*):

The story of a man who coveted his master's wife, and he was a carpenter's apprentice. One day his master needed a loan. The apprentice said to him [his master]: “Send your wife to me and I'll lend you the money.” The carpenter sent him [the apprentice] his wife and she stayed there for three days. The carpenter went to him and said: “My wife, whom I sent to you, where is she?” The apprentice said: “I sent her away immediately, and I heard that the youths abused her on the way.” The carpenter said: “What shall we do?” And the apprentice said: “The divorce settlement specified in the marriage contract is large.” The apprentice said: “I'll lend you the money, and give her her settlement.” The carpenter divorced her and the apprentice married her. When the time came to pay the debt and the carpenter could not pay it, the apprentice said to him: “Come to me and work off your debt.” And they sat eating and drinking and the carpenter stood and waited on them and his tears dripped from his eyes and fell into their cups—and for this hour judgment was passed. (180)

The affinity between the talmudic legend and some of the novel's central themes is evident: the legend mirrors Ya'ara's guilt over being unfaith-



ful to her husband. The implied comparison between the national destruction of the First Temple and Ya'ara's destruction of her first marriage is reinforced by the Hebrew wording of the destruction of the temple as "the destruction of the home" (*hu'rbān ha-bait*).

At the same time, not only is the legend of the carpenter and his wife symbolic of Ya'ara's life, but the complete book of legends seems to gain a life of its own and undergoes the process of personification when Ya'ara "hugs" it tightly and opens it wide "so that it would hug me back" (173). Indeed, later on we discover that Ya'ara intends to adapt her life into a text. This intent becomes clear in the actual meeting with her advisor, Professor Ross, who asks her to present a topic for her dissertation. The upset Ya'ara—who runs into the meeting full of excuses, and even claims to have canceled the previous meeting because her mother died (!)—proposes a thesis based on a new interpretation of the legend of the carpenter and his wife. While the usual reading of the legend focuses on the carpenter's anger and sorrow for the injustice that had been done to him by his wife and his apprentice, Ya'ara's interpretation casts the blame for the tragedy on the carpenter himself:

"Why did he agree to send her to the apprentice to obtain the loan in the first place?" she asks her astonished supervisor Professor Ross: "He was clearly endangering her, simply in order to get hold of the money, and how come he didn't take the trouble to look for her for three whole days? For three nights he went to sleep without her, got up in the morning without her and only on the third day he went to the apprentice to ask what had happened to her, and then when he heard that the youths had abused her on her way, instead of taking her home looking after her and comforting her, he agrees so easily to divorce her as soon as the apprentice offers him the money for the contract . . . Don't you see? There's a whole sequence of crimes and omissions concealed here . . . due to which the fate of the Temple is sealed! (273)

Ya'ara presents a new, feminist reading of the legend, one that transfers the blame from the unfaithful woman to the cuckolded husband who abandoned his wife and ignored her distress, thus leading her to

the arms of another man. Nevertheless, more than the actual content of the legend, the very interpretative process is feminist; the rewrite of the canonical male talmudic text is subversive and close in spirit to the intersexual dialogue that Shalev herself conducts with the Hebrew literary past, embodied in the works of Agnon and Fogel. Like Shalev's own reading of "In the Prime of Her Life" and *Married Life*—which highlights the gender-fluid aspects arising from these texts—Ya'ara too, in her reading of the talmudic legend, focuses the reader's attention on the suppressed point of view of the woman, overlooked by past generations of readers and commentators.

In her strange declaration that her mother died, Ya'ara seems to hint at the powerlessness of women within the canonical literary tradition, which erases the memory of the mother and joins with the father. Ya'ara participates in the assassination of the (poetic) mother but refuses to uncritically accept the hegemony of the father. Instead, she draws on her female precursors' literary processes when she offers to reimagine the male talmudic canonical texts, while exploring their suppressed gendered narratives.

At the same time, Shalev asks what significance notions such as "literary tradition" and "canon" can have in the feminist and postmodernist era: "Do you know who else the legend blames?" Ya'ara asks her astonished advisor, Professor Ross. "You, me, all the listeners and the readers in all the generations who swallowed this simplistic, tear-jerking message and ignored the true course of events" (274). Her statement reverses at once the relations between the original—hence, the "true" reading—putting forward the woman's blame, and the rewrite, the feminist reading which is presented by her as the "true course of events."

Indeed, the intersexual dialogue outlined by Shalev throughout the novel becomes an inseparable part of the discussion on the validity of the past—the biographical as well as the literary past. The novel asks over and over: Are we bound to repeat exactly the parental model delivered to us, or is it possible to revise it subversively, to undermine its authoritative validity? Ya'ara expresses this conflict in one of the most concise lines of the novel: "The past that was a tame cat one minute and savage and frightening the next . . . the past that howled at me at night and cried out for change" (227).

Throughout the novel, Shalev portrays Ya'ara's recurring efforts to

comprehend her past, the family drama which involved her mother, her father, and Aryeh Even. A random photograph of her young mother, found in Aryeh Even's apartment, sends her right back to the truth that was hidden from her. Her mother had been Aryeh's lover, until she chose—for practical reasons and the wish to start a family—Ya'ara's more "settled" father instead. This truth is at the same time, however, part of a fictional text, one that is being authored by Aryeh himself. The photograph of the young, beautiful mother is part of a series of pornographic photographs taken by Aryeh of women he has had intercourse with. Indeed, Ya'ara perceives this series, as Yigal Shwartz notes, as Aryeh's "photographed biography."<sup>13</sup>

The moment when Ya'ara finds her mother's photo inside this "photographed biography" is equivalent to the scene from "In the Prime of Her Life" in which Tirtza finds Mazal's memoir describing his own infatuation with Leah, Tirtza's mother. Ya'ara, much like Tirtza, accepts and internalizes the male text as a testimony of her family past. On the one hand, she tries to replace her mother as she attempts to understand the author of the text, the mother's long lost lover. On the other hand, like Tirtza who rewrites Mazal's memoir, Ya'ara also chooses to go back to the past from the standpoint of cross-gender identification with the author of the autobiographical text, Aryeh, whose pornographic narrative she seems to copy in her own erotic, sadomasochistic relationship with him.

In each case, the repetition by Ya'ara of Aryeh's "photographed biography" is not more complete or smooth. She does not become an icon of feminine self-sacrifice like her mother, nor does she truly succeed in owning Aryeh and repairing the wrong in her mother's love life. At the same time, she does not become hedonistic and sadistic like Aryeh himself. In fact, Ya'ara ultimately breaks free from the sadomasochistic relationship with Aryeh and does not succumb to the creative and intellectual destruction that it encourages. Toward the end of the novel, after a series of preparations involving the reading and revising of previous male texts, Ya'ara writes, mediated by her creator, Zeruya Shalev, her own text, a female alternative to Aryeh's pornographic "photographed biography."

The process of writing this new text begins when Professor Ross asks her to find another talmudic legend to support her thesis about the carpenter and his wife. In the novel's final scene, which takes place after Ya'ara has decided to end her affair as well as her marriage, she goes to

the Hebrew University library to search for talmudic legends that would support her thesis. The encounter with the book that she eventually finds is again described in personified terms, very similar to the encounter with the book that her advisor had lent her. This time, however, the book is compared to a child rather than to a beloved. She tends to it like “a mother to her baby,” knowing that “no cruel rule would separate us” (285–86). Indeed, Ya’ara eventually becomes the midwife delivering the child-text. The legend that she ultimately finds in the book is this time an invented one, written by Shalev herself:

The legend about the daughter of the priest who abandoned her faith on the eve of the destruction of the Temple and her father mourned her as if she were dead and on the third day she came and stood before him and said to him, my father, I did it only to save your life, but he refused to rise from his mourning and his eyes streamed with tears until she died and then he rose and changed his clothes and asked for bread to eat. (286)

At first, this invented legend—written in the exact format of talmudic legends about the destruction of the Temple—seems extremely dark, much darker than the legend of the carpenter and his wife. Nevertheless, the text fills Ya’ara with hope, and she states: “For the first time since it all began I breathed a sigh of relief” (286).

What could be the reason for Ya’ara’s relief? The fact that she finds another legend that can support her thesis about men’s blame for the destruction of the Temple? Or maybe the fact that this legend reveals the heavy price one has to pay for uncritical internalization of the Oedipus narrative from which she herself is trying to break away? Or maybe Ya’ara’s optimism does not stem from the actual content of the legend but from its very existence as a fictional text written by a woman in Hebrew, allowing Ya’ara—and Shalev herself—to articulate a dialogic alternative to the male Hebrew canon.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, the poetic and emotional impact of the legend lies not in its originality and uniqueness but rather in its thematic and stylistic similarity to other talmudic legends. This similarity highlights the tragedy of feminine destiny as outlined in these legends but also includes feminist criticism of this determined destiny. It can be argued that in light of this

new legend invented by Shalev, Ya'ara's interpretation of the carpenter's wife seems more compelling than ever. As in the legend of the daughter of the priest who abandoned her faith, the legend of the carpenter's wife also depicts a world where women exist only as daughters or wives, a commodity transferred between men.

The pseudo-talmudic legend with which Shalev ends her novel supplies, then, a splendid illustration of intersexual dialogue. This is a subversive, challenging return to the past—biographical as well as literary—in an attempt to read it against itself, or perhaps against the male-dominated narratives which constituted it for many years. This process does not lack humor or irony. As opposed to her female precursors who employed intersexual dialogue for their poetic survival, Shalev no longer needs this poetic strategy in order to enter the Israeli canon.

Her approach to the literary past—especially to the imaginary fathers—seems, therefore, less committed, lighter, comic even. Fogel's sadomasochistic drama amounts to a suitcase of “stimulating accessories,” and the similarity between the father and lover, who, according to Agnon, “resembled each other,” is transformed into a grotesque threesome. Nevertheless, perhaps the very possibility of approaching intersexual dialogue with humor and irony is a true testimony to the depth of its influence on Israeli women's prose fiction.

The far-reaching impact of intersexual dialogue can be learned, however, not only from the changes that Israeli female prose fiction has undergone but also from the shifting currents of the Israeli canon itself. In this context, one can examine Amos Oz's late novel, *Sipur al ahavah va'hoshekh* (*A Tale of Love and Darkness*), as signifying Oz's second return to the literary precedents from which he ostensibly withdrew during the 1980s and 1990s. *A Tale of Love and Darkness* is the novel where Oz first returned to his own biographical mother who died in the prime of her life and did not fulfill her creative potential. At the same time Oz evokes the fictional mother of Agnon's Leah, who also died in the prime of her life, leaving her story to be written by her only daughter. By telling, for the first time in his literary career, the tale of his dead mother as a story leading to his own initiation into writing, Oz takes upon himself the role of Agnon's Tirtza, whose poetic and gender stance he embraces through a process of cross-gender identification, itself inspired by the constitutive dialogic processes in Israeli female prose.

In the same context, one may also consider the ways in which the prose fiction of Amalia Kahana-Carmon, especially the figure of the wise child whom she adopts from the *talush* stories, later influenced the fiction of David Grossman, especially in *Sefer ha'dikduk ha'pnimi* (*The Book of Intimate Grammar*) and *Ayen erekh ahava* (*See Under: Love*),<sup>15</sup> works that seem to ask new, feminist postmodernist questions about the fluid boundaries of sexual identity.

It would also be interesting to ponder the pervasive influence of the late prose fiction of Eytan on the writings of the 1970s authors, particularly Ya'akov Shabtai, who received much more critical acclaim than she did, although he is very close to her in prose style. One can consider, for instance, the ways in which Eytan mediated the poetic processes of Gnessin and Fogel while articulating new possibilities of merging the lyrical and the scathing, the political and the erotic, the literary and the romantic—for Shabtai and his many followers, and imitators, in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s.

Even if these discussions should be developed elsewhere, their very existence stems from the dynamics of intersexual dialogue, which harkens as always to the voice of the Hebrew literary past crying out for change and letting it make this change: letting it open itself up—to dialogue.



## NOTES

### Introduction

1. Edith Wharton, "A Letter to W. C. Brownell," in *The Letters of Edith Wharton*, ed. R. W. B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis (New York: Scribner, 1988), 91.
2. Irving Howe, "The Achievement of Edith Wharton," in *Edith Wharton: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Irving Howe (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 6.
3. Ovid, "Narcissus and Echo," in *Metamorphoses: A New Verse Translation*, trans. David Raeburn (London: Penguin, 2004), 104–6.
4. See Amy Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus: Women's Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
5. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 106.
6. See, for instance, Adeline R. Tintner's "Wharton and James," in *Edith Wharton in Context: Essays on Intertextuality* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 9–92.
7. See Shachar Pinsker, *Literary Passports: The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011), 12.
8. Avraham Mapu, *Ahavat Zion* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1944).
9. See Dan Miron, *Bo'dedim be'moadam: Le'dyokanah shel ha'republica ha'sifrutit ha'Iyrit bethilat ha-mea ha-esrim* (Tel Aviv: Am oved, 1987), 57.
10. For a comprehensive reading of Hebrew modernism in Europe, see Pinsker, *Literary Passports*. See also: Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Michael Gluzman, *The Politics of Canonicity: Lines of Resistance in Modernist Hebrew Poetry* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003).
11. Chana Kronfeld, "Sohnut intertextualit," in *Intertextualit ba'sifrut ubatarbut: Se'fer ha-yovel le'Ziva Ben-Porat*, ed. Michael Gluzman and Orly Lubin (Tel-Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 2012), 11–57.
12. See "Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality," in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, eds. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 7.
13. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
14. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979).
15. For a concise summary of the feminist responses to Bloom, and especially that of



Gilbert and Gubar, see Carla Kaplan, *The Erotics of Talk: Women's Writing and Feminist Paradigms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

16. Criticism of the family metaphor ranges from former second-wave feminists such as Elaine Showalter, who embraced the female genealogy model in the late 1970s, to scholars who are engaging with modernism in cultural and national contexts, such as Chana Kronfeld. See Elaine Showalter, "Twenty Years On: A Literature of Their Own Revisited," in *Novel: A Forum on Literature* 31, no. 3 (1998): 399–413, and Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

17. Julia Kristeva, "Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman," *Critique* 239 (April 1967), 438–65.

18. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). For a comprehensive analysis of the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism, see Ken Hirschkop, *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). For a discussion of Bakhtin's influence on feminist theory, see Dale M. Bauer and Susan Jaret McKinstry, eds., *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

19. Kristeva's notion of intertextuality was influenced not only by the Bakhtinian diachronic and ideological concept of dialogism but also by Ferdinand de Saussure, who laid the foundation for the semiotic, synchronic course of the theory of intertextuality. Although my discussion of Kristeva focuses on her later psychoanalytic work, I stress here her Bakhtinian influences rather than her Saussurean ones because the diachronic ideological element formulated by Bakhtin pervades her later thinking about the affinities between intertextuality and intersubjectivity, as evident in her reading of Freud's prehistorical father, for instance, that I shall examine later on.

20. Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

21. Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 246.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 26.

24. It is noteworthy, in this context, that Lacanian psychoanalysis addresses the mother as the "first other." See James L. Mellard, *Beyond Lacan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 132.

25. In a footnote, Freud maintains that "perhaps it would be safer to say" that this identification is "with both parents." Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Super-Ego," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. 19, *The Ego and the Id and Other Works* (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1961), 31.

26. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 40.

27. Kelly Oliver, *Subjectivity without Subjects: From Abject Fathers to Desiring Mothers* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 65.

28. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 3.

29. Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *The Lesbian and Gay*

*Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 315.

30. Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 6–7.

31. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt/Harvest Books, 1981), 77.

32. See Miglena Nikolchina, *Matricide in Language: Writing Theory in Kristeva and Woolf* (New York: Other Press, 2004); Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005).

33. Michael Awkward, *Inspiriting Influences: Tradition, Revision and Afro-American Women's Novels* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

34. Uri Nissan Gnessin, "Hatsida," in *Kol ktavav* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1982), 1:135–62.

35. As argued by Dan Miron, the whole scene is based on the contrast between Hagzar, who immersed himself in "life" and gave up writing, and the biographical figure of Peretz Smolenskin himself. The latter continued to write ceaselessly, despite life difficulties and deteriorating health. Eventually, not only did he produce a series of epic novels, but also important Maskilic scholarly books including twelve volumes of *Hashahar* (*The Dawn*) in which Smolenskin encompasses that period in modern Hebrew literature that Hagzar himself unsuccessfully attempts to describe. See Dan Miron, *Bo'dedim be'moadam*, 470.

36. Orian Zakai, "Zion of Their Own: Hebrew Women's Nationalist Writing" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2012), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/96039>. 37; Jay Y. Gonen, *A Psychohistory of Zionism* (New York: New American Library, 1975).

37. Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1997.

38. Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles*, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

39. Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987).

40. The term *Künstlerroman* applies to various narratives of artistic inauguration, including painting, acting, etc. Nevertheless, Roberta Seret has shown that *Künstlerromans*—given their significant autobiographical component—were more often than not novels about writers, even in cases in which the authors sought to disguise their true identity by addressing a different art form, painting in most cases. See Roberta Seret, *Voyage into Creativity: The Modern Künstlerroman* (New York: P. Lang 1992).

41. Maurice Beebe, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 5–6.

42. These uprooted protagonists were not only fiction writers but also scholars who devoted themselves to the documentation of the history of Hebrew literature, a crucial part of the Hebrew national revival project. See Iris Parush, *Kanon Sifrutit ve'idiologiya le'umit* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik and Ben Gurion University, 1992), 10.

43. M. Y. Berdichevsky, "Orva parah," in *Romanim ktsarim* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1971), 102–3.

44. Y. H. Brenner, "Ba-choref," in *Ktavim* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1977), 95–267.

45. Ironically enough, Ahad Ha'am—the literary father figure as he is described in “Ba-choref”—did not display much fatherly behavior toward the young Brenner when he rejected the first draft of “Ba-choref.”

46. H. N. Bialik, “Shiratenu ha-tseira,” in *Kol kitvey H. N. Bialik* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1946), 230–35.

47. See Y. H. Brenner, *Ktavim* (Tel Aviv: Merhavia, 1977), 3:823–85; *Ktavim* (Tel Aviv: Merhavia, 1977) 4:1444–46.

48. Yosef Klausner, *Historia shel ha-sifrut ha'Ivrit ha-chadasha*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Achiassaf, 1952).

49. Dov Sadan, “Massat mavo,” in *Avney Bedek: Al safrutenu masa ve'agapeha* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1962), 9–66.

50. See, for instance: Avner Holtzman, *Ahavot Zion: Panim ba'sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-hadasha* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2006), 319–463; Michael Gluzman, *Ha-guf ha-tsiyoni*; Michal Arbel, “Gavriut ve'nostalgia: Kria be'Hu halah basadot le'Moshe Shamir al reka bnei doro,” *Madei ha-yahadut* 39 (1999): 53–66.

51. Gershon Shaked, *Ha-siporet ha-Ivrit 1880–1980* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1993), 4:14–17.

52. Hannah Naveh, “Leket, peah ve'shiheha: Haayim mihutz lakanon,” in *Min, politica, migdar* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1999), 49–106.

53. Amos Oz, for instance, in his early story “Minzar ha-shatkanim” (“The Trappist Monastery”) presents the conflict between Itchek, the legendary Palmach commander and father figure, and his metaphorical son, the weak, effeminate, diasporic medical orderly Nahum Hirsch. Although Itchek's superiority and ultimate sabra-like, native-Israeli qualities are put in question—with the revelation, for instance, toward the end of the story that Yiddish is in fact Itchek's mother tongue, not Hebrew as expected from a true sabra—the text nevertheless upholds that the supposedly innate Israeli aspiration is to resemble and conform to the virile, upright sabra father figure. Amos Oz, “The Trappist Monastery,” in *Where the Jackals Howl*, trans. Nicholas de Lange and Phillip Simpson (New York: Harcourt, 1981), 84–106.

54. Gershon Shaked, *Ha-siporet ha-Ivrit 1880–1980* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1998), 5:39–44; Nurit Gertz, *Hirbat hiz'a ve-haboker she'lemahart* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1983).

55. See Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women: Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth-Century European Jewish Society*, trans. Saadya Sternberg (Lebanon, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 2004).

56. S. Y. Agnon, “In the Prime of Her Life,” in *Eight Great Hebrew Short Novels*, ed. Alan Lilchuk and Gershon Shaked (New Milford, Conn.: Toby Press, 1983), 196.

57. See Michael Gluzman, “The Invisible Revolution: Rereading Women's Poetry,” in *The Politics of Canonicity: Lines of Resistance in Modernist Hebrew Poetry* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 100–140.

58. Sadan, “Massat Mavo,” 53.

59. *Ibid.*

60. Yael S. Feldman, *No Room of Their Own: Gender and Nation in Israeli Women's Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 3.

61. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt/Harvest Books, 1981), 77.

62. Yitshak Erter, *Ha-tsofeh le-Beyt Yisrael* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1996).

63. Hamutal Tsamir, *Be'shem ha-nof: Le'umiut, migdar ve'subjectiviut ba-shirah ha-Yisraelit beshnot ha-shamishim ve-hashishim* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2006).

64. See, for instance, Alan Mintz, "The Boom in Israeli Fiction: An Overview," 55–60, in *Translating Israel: Contemporary Hebrew Literature and Its Reception in America*. Lebanon, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 1997.

65. See Yael S. Feldman, *No Room of Their Own*; Nurit Govrin, *Ha-mahtzit ha-rishona: Dvora Baron: Ha-yeha ve-yetsirata* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1988).

66. Yaffa Berlovitch, "Siporet miyabeshet avuda," in *Sheani adama ve-adam: Sipurei nashim ad kom ha-medina* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 2002), 335.

67. Gershon Shaked, *Ha-siporet ha-Ivrit 1880–1980* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1988), 3:84–87.

68. Dan Miron, *Imahot me'yasdot, achayot chorgot* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1991).

69. Michael Gluzman, "The Invisible Revolution: Rereading Women's Poetry."

70. See Dana Olmert, *Bitnuat safa ikeshet: Ktiva ve'ahava be'shirat ha'meshorerot ha'rishonot* (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 2012); Shira Stav, *Aba ani koveshet* (Or-Yehuda: Dvir, 2014).

71. Esther Fuchs, *Israeli Mythologies: Women in Contemporary Hebrew Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).

72. Lily Rattok, "Kol isha makira et zeh," in *Hakol he-acher: Siporet nashim Ivrit*, ed. Lily Rattok (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1994), 261–350.

73. Pnina Shirav, *Ktiva lo tama: Emdat siakh ve'yezugei nashiut be'yetsirotehen shel Yehudit Hendel, Amalia Kahana-Carmon ve'Ruth Almog* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1998).

74. Sheila Jelen and Shachar M. Pinsker, *Hebrew, Gender, and Modernity: Critical Responses to Dvora Baron's Fiction* (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2007).

75. See Orian Zakai, "Zion of Their Own."

76. Tova Cohen, "Betoch ha-tarbut umichutsa lah, al nikhus 'sfat ha'av' kederekh le'itsuv intelektualni shel he-ani ha-nashi," in *Sadan: Mehkarim be'sifrut Ivrit* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1996), 2:74–75; Wendy Zieler, *And Rachel Stole the Idols: The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Women's Writing* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004).

77. Gershon Shaked, *Ha-siporet ha-Ivrit 1880–1980* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1998), 5:39–44.

78. Shaked, *Ha-siporet ha-Ivrit*, 5:43.

79. Baruch Kurzweil, *Massot al sipurei Agnon* (Jerusalem: Schocken Books, 1970), 200–201.

80. On the popular noncanonical influences on Agnon's work, see Eliezer Meir Liphshitz, *Ktavim*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Mosad ha'ra'v Cook, 1953) and Gershon Shaked, *Panim aherot be'yetsirato shel S. Y. Agnon* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1989), 148.

## Chapter 1

The chapter epigraph is based on a speech Hendel made at the award ceremony for the Agnon Prize in 1988, which was recorded in an essay in the literary supplement of the *Haaretz* daily newspaper on December 8, 1989, under the headline "Al ha-et ha-haser" ("On the Absent Pen").

1. This is an expression appearing on the cover of Nitza Ben-Dov's book *Ve'hi tehi-*

*latekh: Iyunim be-yetsirot shel S. Y. Agnon, A. B. Yehoshua ve'Amos Oz* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken Books, 2007).

2. Amos Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, trans. Nicholas de Lange. Orlando: Harcourt, 2004.

3. A. B. Yehoshua, *Ha-kir ve'hahar: Metzuito ha-losifrut shel ha-sofer be'Yisrael* (Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1989), 126.

4. See Paul de Man's discussion of the rhetoric of blindness in literary criticism: Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1983), 142–65.

5. Dan Miron, *Ha-rofe ha-medume: Iyunim ba-sifrut ha-Yehudit ha-klasit* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1995). Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975).

6. Yehudit Hendel, "Al ha-et ha-haser." *Haaretz*, December 8, 1989.

7. S. Y. Agnon, "Otiot ve'sofrim: Ba'universita ha-Ivrit be'Yerushalayim bekabalat ha-pras shel universitat New York," in *Me'atmi el atmi* (Jerusalem: Schocken Books, 1976), 74.

8. Hendel wrote most of her early stories in the late 1940s and the early 1950s. The first work to be discussed at length here, the novella "Almanato shel Eliezer" ("Eliezer's Widow"), was first published in 1947 but was included in Hendel's first collection of short stories, *Anashim aherim hem* (*They Are Other People*), published in 1950. I therefore take the liberty of including the novella in this chapter's discussion of Hendel's work from the 1950s.

9. Hendel's first story, "Becavut orot" ("Lights Out"), was published in 1942 in the journal of the Kibbutz movement, *Mi-bifnim*. Yehudit Hendel, "Becavut orot" *Mi-bifnim* (April 1942): 85–92.

10. Yehudit Hendel, *Anashim aherim hem* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 2000).

11. Yehudit Hendel, *Re'hov ha-madregot* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1998). All translations from the novel and the novella "Almanato shel Eliezer" cited in this chapter are by Rebecca Gillis.

12. Azriel Uhmani, Shlomo Tanay, and Moshe Shamir, eds., *Dor Ba-Aretz—Antologiya shel sifrut Yisra'elit* (Merhavya: Sifriyat poalim, 1959).

13. Avner Holtzman, *Ahavot Zion: Panim ba'sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-hadasha* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2006), 332. As Holtzman himself points out, however, in retrospect the anthology was published at a point where this Palmach generation group of writers were losing their primacy in the literary scene. In the same year, A. B. Yehoshua, Amalia Kahana-Carmon, and Aharon Appelfeld released their first books, presaging the rise of a new literary generation. It appears that the editors were themselves aware of the changes taking place in Hebrew literature, commenting in the introduction that they "have in no way attempted to include in this anthology all the writers who could be thought part of that generation in one way or another" (*Dor ba'aretz*, 1).

14. Yosef Lichtenbaum, "Yehudit Hendel," *Ha-poel ha-tsair*, July 24, 1956.

15. Hanna Bat-Miriam, "Anashim vesimtaot be-sipurei Yehudit Hendel," *Lamerhav*, May 1969.

16. Gershon Shaked, *Ha-siporet ha-Ivrit 1880–1980* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1988), 3:121.

17. Yehudit Hendel, *Ha-koah ha-aher* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1984).

18. Pnina Shirav, *Ktiva lo tama: Emdat siakh ve'yezugei nashiut be'yetsirotehen shel*

*Yehudit Hendel, Amalia Kahana-Carmon ve'Ruth Almog* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1998), 48–114; Lily Rattok, “Kol isha makira et zeh: Al kovetz ha-sipurim ‘Kesef katan’ shel Yehudit Hendel,” *Epirion* 15 (1989): 11–17; Yael S. Feldman, *No Room of Their Own: Gender and Nation in Israeli Women’s Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 181.

19. Shirav, *Ktiva lo tama*, 30.

20. Yael S. Feldman, “From Feminist Romance to an Anatomy of Freedom: Israeli Women Novelists,” in *The Boom in Contemporary Israeli Fiction*, ed. Alan Mintz (Lebanon, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 1997), 76. It should be pointed out that some of these scholars identified a certain subversive ideological potential in Hendel’s early prose, albeit not couched in terms of gender. Pnina Shirav for example, stresses Hendel’s unusual choice to focus on others’ viewpoints in her early stories set during the War of Independence: parents left behind, bereaved women, the elderly, the sick, and new immigrants. Nevertheless, Shirav also stresses that Hendel’s early stories are immature in terms of her development as a woman writer, and do not specifically deal with gender issues (*Ktiva lo tama*, 49).

21. Talila Kosh Zohar, “Hi lo halcha ba’sadot: Hayitzug ha’nashi betextim shel dor tashach,” *Sadan* 5 (2002): 204–346.

22. Dan Miron, *Ha-koah ha-halash: Iyunim be-sifrut shel Yehudit Hendel* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 2002), 11.

23. See for example: Michael Gluzman, *Ha-guf ha-tsiyoni*, 182–208; Yigal Schwartz, *Hayadata et haaretz sham halimon poreakh: Handasat ha’adam umachshevet hamerhav be safrut ha’Ivrit hahadasha* (Or Yehuda: Kinneret, Zmora Bitan, Dvir, 2007), 239–341.

24. Shaked argues that the 1948 generation writers’ adoption of the genre of Eretz Israel literature as a source of influence entailed rejection of its “anti-genre” elements, including modernism. This impacted writers such as Gnessin and Steinberg, Baron Shofman, Fogel, and even Agnon’s own later *Sefer hama’asim* (*Book of Tales*), a book already existing in Hebrew literature between the wars. Given that this was the case, one can see why the influence of Agnon, as well as such writers as Gnessin and Fogel, skipped a generation and led the literary revolution that put an end to the hegemony of the literature of the beginnings of the Yishuv and the establishment of the state. See Gershon Shaked, *Ha-siporet ha-Ivrit 1880–1980*, 4:18–22.

25. Joseph Klausner, “Safruteinu,” *Ha-shiloah* 41 (1924): 372–73.

26. D. A. Friedman, “S. Y. Agnon,” *Ha-shiloah* 42 (1924): 80–86.

27. Baruch Kurzweil, *Massot al sipurei Agnon* (Jerusalem: Schocken Books, 1970); Dov Sadan, *Al S. Y. Agnon: Kerekh masot uma’amarim* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1978).

28. See in connection with this Dan Laor, *S. Y. Agnon: He’betim hadashim* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat poalim, 1995), 176–78; 192–95.

29. Dan Laor, *S. Y. Agnon: He’betim hadashim*, 178–81.

30. Moshe Shamir, “Im bnei dori,” in *Sefer yalkut hare’im*, ed. Moshe Shamir and Benjamin Tanai (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1992), 3:213, 215.

31. Moshe Shamir, “Safruteinu be’aliya o be’yerida?” *Moznayim* 5 (April 1952): 69–76.

32. Robert Alter, “Ve’hi tehilata—al Nitsa Ben-Dov’s *Ve’hi tehilatekh: Iyunim beyetsirot S. Y. Agnon, A. B. Yehoshua ve’Amos Oz*,” *Keshet ha-hadasha* 19 (2007): 31.

33. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 237-58, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, (1914-1916): *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976).

34. *Ibid.*

35. Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," 311, 316.

36. *Ibid.*, 316.

37. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 251-52.

38. Ruth Leys, "The Real Miss Beauchamp: Gender and the Subject of Imitation," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 172.

39. Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I," in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 1-7.

40. Yehudit Hendel, "Almanato shel Eliezer," in *Anashim aherim hem*, 51-90.

41. "Ha-rofeh ve'grushato," in *Bechor: Ma'asaf ben zmaneinu*, ed. Berl Katznelson (Tel Aviv: Hug Avanim, 1941), 181-92. Citations here from S. Y. Agnon, "The Doctor's Divorce," trans. Robert Alter, in *Twenty-One Stories*, ed. Nahum Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 135-61.

42. Like other sabra characters appearing in works by Palmach generation writers, Gad is only referred to by his first name, echoing attempts to refrain from any hint of exilic traits. The popular, short sabra name Gad is also typical, as Oz Almog has pointed out. See Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

43. Pnina Shirav, for example, points out the affinity between "Almanato shel Eliezer" and "The Doctor's Divorce" but describes Hendel's novella as typical of an early, nongendered period in her writing, when she was still dependent on patriarchal literary antecedents, not yet having found her unique voice as a woman writer. See *Ktiva lo tama*, 93.

44. Peter Brooks describes the modern confessional novel as current in literary tradition since Rousseau's *Confessions*, as a story related in the first person in which the narrator lays out a confession about a regrettable past, before an imaginary addressee. See Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

45. Laura Mulvey, in her classic article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" associates the penetrating, voyeuristic male gaze with sadism. See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 833-44. Michel Foucault also describes in his various works the affinity between gaze and power relations. See Michel Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*.

46. It is interesting to consider, in this context, the various critics who challenged Mulvey's descriptions of the male gaze. David Rodwick has shown that the male voyeuristic gaze also reflects masochistic subordination to the woman and not only possession over her. See David N. Rodwick, "The Difficulty of Difference," in *Feminism and Film*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 181-202. Steve Neale, on the other hand, focuses on the moments where masculinity itself becomes a voyeuristic spectacle designed to arouse in the spectator homoerotic desire. This option is also being examined in Hendel's novella. See Steve Neale, "Masculinity

as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema,” in *Feminism and Film*, 253–64.

47. We may consider, in this context, Slavoj Žižek’s superb analysis of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*. The protagonist, Geoff (James Stewart) is caught up, seemingly incidentally, in observing erotic and criminal events taking place in the building opposite, preferring this voyeuristic situation to spending time with his beautiful girlfriend (Grace Kelly). Žižek argues that both Geoff’s and the viewer’s fascination with what is going on in the building opposite distracts us from the crucial importance of everything going on at Geoff’s side of the window. *Rear Window* is ultimately, as Žižek puts it, “the story of a subject who eludes a sexual relation by transforming his effective impotence into power by means of the gaze, by means of secret observation: he ‘regresses’ to an infantile curiosity in order to shirk his responsibility toward the beautiful woman who offers herself to him.” Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 92.

48. Girard refers to desire aroused by identification with another subject, the mediator, who desires the same love object. The desiring subject, unaware of the mimetic nature of his passion, mistakenly regards the mediator as a rival in pursuit of the same object of desire. But the rivalry is in fact mimesis of the mediator’s desire, who is not a rival but rather an object of wonder, which is what inspires the mimesis in the first place. René Girard, *The Girard Reader*, ed. James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1996), 33–44.

49. As Nitsa Ben Dov has pointed out in this regard, “the readers are left, like Dina . . . to accept the word of the unreliable narrator as empirical fact, or to suspect that this is a reality that the doctor-patient created as a result of his illness” (Ben-Dov, *Ve’hi tehilatekh*, 433).

50. See Miri Kohavi-Manor, “The Nature of Jealousy: An Aspect of the Art of Agnon’s story “The Doctor’s Divorce,”” in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, no. 9 (Bloomington: World Union of Jewish Studies, Indiana University Press, 1986) 295–300; Ben Dov, *Ve’hi tehilatekh*, 85–90.

51. It is interesting to note that Agnon’s story, like Foucault’s genealogies, also situates modernity and its deconstruction at the center. In one of the most famous passages in the story, Agnon’s protagonist screams out: “We are enlightened individuals, modern people, we seek freedom for ourselves and for all humanity and in point of fact we are worse than the most diehard reactionaries” (“The Doctor’s Divorce,” 146–47).

52. See for example Nitsa Ben-Dov, “‘Ahot ahot boiee etzli’: ‘Harofeh ve’grushato’ veoness Dina,” in *Mimerkazim lemerkaz: Sefer Nurit Govrin*, ed. Avner Holtzman (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 2005), 434; Dvora Sheribaum, *Pesher ha-halomot be-yetzirotav shel S. Y. Agnon* (Tel Aviv: Papyrus, 1993), 210; Dan Miron, *Ha-rofe ha-medume*, 280. Here Miron, more than the other scholars cited above, insists upon the hidden homoerotic aspect of the relationship between the doctor and his patient as well as the link between it and the doctor’s aggression which in his opinion is “also a Jewish sting, since the hated, attractive, despised, and infuriating male rival is a Christian.”

53. Traditionally, the rape metaphor in the story and Dina, the name of the female protagonist, are read in terms of a clear allusion to the rape of the biblical Dina (Genesis 32:4–36:43) by Shechem ben Hamor, who then fell in love with and wished to marry her. Instead he and his tribe suffered brutal vengeance at the hands of Dina’s brothers Simeon and Levi. See also Ben-Dov, *Ve’hi tehilatekh*, 72–91.



54. Dan Miron, *Ha-rofe ha-medume: Iyunim ba-sifrut ha-Yehudit ha-klasit* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1995), 279–80.

55. Arbel, “Gavriut ve’nostalgia,” 53–66.

56. Gluzman, *Ha-guf ha-tsiyoni*, 182–208.

57. Moshe Shamir, *With His Own Hands*, trans. Joseph Shachter (Tel Aviv: Israel Universities Press, 1970).

58. Thus, for example, in Moshe Smilansky’s famous story “Havag’a nezer” the Russian-born protagonist becomes a nationalist Jew after reading biblical descriptions of the Land of Israel. He settles in a village in Eretz Israel, but is disappointed when he sees the River Jordan; he jumps into it and eventually drowns. Shay Ginsburg argues that this was a critical, almost parodic text casting doubt on the possibility of national possession of the Land of Israel. See Shay Ginsburg, “Bein safa le’eret: ‘Havag’a nezer’ le’Moshe Smilansky,” *Mechkarei Yerushalayim be’safrut Ivrit* 20 (2005): 221–35.

59. See Hamutal Tsamir, “Mehistoria lemitos: Mitizatziot shel yelidiyut beshirat dor hamedina,” in *Mishkei zikaron: Tefisot shel zman vezikaron betarbut ha-Yehudit*, ed. Yotam Benziman (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 2008), 98–136.

60. Miron, *Ha-koah ha-halash*, 33.

61. Yehudit Hendel, *Re’hov ha-madregot* (Tel Aviv: Habima, 1968).

62. Shalom Kramer, “Sipura shel Yehudit Hendel: Al *Re’hov ha-madregot*,” in *Hilufei mishmarot besafuteinu* (Tel Aviv: Agudat ha-sofrim ha-Ivrim Leyad Dvir, 1959), 300–306.

63. Miron, *Ha-koah ha-halash*, 33.

64. *Kazablan*, Kameri Theater, directed by Moshe Bonim, with Yigal Yadin and Haya Hararit. Later adapted as a musical (1966) and film (1973).

65. “Agunot” was first published in the *Ha’omer* journal in October 1908. I cite here Baruch Hochman’s translation in S. Y. Agnon, *Twenty-One Stories* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 30–44.

66. Gertz, *Hirbat Hiz’a ve’haboker she’lemahart*.

67. Lacan first presented his model of the mirror stage of child development, which later became a basic component in descriptions of the construction of the subject, at an international psychoanalytic conference at Marienbad in 1936. The original paper was never published, but a revised version appeared in 1949. Though from 1936 till 1949, Lacan saw the model as a transient stage of childhood development occurring between six and eighteen months of age, he was later to expand the model to include a permanent representation of subjectivity. I refer in my discussion to this expanded model.

68. Jacques Lacan, *Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l’individu. Essai d’analyse d’une fonction en psychologie* (Paris: Navarin, 1984), 35. Melanie Klein, for example, includes cannibalistic fantasies of swallowing and being consumed by the mother in this relation. See Melanie Klein, “The Importance of Symbol-Formation in the Development of the Ego,” in *The Writings of Melanie Klein*, ed. Roger Money-Kyrle (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1975), 1:219–32.

69. See, for instance, Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 33.

70. Thus, for instance, Nitsa Ben-Ari argues that by the end of the Second Aliya, marriage and family were rejected as reactionary, as a threat to the community. Children were a luxury in the grim socioeconomic situation, and the lack of contraceptives must have made abstinence compulsory, if not fashionable. See Nitsa Ben-Ari,

*Suppression of the Erotic in Modern Hebrew Literature* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2006), 93. See also Margalit Shiloh, Ruth Kark, and Galit Chazan-Rokem, *Ha-Ivriot ha-hadashot: Nashim be-Yishuv u-be-Zionut bere'i hamigdar* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2001).

71. There is a recurrent textual analogy made in “Agunot” between the holy ark and a woman. For discussion of this point, see Shaked, *Panim aherot be'yetsirato shel S. Y. Agnon*, 21.

72. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 315.

73. Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 3–44.

74. Michal Arbel, *Katuv al oro shel ha-kelev: Al tfisat ha-yetsira eszel S. Y. Agnon* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2006), 24.

75. Thus, for example, Orna Golan argues that the story serves as an allegory for the failure of the Second Aliya, which put building the place—the land of Israel—above Jewish values. Golan points out that the father is the main culprit of this failure since his “dependence on the diaspora and his inner connection with it drew him to the rupture realized fictively in the love affair.” See Orna Golan, “Hasipur ‘Agunot’ ve’ha-aliya ha-shniya” in *Moznayim* 32:3 (1971): 217. Gershon Shaked wrote, “Erotic disharmony is disharmony between two sectors of the community (Eretz Israel and the diaspora) which undermines the possibility of redemption of the community” and that “all the characters are abandoned [*agunot*] because they have lost their partners, so that the Rabbi (Dina’s father) also becomes an abandoned soul searching for remedy of the disruption which has befallen the world through her pen.” See Gershon Shaked, *Panim aherot*, 24.

76. Arbel, *Katuv al oro*, 24; Yitshak Bakun, “Al Agunot le S. Y. Agnon” *Moznayim* 46 (1978): 167–79.

77. Dan Laor, *Hayei Agnon: Biographia* (Jerusalem: Schocken Books, 1998), 65.

78. S. Y. Agnon, *Mehkarim veteudot*, ed. Gershon Shaked and Raphael Weiser (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1978), 42–43.

79. Dan Laor, *Hayei Agnon*, 57.

80. *Ibid.*, 58.

81. The melancholic process established by Agnon in “Agunot” continued in his later, ars poetic works and culminated in the novella “In the Prime of Her Life,” which will be discussed in later chapters. The novella opens with a scene of a dying mother looking at her reflection in a mirror and proceeds in this melancholic text to describe the reworking of the relationship between the daughter and her dead mother into another text. This is in fact a literary text, written, as we find out with hindsight only at the end of the novella, by its protagonist Tirtza, who as Agnon’s literary agent writes from a feminine viewpoint Agnon adopts in a cross-gender process of identification. S. Y. Agnon, “In the Prime of Her Life,” trans. Gabriel Levin, in *Eight Great Hebrew Short Novels* (New Milford, Conn.: Toby Press, 1983), 189–248.

82. Miron, *Ha-koah ha-halash*, 26–45.

83. Shaked, *Panim aherot*, 13.

84. Yehudit Hendel, *Te’rufo shel rofe ha-nefesh* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 2003).

85. Yehudit Hendel, *Kesef Ka’tan* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1988). Available in English translation as: *Small Change: A Collection of Stories* (Lebanon, N.H.:

Brandeis University Press, 2003). Yehudit Hendel, *Har ha-to'im* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1991).

86. Yehudit Hendel, *Ha-koah ha-aher* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1984).

87. A. B. Yehoshua, "Ha-koakh ha-aher: Hashiga'on shel ha-omanut," *Siman Kriah* 18 (1986): 424–25.

88. The dialogue between Hendel and Mairovich had another interesting expression in the book documenting the exhibition "Ha-koach ha-aher" shown in 1999, which included photographs of Mairovich's works alongside Hendel's texts. Yehudit Hendel and Tzvi Mairovich, *Ha-koah ha-aher, The Art Exhibition*, curated by Moti Omer (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 1999).

89. Miron, *Ha-koah ha-halash*, 68.

90. Amalia Kahana-Carmon, "Ma asta tashach le'sofreyha," *Yediot Aharonot*, May 4, 1974.

## Chapter 2

The chapter epigraph is taken from Amalia Kahana-Carmon, "Ne'ima Sasson kotevet shirim," in *Bi-khefffa ahat* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1966).

1. Thus, for example, Gershon Shaked stated that "[Kahana-Carmon]'s excellent stories represent an achievement no less great than that of the literature of Bialik and later generations." Gershon Shaked, "Tamtsiot atah leumat tamtsiot ani: Amalia Kahana-Carmon's *Bi-khefffa ahat*," *Moznayim* 24, no. 2 (1967): 96. Critics and authors of her period such as Shlomo Grodzensky also heaped praises on her stories' style and uniqueness. See Shlomo Grodzensky, "Al sipureha shel Amalia Kahana-Carmon," *Amot* 5 (1964): 110–12; Meir Wieseltier, "Anashim—ha-davar ha-nifla beyoter," *Haaretz*, October 21, 1966; Dahlia Ravikovitch, "Hanefesh tluyah al blimah," *Maariv*, November 4, 1966.

2. Kahana-Carmon, "Va'yitvadea Yosef el e'hav," *Maariv*, December 16, 1966.

3. Yona Bahur, "Tshuvah le'Amalia Kahana-Carmon," *Maariv*, December 23, 1966.

4. Saray Makover-Belikov, "Ani megaloman: Re'ayon im Menahem Perry," *Maariv*, November 23, 2007.

5. This episode even came to litigation because of an editor's changes made to the manuscript against Kahana-Carmon's explicit wishes. See Lily Rattok, "Kol isha makira et zeh," in *Hakol he-acher: Siporet nashim Ivrit*, ed. Lily Rattok (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1994), 288.

6. Kahana-Carmon, who was born in 1926, belonged biographically to the previous generation—the 1948 generation—but thematically and stylistically she was a part of the New Wave. Kahana-Carmon herself, in her article "Ma asta tashach le'sofreyha" described her poetic and mental distance from the literature of the 1948 generation (*Yediot Aharonot*, May 4, 1974).

7. On the New Wave in the prose of the 1960s and the analogy between it and the poetry revolution, see Gertz, *Hirbat Hiza'a*.

8. See Gershon Shaked, *Ha-siporet ha-Ivrit 1880–1980*, vol. 5, and Gertz, *Hirbat Hiza'a*. Although this process of substituting grandfathers for fathers, after the Russian formalists, supposedly articulated a distancing from the Bloomian Oedipal model, it ultimately affirmed it. Both Shaked and Gertz described the turn to the grandfathers as part of the aggressive, revisionist relationship between literary sons and their dominant fathers.

9. Grodzensky, "Al sipureha shel Amalia Kahana-Carmon," 110–12.
10. See Gershon Shaked, *Gal hadash ba-siporet ha-Ivrit: Masot al siporet Yisraelit tse'ira* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat poalim, 1974), 178.
11. The festive photograph appearing on the cover of the sixth volume of Shaked's study *Ha-siporet ha-Ivrit 1880–1980* would seem to indicate this. In the photograph, Kahana-Carmon appears as the only woman writer, alongside Amos Oz, A. B. Yehoshua, and Aharon Appelfeld. In *Hirbat hiza'a ve-haboker she'lemahart*, Nurit Gertz also related to Kahana-Carmon as the ultimate representative of State generation literature.
12. Shaked, *Gal hadash*, 178.
13. Shaked, *Ha-siporet ha-Ivrit*, 311.
14. See Lily Rattok, "Kol isha makira et zeh"; Yael S. Feldman, "'Overet lifnei ha-mahaneh': Ha-mered ha-nashi belashon ha'av besiporet shnot hashmonim: Iyunim beyetsiroteihen shel Amalia Kahana-Carmon, Shlomit Hareven, Ruth Almog ve-herot," *Aley Shiah* 50 (2003): 36–59; Esther Fuchs, *Israeli Mythogynies: Women in Contemporary Hebrew Fiction*; Pnina Shirav, *Ktiva lo tama*, 116–94; Rivka Feldhay, "Drash nashi," *Teoria vebikoret* 2 (1992): 69–88.
15. See Feldhay, "Drash nashi"; Tova Cohen, "Betoch ha-tarbut umichutsa lah, al nikhus 'sfat ha'av' kederekh le'itsuv intelektuali shel ha-ani ha-nashi," in *Sadan: Mehararim be'sifrut Ivrit*, ed. Ziva Shamir (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1996), vol. 2, 74–75.
16. Sigmund Freud, "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes," "Female Sexuality," and "Femininity," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 19:186–243; 21:223–52; and 22:112–35, respectively.
17. Freud, "Femininity," 133.
18. See, for instance: Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985).
19. Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 6.
20. Amalia Kahana-Carmon, "Ne'ima Sasson kotevet shirim," in *Bi-khefifa ahat* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1966), 136–51.
21. Avraham Raz, "Shiratah ha-Orpheit shel Ne'ima Sasson: Iyun be'Ne'ima Sasson kotevet shirim," in *Madrich leleket sipurim* (Tel Aviv: Mif'alei tarbut vehinuh, 1976), 40–65.
22. Shalom Luria, "Shirah habaah be'ahava veyisureihah: Al sipura shel Amalia Kahana-Carmon 'Ne'ima Sasson kotevet shirim,'" *Moznayim* 50 (1980): 264–77.
23. Menahem Perry, back cover of *Pgishah, hatsi pgishah: Sipurei ahavah* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 2006).
24. Rattok, "Kol isha" (1994), 266.
25. Feldman, "Overet lifnei ha-mahaneh," 45.
26. Hanna Naveh, "Leket, peah ve'shiheha: Haayim mihutz lakanon," in *Min, politica, migdar*, ed. Daphna Yisraeli et. al. (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1999), 74–75.
27. Lily Rattok, *Namal motsa lehaflagah mufla'ah: Iyun be-sipurei Amalia Kahana-Carmon* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1977), 34–35.
28. Feldhay, "Drash nashi," 87.
29. For a description of the essence of the mystic experience see Gershom Gerhard Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965).

30. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Avodah Zarah* 20a–b.
31. Luria, “Shirah habaah be’ahava veyisureihah: Al sipura shel Amalia Kahana-Carmon ‘Ne’ima Sasson kotevet shirim.” 274.
32. Lily Rattok makes general mention of “the story which she (Ne’ima Sasson) writes in front of the reader.” Rattok, “Kol isha” (1994), 266. Pnina Shirav also points out that the story makes the act of writing present by “a direct quote of the opening of the story . . . in its end.” Shirav, *Ktiva lo tama*, 259.
33. S. Y. Agnon, “In the Prime of Her Life,” 189–248.
34. See Avraham Band, “Ha-mesaper ha-bilty meheyman be’Michael Sheli ve be-Be’dmi Yameyhah,” *Hasifrut* 1 (1971): 30–34; Adi Tzemach *Kri’ah tama Ba’sifrut ha-Iyrit bat ha-me’ah ha-esrim* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1990), 11–24; A. B. Yehoshua, “Av ve’bat bema’arechet lo mu’da’at; ‘Bidmi Yameyha Me’et S. Y. Agnon,” in *Koha hanora shel ashma ktana: Ha-he’ksher ha-musari shel ha-text ha-Sifrut* (Tel Aviv: Yediot aharonot, 1988), 142–64.
35. Ruth Ginsburg, “Bi’dmi ya’mehah metah Tirtza,” *Dapim lemehkar besifrut* 8 (1991): 285–300.
36. Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 33–44.
37. *Rotsah* in Hebrew is a female form of “to want.” This role contrasts with her mother, Leah, whose name means “tired, exhausted,” and who appears in Mazal’s journal as a passive figure, unwilling to woo her beloved for herself and submissive to her father’s prohibition. Leah’s passivity is an allusion to the biblical Leah, and is expressed in other biblical allusions such as one to Rebecca, Isaac’s wife, who is wooed by Abraham’s servant Eliezer (Genesis 24:15–61).
38. This is highlighted in the scene in which Leah breathes in the aroma of the texts Mazal has written after her, thus conflating her passive, erotic role in their relationship and her role as a reader who does not herself write.
39. This process is not, I should mention, exclusive to “In the Prime of Her Life.” It can also be seen in Agnon’s first Land of Israel story, “Agunot,” per the first chapter of this book.
40. For an interesting reading of the father-daughter conglomerate in Israeli women’s poetry, see Shira Stav’s study *Aba ani koveshet (Deconstructing Daddy)*. Stav, however, relates to the figure of the father in Israeli women’s poetry while my discussion of Kahana-Carmon’s prose focuses on the father as a representation of the Hebrew canon.
41. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Sofrim* 16.
42. Yerushalmi Talmud, Tractate *Nedarim* 85, 5–6.
43. “Ne’ima Sasson kotevet shirim” constitutes one of the most outstanding examples of intertextuality between Ravikovitch’s poetry and Kahana-Carmon’s prose. *Hovering at a Low Altitude* by Ravikovitch mentions the inner monologue which Ne’ima conducts after Ezekiel has responded cruelly to her poems: “I am not here / I am on those craggy eastern hills / streaked with ice.” Dahlia Ravikovitch, *Hovering at a Low Altitude: The Collected Poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch*, trans. Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009). There is a notable propinquity between these two texts, which both portray a female speaker who becomes cut off from herself following an offensive or humiliating situation.
44. Amalia Kahana-Carmon, “Im na matsati hen be’eineha,” 101–15.
45. Amalia Kahana-Carmon, “Lev ha-kaits, lev ha-or,” 175–233.

46. M. Y. Berdichevsky, "Ba'emek," in *Sipurim* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1965), 127. Translation taken from M. Y. Berdichevsky, "In the Valley," in *Miriam and Other Stories*, trans. Tirza Zandbank, 41–54 (New Milford, Conn.: Toby Press, 2004).

47. Avner Holtzman, "Ha'shivu lanu et ha'yaldut: ha'talush ke'yeled," in *Ahavot Zion: Panim ba'sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-hadasha* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2006).

48. On the identification between Dr. Bruhin and his father see also: Hannan Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon: Nation Building and Minority Discourse* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 155–56.

49. Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon*, 157–58.

50. Yitshak Orpaz, *Mot Lisanda* (Merhavia: Sifriyat poalim, 1964).

51. Among these are Hannan Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon*; Michal Arbel, "Minzar ha-shatkanim: Aliyato shel ha-jobnik ve-irura shel ha-zehut ha-gavrit ha-lohemet," *Mekhcarey yerushalayim be'sifrut Ivrit* 20 (2006), 285–307; Yitshak Laor, *Anu kotvim otah moledet: Masot al Sifrut Yisraelit* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1995).

52. See, for instance, Amalia Kahana-Carmon, "Shirat ha-atalefm be-meufam," *Moznayim* 3–4 (1989): 5.

53. As noted by Avner Holtzman, the theme of an unfit marriage between an angelic, gentle, and spiritual wife with a coarse, vulgar man who breaks her spirit and even causes her death was a central theme in Berdichevsky's stories. See Holtzman, *El ha'kera she'balev: Micha Yossef Berdichevsky, shnot ha'tsmicha* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1995), 126–27.

54. Amos Oz, *My Michael*, trans. Nicholas de Lange (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005).

55. See Gershon Shaked, *Ha-siporet ha-Ivrit 1880–1980* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1998), 5:39–44.

56. *Kings* 2, 22: 8–20.

57. H. N. Bialik, "Alone," in *Complete Poetic Works of Hayim Nahman Bialik*, vol. 1 (New York: Histadruth Ivrit of America, 1948), 122–23.

58. Dan Miron, "Hak'dama tmima le'shirat Bialik," in *Hadashot me'ezor ha'kotev: Iyunim ba'shira ha-Ivrit ha'chadasha* (Tel Aviv: Zmora Bitan, 1993), 493.

59. Michael Gluzman has already acknowledged the feminine aspect of the tear in Bialik's poetry, as revealed in the poem "The City of Slaughter," in which the speaker denies his own identification with the mother in favor of a male rhetoric of rage and aggression. See Gluzman, "Hoser koah—ha-mahala ha-mevisha beyoter: Bialik and Kishinev pogrom," in *Be'ir ha-hariga—bikur me'uchar bi-melot me'ah shanah la-po'ema shel Bialik*, ed. Dan Miron (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2005), 34.

60. Amalia Kahana-Carmon, "Lihot isha soferet," *Yediot Aharonot*, April 13, 1984.

61. Amalia Kahana-Carmon, "Muskalot rishonim," in *Bi-khefifa ahat* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1966), 234–43.

62. Amalia Kahana-Carmon, *Ve'yareah be'emek Ayalon* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1971).

63. Amalia Kahana-Carmon, "Nusakh ishi: Re'ayon im Yitshak Betsalel," *Masa*, November 11, 1966.

64. Amalia Kahana-Carmon, "Hitrosheshut," in *Bi-khefifa ahat* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1966), 152–74.

65. Feldhay, "Drash nashi," 81.

### Chapter 3

The chapter epigraph is from Yehudit Oriyan Ben Hertsl, "Lesachek et Tatiana ule-hitahev behamorim: Al tofaot signon be 'Shida ve'shidot,'" *Maariv*, January 17, 1975.

1. Dahlia Ravikovitch, "Rachel Eitan shrira ve'kayemet," *Shishi: Tikshoret, tarbut*, November 17, 1995.

2. Rachel Eytan, *Ba'rakia ha-hamishi* (Tel-Aviv: Am oved, 1962). All quotations from the novel are taken from the English translation: *The Fifth Heaven*, trans. Philip Simpson (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985).

3. Rachel Eytan, *Shida ve'shidot* (Tel Aviv: Am oved, 1974).

4. During the years that followed publication of *Shida ve'shidot* and until her death, Eytan published several short stories in newspapers and literary journals as well as chapters of an unfinished work entitled *Mishlachat malachei reim* (*A Delegation of Angels on High*).

5. Gershon Shaked, *Gal hadash ba'siporet ha-Ivrit* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat poalim, 1974), 68.

6. Alex Zehavi, "He'arot le'rezensia," *Yediot Aharonot*, November 20, 1974.

7. Dan Miron, "Romanim, romanim: *Shida ve'shidot*," *Ha-doar*, May 30, 1975.

8. See, for instance, Shosh Mimon's account of the responses to Eytan and her work in light of the sensational Rina Shani affair. Mimon, "Bein shtei nashim," *Yediot Aharonot*, June 6, 1986.

9. Yoram Kanyuk, "Ra'ayon im Rachel Eytan," *Yediot Aharonot*, June 6, 1986.

10. Aharon Meged, *Al Etsim ve'avanim* (Tel Aviv: Am oved, 1973); *Le'an ne'elam Daniel Wax?* directed by Avraham Heffner (Tel Aviv: Ha'ozen hashlshit, 2011). Heffner's film was released in 1972 and exposes his fascination with the possibilities of living abroad as well as Israeli society's occult desire to punish artists leaving the country. They were seen as living empty lives across the Atlantic, devoid of real feeling or meaning as embodied by the protagonist of the movie, a *yored* singer.

11. Taken from an interview conducted by Esty Segal on her blog: <http://www.notes.co.il/esty>.

12. In effect, the first academic essay devoted to Eytan's work was published in 1995 by Tamar Mishmar. The article, based on Mishmar's M.A. thesis, suggested a feminist and postcolonialist reading of Eytan's prose. However, like the thesis on which it is based, Mishmar's essay relates exclusively to Eytan's first novel, ignoring the second. Tamar Mishmar, "Ein osim lehem me'idiologi'ot: Hanicha kefula be *Ba'rakia ha-hamishi* le'Rahel Eytan," *Teoria ubikoret* 7 (1995): 147–58.

13. Uri Nissan Gnessin, "Hatsida," in *Kol ktavav* vol. 1 (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1982), 135–74.

14. David Fogel, *Hayei nisuim* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1986). All quotations are from the English translation: David Vogel, *Married Life*, trans. Dalya Bilu (London: Peter Halban Publishers, 1988).

15. Mishmar, "Ein osim lehem me'idiologi'ot: Hanicha kefula be *Ba'rakia ha-hamishi* le'Rahel Eytan," *Teoria ubikoret* 7 (1995): 156.

16. I refer here to the term "heterotopia," coined by Michel Foucault in 1967 to mean "other places." The Foucauldian "other place" is a kind of negative space, situated at the heart of every society, which lends the society meaning thanks to the distinction it makes between the normal and the abnormal. See Michel Foucault, "Des espaces autres," *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5 (October 1984): 46–49.

17. Genesis 39.

18. Tamar Mishmar reads the scene as centering on an “encounter with a male subject,” that is, Ketzale, whom she sees as a normative male substitute for the inter-female relations among the girls at the orphanage (Mishmar, 157). I disagree with this reading, arguing that the text makes it very difficult to view Ketzale as any kind of male partner, but rather as a helpless child, dependent on Maya for protection.

19. Rachel Eyton, *Shida ve’shidot*, 47. All translations from *Shida ve’shidot* in this chapter are by Rebecca Gillis.

20. Hannan Hever sees this phenomenon of Statehood Generation literature as paradoxical. Major literature, of the national majority, blurs its awareness of majority and evades responsibility by writing a “national allegory” that disrupts “the spheres between libidinal needs and social deployment of power.” See Hannan Hever, “Rov ke’miut le’umi be’siport Yisraelit me’reishit shnot hashishim,” *Siman Kria* 22 (1991): 330.

21. Linda Huf, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: The Writer as Heroine in American Literature* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1983), 1.

22. See chapter 1 of this book, “Writing, Nationhood, Manhood: The Holy Trinity of Modern Hebrew Literature.”

23. Dan Miron, *Hahaim be’apo shel hanetzah: Yetzirato shel Uri Nissan Gnessin* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1997), 150.

24. *Ibid.*, 159–60.

25. Ada Tzemach, “Kria be-‘Hatsida,” *Dapim le-mechkar be-safrut* 7 (1990): 31.

26. Uri Nissan Gnessin, “Ezel,” in *Kol ktavav*, 1:379–485; “Beside,” in “Beside” and *Other Stories*, ed. Rachel Albeck-Gidron, trans. Hillel Halkin (New Milford, Conn.: Toby Press, 2005), 179–297.

27. Dan Miron, *Hahaim be’apo shel hanetzah*, 588.

28. On this tangled literary affair see Tamar Merin, “The Purloined Poem: Lea Goldberg Corresponds with Gnessin (and with Celia Dropkin) in *Letters from an Imaginary Journey*,” *Mikan Literary Journal* 17 (2016): 31–54.

29. David Fogel, *Hayei nisuim* (Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1986). All quotations are taken from David Vogel, *Married Life*, trans. Dalya Bilu (London: Peter Halban Publishers, 1988).

30. It is interesting to consider the possibility that Fogel himself was inspired by Gnessin’s “Hatsida” while writing *Married Life*. This possibility can be reinforced by the fact that Fogel testified to Gnessin’s influence on him in his essay “Lashon ve-signon be-sifrutenu ha-tse’ira” (“Language and Style in Our Young Literature”). See David Fogel, “Lashon ve-signon be-sifrutenu ha-tse’ira,” *Siman Kriah* 3–4 (1974): 367–72. Menahem Perry and Gershon Shaked also referred to the affinities between both writers in their afterwords to the Hebrew edition of the novel. Menahem Peri, “He’ara al nusakh ha-sefer” (“A Note on the Book’s New Version”), in *Hayei nisuim*, 331–33.

31. See Michael Gluzman, “The Politics of Simplicity in Modernist Hebrew Poetry: Rereading David Fogel,” *Prooftexts* 13:1 (1993): 21–43.

32. See Dan Miron, *Imahot me’yasdot, achayot chorgot*.

33. See Gershon Shaked, “David Fogel: Sofer shel hulin,” review of *Married Life* by David Vogel, *Ha-arets*, October 5, 1973; Gabriel Moked, “David Fogel kemesaper,” review of *Married Life* by David Vogel, *Moznayim* 18:6 (1964): 426–33; Ehud Ben-Ezer, “Hayei nisu’im: Kri’aa efscharit,” review of *Married Life* by David Fogel, *La’mehar Masa*, February 28, 1969.



34. It is interesting to mention, in this regard, both novels' relation to theater. Gershon Shaked, in the afterword to the new Hebrew edition of *Married Life*, addressed the dramatic and theatrical structure of the novel. Indeed, in 1989 the novel was adapted by Hayim Merin, for a play that was staged at the Haifa Theater and directed by Gdalia Besser. Another theatrical version of the novel was staged in Tmuna Theater in 2007 and directed by Dalia Shimko. The novel *Shida ve'shidot* is also typified by a theatrical structure, as mentioned. Moreover, the female protagonist is a playwright whose work is being staged.

35. It is no surprise that, like Fogel's poetry during the first decades after it was written, *Married Life* was seen as "an interruption in Hebrew literature's blood circulation," as Menahem Peri put it in the new Hebrew edition of the novel.

36. Dan Miron, "Matai nechdal 'legalot' et Fogel," *Yediot Aharonot*, June 2, 1987.

37. Moshe Shlanger, "Reshimat bikoret: *Hayei nisum*," review of *Married Life* by David Fogel, *Ktuvim*, May 1930.

38. See Shimon Zandbank, "Gustav Mahler vehagoel nefesh," *Siman Kriah* 5 (1976): 466–68; A. B. Yaffe, "Shida ve'shidot," *Moznayim* 3:40 (1975): 230–31.

39. One exception is a review by Ehud Ben-Ezer, who gave one of the few positive reviews that have been ever written about *Shida ve'shidot*. In this review, Ben-Ezer mentions Amnon Shatz's tendency to undermine his wife's writing as a significant component of their abusive relationship. However, Ben-Ezer does not directly relate to the effect of this abuse on the progression of Aviva's literary career. See Ehud Ben-Ezer, "Shida ve'shidot," review of *Shida ve'shidot* by Rachel Eytan, *Al ha-mishmar*, December 12, 1974.

40. Ecclesiastes 2:8, *The Koren Bible*, trans. Harold Fisch (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1977). The King James Bible translates "shida ve'shidot" as "of all sorts." *The Bible: Authorised King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

41. For example when Gurdweill's baby son Martin cries, Lotte asks Gurdweill, "Does Thea breastfeed him?" and when he answers in the affirmative, she scolds him: "I thought that you . . . Ha ha ha! Since you do everything else!" (Vogel, *Married Life*, 346–47).

## Epilogue

1. Hana Hertsig, *Ha-kol ha-omer: Ani—me'gamot ba'siporet ha-Yisraelit shel shnot ha-shmonim* (Tel Aviv: Open University, 1998).

2. Hannan Hever, "Tnu lo bad'ranim ve'yanuach beshalom," in *Canoni ve'popolari be'idan shel kibush*, ed. Yael Shapira, Omri Herzog, and Tamar S. Hess (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2007), 193–207.

3. Hannah Naveh, "Leket, pea ve'shiheha," 68.

4. *Ibid.*, 69.

5. Feldman, *No Room of Their Own*, 230.

6. Yehudit Hendel, *Te'rufo shel rofe ha'nefesh* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 2002).

7. Dan Miron also addressed the homoerotic relationship of Elhanan to his dead friend. See "Ha-rofe ha-medume ve'hamara hashvura," *Aley-Shiach* 50 (2003): 12–33.

8. Yehudit Katzir, *Hineh ani ma'thila* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 2003).

9. Zeruya Shalev, *Hayei ahavah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1997); in English translation:

*Love Life*, trans. Dalya Bilu (New York: Grove Press, 2000). All quotations from the novel from now on will be taken from the English translation.

10. Freud, "Femininity," 133.

11. A good example of this is the word "irbuvia," which means "mixing" or "shuffling" in Hebrew. Agnon uses this word in his story "Giv'at ha-hol" ("The Hill of Sand") to describe Hemdat's—the protagonist's—impression of his beloved's room, which serves as a metonymy of her, herself a manly woman who disrupts the protagonist's masculine identity. S. Y. Agnon, "Giv'at ha-hol," *Al kapot ha-manul* (Jerusalem: Schocken Books, 1961), 359.

12. See Butler's criticism of the dichotomy between identification and desire as outlined in chapter 2 of this book.

13. Yigal Schwartz, "Ha'yefeifya she'bahara le'hamshich lishon: Al ha'emda ha'nasit hat'ranit shel ze'ruya shalev," *Zafon* 6 (2000): 108.

14. The literary impact of the legend as a female alternative to the male talmudic legends has also been recognized by Yigal Schwartz. See "Ha'yefeifya she'bahara le'hamshich lishon: Al ha'emda ha'nasit hat'ranit shel ze'ruya shalev," *Zafon* 6 (2000): 111.

15. David Grossman, *Sefer ha-dikduk ha-pnimi* (Tel-Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1991); *The Book of Intimate Grammar*, trans. Betsy Rosenberg (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1994); *Ayen erekh: Ahava* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 1988); *See Under: Love*, trans. Betsy Rosenberg (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1989).



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- . "The Doctor's Divorce." Translated by Robert Alter. In *Twenty-One Stories*, edited by Nahum Glatzer, 135–61. New York: Schocken Books, 1970.
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