The Poetics of Horror: Representations of Violence Against Women in Israeli Women's Literature

Shai Rudin, Levinsky College of Education, Tel-Aviv, Israel

Abstract

This article examines the literary techniques used by four leading Israeli women writers, Orly Castel-Bloom, Alona Kimchi, Nava Semel, and Ronit Matalon, to characterize and describe violence against women. This study also reveals the individual and subversive poetic path each takes in representing the horror that is being portrayed.

Introduction

Depictions of violence against women have always appeared in Modern Hebrew literature. Starting with Dvora Baron’s early story, “Fighting Couple” published in 1905, and continuing until today, scenes of violence have increasingly dominated the writing of many Israeli women writers. Since the 1980s, the subject of violence against women has gained unprecedented attention and has become a kind of super-theme in the contemporary literary landscape.¹

This article examines the literary techniques used by four leading Israeli women writers, Orly Castel-Bloom, Alona Kimchi, Nava Semel, and Ronit Matalon, to characterize and describe violence against women. This study reveals the individual and subversive poetic path each takes in representing the horror that is being portrayed.² These authors write about violence against women, rather than the violence that characterizes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet, understandably, the theme of Israeli-Arab tension does appear in their work, but not as a super-narrative.³

By focusing on violence against women, these writers find their own feminist niche

¹ In a number of other stories Baron also describes the physical and mental implications of violence against women, and their surrounding’s indifference to it. See "Ziva," "In the Dark," and "Cruelty". Baron, Dvora (1988). Early Stories (1902-1921). Holtzman, Avner (Ed.), Jerusalem: Bialik Institute [Hebrew]; Baron, Dvora (2001). The First Day and Other Stories. Naomi Seidman, and Chana Kronfeld, (Eds.), University of California Press.
² Other leading Israeli women writers, for example Savyon Liebrecht (in her stories "Purple Grasses," "Hiroshima," "D. Amsalem," "A Mercy," and "A Morning in the Park Among the Nannies"), use realistic poetics and build a linear plot when they describe violence against women, and therefore are not included in the current article.
³ For example: Dolly City and Where Am I by Orly Castel-Bloom, "Two Years" and Bliss by Ronit Matalon, and Israisland by Nava Semel.
and separate themselves from leading Israeli male authors, such as A.B. Yehoshua, Amos Oz, David Grossman, and Aharon Appelfeld, renowned political writers who deal mostly with Jewish/Israeli identity. The women writers seek new literary structures, which withdraw from the realistic narrative that exemplifies much of the foregoing writers’ work.5

Women's attempts to survive assault is often embedded in a poetic layer that requires writers to diverge from the linear realism characteristic of most Israeli literature in the past sixty years, and to adopt alternative poetic forms, which include fantasy, naturalism, impressionism, stream of consciousness, symbolism, fictional confession, and surrealism. Using non-realistic styles is one way literature presents violence against women, or in other words, transforms physical horror into literary description.

This process shows that women writers in Israel do have a political commitment to the feminist movement (and reader), and that their works shift the focus of Hebrew literature from the male experience (the characteristic "rootless Hebrew male" or the "rootless Sabra" depicted since the beginning of the twentieth century), to the lives of contemporary Israeli women.6 Hava Shapiro (1878-1943), the first woman writer ever to publish a Hebrew work of fiction in Europe, Kovetz Tziyurim [Hebrew (A Collection of Paintings)](1909), wrote that Hebrew literature was defined by the absence of women writers, as well as the lack of female

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5 Exceptional Israeli male writers' works that describe violence against women as part of the main plot are the novels Until the Dawn's Light (Tel Aviv: Keter, 1995) by Aharon Appelfeld, which describes the mental, physical, and sexual abuse by a gentile husband against his Jewish wife; Easy Prey (Tel Aviv: Miskel–Yediot Aharonot Books and Chemed Books, 2000) by Yishay Sarid, which describes the rape of a woman soldier through the eyes of an attorney investigating the incident, and Aida (Tel Aviv: Zmora Bitan, 2008) by Sami Mikhael, which tells of the harsh sexual violence perpetrated against a mute Kurdish woman refugee. In these three books, the woman does not relate her story and the narration belongs to a witness-narrator (Sarid) or to a third person narrator (Appelfeld and Michael), who constructs an orderly chronological realistic narrative.

characters, since it was mainly concerned with the "rootless male." Shapiro's pioneering book was the beginning of a contemporary movement that led to showcasing male violence designed to disempower and exclude women. Her most adept contribution could be traced to the way she described spatial violence, namely, how men prevent women from reaching and occupying the public sphere.

By adopting violence against women as a super-theme, Israeli women writers have created a metaphoric bridge which bypasses national politics – a realm that historically "belongs" to male writers – to expose domestic violence, which is their way of revealing the private sphere of Israeli women (stealing the language, as Alicia Ostriker suggests). But this "private" realm does have political ramifications, since it reflects social politics and the connection between violence in the public and private spheres. Reading Israeli women's literature demonstrates that the “outside” (political) violence does indeed seep into the Israeli home and that this has created grave implications for the contemporary Israeli society.

Describing domestic violence "allows" women writers to use a political voice indirectly, since violence is considered a political issue even when it occurs in the home. The critical question that arises is how the physical act of violence is represented in literary ways. What is the "poetics of horror" that these female writers utilize when violence against women is expressed in their fiction?

The works under review in this study exhibit radical feminist adaptation of the fantastic tale structure. Here, the fantastic tale is part of mixed poetics, yet not the only poetics used in the narrative. The women writers combine this genre with naturalism, impressionism, stream of consciousness, symbolism, fictional confession, and surrealism in order to emphasize and intensify the protagonist's reality, which

7 Hava Shapiro (2008) [1909] In My Entering Now. Carole Balin & Wendy Zierler (Eds.), Tel-Aviv: Resling. See her essay, "The Female Character in our Literature," p. 200. Shapiro uses the early term "The Hebrew Intellectual Male." Both terms refer to the Jewish young man characterized by loose masculinity and wandering between two worlds: the Jewish legacy or "the old world" and the "new modern world" that includes enlightenment but also assimilation.


9 Todorov's genre theory of the "fantastic tale" (1970) states that the fantastic requires the fulfillment of three conditions. First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the event described. Second, a character may also experience this hesitation. [...] Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text [...] Tzvetan Todorov (1975) [1970]. The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre. Translated by Richard Howard. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 33.
seems unreal, but in fact, is the only reality the female character knows. Furthermore, the writers criticize this reality by showing its grotesque parts and by bringing “ugliness” into literature, focusing on three feasible situations: abusive romantic relationships, child molestation, and the case of "the second rape"—the rape trial following the malicious act, which then becomes its own additional trauma. When genre and interpretation are joined, it is possible to explore how a distinct literary structure raises awareness to the struggle against male violence. This exploration could eventually answer Tzvetan Todorov's question "why is the fantastic?" and reveal its literary and social functions.\(^\text{10}\)

### Victimology and Rape Narratives

A comparative view of a victim’s testimony in rape trials demonstrates the need to change the current discourse. In her research, Liora Bilski concentrates on the testimony of victims in rape trials. She asks a fundamental question:

What happens when that damage still has no name, when a distinct category or recognized story is missing that could impart meaning to the painful experience? What happens when a suitable story exists with a legal tag, but the injured woman knows neither the story nor its legal title? (66).\(^\text{11}\)

The answer to this question is deduced from Bilski's examination of the testimony of "Eva" at the trial dealing with her rape. Describing her assault, "Eva" could not use the specific word ‘rape,’ and even challenged the notion of the rape, which she knew had happened:

Yes, it was awful, it hurt me a lot. I cried. It was a long time, five hours. My sister wasn't in that night, and he couldn't get it inside. I was so tight, it hurt me so much, and I screamed, and in the middle of it he went to get me some water. I said to him no—but he didn't listen […] (67).

When "Eva" was asked if she was describing a rape, she answered, "Yes. [Pause] But really it's not rape because he stayed with me afterwards, he didn't throw me out or anything" (67). This response exposed the difficulty the rape survivor felt in framing her personal story within the legal definition of rape. A reading of the testimony

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\(^{10}\) Ibid, 158.

illuminates fragmentation, disconnection between sentences — features not necessarily conducive for a legal narrative in search of scrupulous facts.

Clearly, the attempt to describe the "story" of sexual or physical violence does not always succeed when the survivor encounters the justice system. To deliver evidence about the harsh experience she has undergone, the survivor must create "poetics of horror," which according to this author’s definition allows her to describe the dreadful event she has suffered using personal language. Reading the work of women writers who deal with sexual, physical, and spatial violence strengthens this position, and may lead to a renewed definition of the "story" of abuse—inside and outside the courtroom.¹²

This study suggests that there is particular aesthetics for representing violence against women in Israeli women's literature.¹³ Within the context of contemporary Hebrew language literature, it seems that only radical poetics can epitomize women's personal experience. The poetics style of the canonical male writers who in the last three decades have mostly used realistic forms of writing (even A.B Yehoshua, whose first stories were Symbolist, writes today mostly realistic tales) to describe the tension between Arabs and Jews and the social conflicts in Israel, hardly describe violence against women. They prefer to build a linear narrative with one main plot. Family portraits are the built-in structure of the story in a way that preserves the patriarchal convention that women thrive in a nuclear family or a heterosexual coupledom. These male writers also avoid the use of mixed-poetics in one work, and prefer to present the "other" as "a second voice" and not as the main character of their narrative. To find a drug addict protagonist, a prostitute, incest survivor, or rape survivor, one can only find them in Israeli women's literature.

The reach of radical feminist thought into academic discourse, and into the consciousness of those writers aspiring to represent aspects of the female experience either hitherto silenced, or described exclusively by male writers through paternalist

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or misogynist lens,\textsuperscript{14} could be seen as one of the causes for this artistic political choice among Israel’s women writers. Another cause for its precedence may be observed from a sociological angle. According to Simona Sharoni, the centrality of violence against women in Israeli society in the last three decades is linked to "the violent patterns of behavior that are used by the Israeli army against Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip… part of a culture of unchallenged sexism, violence and oppression which women face daily on Israeli streets and in their homes."\textsuperscript{15} Sharoni traces the steep rise in violence against women in Israel to the outbreak of the First Intifada in December 1987 and particularly to the aftermath of the First Gulf War in 1991. Sharoni shows the connections between the use of violence against Palestinians and the increase in violence against Israeli women.

Since 1985, Israeli women writers have received more attention and recognition from critics and readers. Their works convey a central theme—violence, from different angles: scenes of rape, incest, murder, pornography, abuse, child molestation, as well as human trafficking. Moreover, it seems that most of the Israeli women writers emphasize violence against women and describe this phenomenon with more attention than the violence between Israelis and Palestinians. However, despite its prevalence, only a few scholars and critics have probed this phenomenon in the Israeli literary landscape.\textsuperscript{16}


\textsuperscript{16} See also: Orly Lubin (2003), \textit{Woman Reading Woman}, University of Haifa and Zmora-Bitan Press, [Hebrew]; Shai Rudin (2010), \textit{Not Politically Correct: Sex, Gender and State Politics in the Prose of Savyon Liebrecht, Orly Castel-Bloom and Ronit Matalon}, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Haifa [Hebrew].
Addressing violence against women defines female Israeli writers as political writers, a term that has already been established in Pnina Shirav's research.\textsuperscript{17} As previous sociological research has shown, male rapists and aggressors may deny that the injured party is a survivor and might see her as a "legitimate victim."\textsuperscript{18} This concept characterizes not only oppressors, but also the legal discourse. According to Ann Cahill, "rape culture" is a term that defines a social environment where the crime of rape is not only assumed, but is necessary for the perpetuation of other, more subtle forms of gender inequity.\textsuperscript{19} However, "rape culture" can also define the inclusion of rape (as physical and sexual crime) in cultural products such as literary works using a feminist perspective. Contemporary women writers describe rape as a major trauma that haunts the woman long after the actual assault is over.

For example, while critiquing Pnina Caspi's prose, Orly Lubin employs Kate Millett's discourse on rape as part of the sexual politics produced by patriarchy,\textsuperscript{20} and argues that rape is a criminal act that stems from the perception of the survivor as property.\textsuperscript{21} This ultimate objectification has come to dominate the work of contemporary Israeli women authors in the last three decades.

Historically, the background to present-day discussions on rape narratives originates from close observation of biblical representation of violence against women. Whether it is the rape of Dina and Tamar, or Jephthah's daughter, who was murdered by her father\textsuperscript{22} (Judges, 11), (a story that exudes a strange feeling of incest and forbidden pagan behavior), the result is always the same. The biblical narrator does not condemn the violence against the female character, which is frequently marginal and voiceless.\textsuperscript{23} Additionally, as Andrea Dworkin suggests, there is an

\textsuperscript{17} Pnina Shirav (1998), \textit{No Innocent Writing}, Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad.
\textsuperscript{21} Lubin (2003), \textit{Women Reading Women}, University of Haifa and Zmora-Bitan Press, 26-27 (Hebrew).
\textsuperscript{22} Mieke Bal (1988) maintains that the ritual in which young women came out of the house to meet the victor was well known (45). This statement leads the reader to consider the murder of Jephthah's daughter as a violent act rather than a misfortune. In this light, the motive for the murder is Jephthah's latent wish to prevent his daughter from finding another man who would possess her and her virginity.
acknowledgment that intercourse is the "normal" way to use a woman. On the one hand, intercourse is a religious commandment, and on the other, it appears like "sick vulgarity."n24

The Realistic Fantastic Tale of Abusive relationships – Orly Castel-Bloom and Alona Kimchi

While Orly Castel-Bloom’s pioneering poetics have been subjected to numerous and diverse stylistic definitions,25 most critics agree that she does not compose realistic stories. She shows an affinity for post-modernism, fantasy, and surrealism. Notwithstanding the choice of these styles, her writing does not seem to fit the domains of science fiction or fantasy, but extends itself to the extreme grotesque; thus, prompting the reader to feel a connection between the content and the chosen poetics, and to experience feelings of horror along with the protagonist. The harsh reality and the "hostile environment" that Castel-Bloom depicts in her writing suit the poetics that she creates — one which integrates different styles, hinders the absorption of the text, and makes violence present as a theme, and as a narrative device.26

From the start of her writing career, Castel-Bloom has paid attention to violence directed at women, starting with her first collection of stories, Not Far from the Center of Town (1987), specifically in the stories "Heathcliff," "A Diary," and "A Question of Water," and in her subsequent collection of short stories, Hostile Surroundings (1989), specifically in the "Death in an Olive Grove," "Bent Double," and "The Mystery of the Pigs' Heads," and also in her novels Where I Am (1990), Dolly City (1992), and The Mina Lisa (1995).27 Common to these texts is the choice of a poetics that highlights the story of women’s abuse in non-realistic ways,
recognizing that this situation requires an external solution, since the protagonist
cannot fight against her oppressors.

Catherine MacKinnon claims that heterosexual relations reproduce the
asymmetry inherent in a gendered division of power. She sees an immediate
connection between the kind of sexuality expressed in male erotic domination and
female submission, and the dynamics of gender inequality. Emma Goldman states
that "Marriage is often an economic arrangement purely, furnishing the women with a
life-long life insurance policy and the man with a perpetuator of his kind or a pretty
toy. That is, marriage, or the training thereto, prepares the woman for the life of a
parasite, a dependent, helpless servant, while it furnishes the man the right of a chattel
mortgage over a human life." Castel-Bloom’s protagonists fit these descriptions as
they try to survive in a male chauvinist world.

In The Mina Lisa, women's oppression is conveyed through a description of
married life that turns wives into people devoid of desire. The novel presents the
unfulfilled life of a homemaker who gave up her career as a screenwriter to devote her
time to her husband and three children. The realistic tale turns into a fantastic tale,
following Todorov’s typology of the "change genre," when Mina, the protagonist
and narrator, meets Flora, a 203 year old woman with supernatural powers. Mina
finds out that Flora will only eat her old film scripts and refuses to eat "normal" food.
She then understands that Flora is a woman from "another" world. The plot that
opened in a realistic style turns into the fantastic when Flora takes Mina into her
world, and away from her family duties; there she can be an active person with a
professional identity once again. Dividing the novel into three parts – "Exposition,"
"Journey," and "The Return" – makes the surreal motifs an integral part of the events,
and the reader sees the fantastic elements as reflections of Mina's consciousness, all
part of her efforts to write her first novel.

By choosing the Journey motif, Castel-Bloom feminizes this traditional male
genre and is able to present an initiation story of a woman who becomes a writer at

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31 Todorov, 42.
the end of her fantastic journey. When Mina returns home, she immediately wakes her children up, prepares a meal and washes their clothes. The glory of "the return" (as seen for example, in Homer’s *The Odyssey*), is preserved for men. Mina is not presented as a world savvy hero since she is too busy being a mother and a wife. Consequently, when the novel ends, her advantage lies not in any worldly esteem she might have achieved, but in the fact that she now has a story to tell.

Retrospectively, Mina understands that the journey to Flora’s mystical world saved her from her mundane reality and made her stronger. Unlike Virginia Woolf’s famous suggestion, Mina does have a room of her own and a rich husband, but she could not write until she left the real world and its constraints. The fantastic experience, as analyzed by Todorov, is always a break from the acknowledged order, an eruption of the inadmissible within the changeless everyday reality.  

The everyday complicated reality Mina wants to resolve is not just her identity crisis (as mini-wife and mini-woman), but also the difficulty of her marriage. The novel depicts a violent relationship between Mina and her husband, Oved. The evident hierarchy of the spouses illustrates that their relationship is oppressive as well as perverse. Love is absent from the marriage, and the overarching motif is violence, which has become Mina's daily reality. In the realistic "Exposition" she writes about her husband's physical and mental abuse and his infidelity. Leaving the realistic tale allows her to leave the stereotype of "the good wife" and to show her indifference when she hears of Oved's presumed death. Her reaction reflects their lack of connection and her subconscious wish to be free. Yet, she displays the same indifference when she realizes that her husband is actually alive, since his death occurred in the supernatural world.

Alive or dead, he is of no importance to her; as a result, Castel-Bloom does not linger on the description of Mina's sadness (after his death) or her joy (after discovering he is alive). Nor does Mina show any desire to investigate his love affairs with co-workers, hinted at in the novel. Her apathy is another sign that the relationship is void of emotion or mutual commitment.

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32 Virginia Woolf (1989) [1929], *A Room of One’s Own*, Harvest Books.
33 Todorov, 26.
34 This novel can be defined as "fantastic-marvelous" since the fantastic parts end with an acceptance of the supernatural. Ibid, 52.
While in the "real" world there are chauvinist (written and unwritten) laws, the fantastic world makes her stronger and determined to change her real life. She now wants to become a person who possesses numerous identities – both in the personal and professional spheres – and who no longer remains someone who "burie[s] the urge" (36), in Oved’s words. At the end of her fantastic journey she decides to change only one matter in her life – her husband's violence. She refuses to accept Oved's aggression and fights back. The reader, in a retrospective overlook, has no confusion anymore regarding the "truth" of the narrative since the cessation of the fantastic coincides with Flora's death. Mina treasures her fantastic journey as an experience of empowerment. There she was able to rescue women from spatial, sexual, and physical violence. There she decides that preventing men's aggression is not only limited to the other world, but could take place in the reality of her daily life.

On another level, the novel promotes an ars-poetics statement about women's writing. Several types of violence are involved in conveying the statement: textual violence (Flora is also Mina's critic);35 spousal violence (Oved's sneer regarding Mina's scripts and his refusal to photocopy them), and official patriarchal violence (the theft of scripts written by women). These types of violence seem to parallel the place of women writers in the literary sphere in Israel.36 The scripts that Mina wrote and that Flora ate are actually several stories that would have never been told.

Mina is an abused woman who experiences a journey of inner strengthening, and in the end resolves not to allow Oved to beat her ever again. The journey permits her to change from being a marginal person to a leading character in the story she writes. The choice of surrealism enables Castel-Bloom to expose the writer's inner world, and reveals the inability of Mina to protest against the reality of her depressing life. Only in the "other" fantastic world in which the laws of logic do not operate, could Mina save herself and the nineteen other women screenwriters who depend on her and need her protection. The choice of surrealism as a literary device highlights the helplessness of women in the "real" world.

36 On the marginal place of women writers in Israel see: Hanna Naveh (1999), "Leket, Peha V’shikhehah: Life Outside the Canon," In Israeli Dafna et al (Eds.) Sex, Gender, Politics, Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 49-106 (Hebrew).
Alona Kimchi,\textsuperscript{37} in her novel \textit{Lily La Tigresse}, adopts Castel-Bloom's unrealistic poetics in order to build a "hyper-realistic" realm of abusive relationships. The novel takes place in Tel Aviv in the early twenty-first century, and concerns three women who represent the fabric of the Israeli society: Lily, a dental hygienist, thirty, single; Michaela, cab driver, divorced; and Nina, an immigrant from Russia who lives with a violent partner. The novel’s complexity is exposed when Lily, the first-person narrator, relates the story of Leon’s (Nina’s partner) climb in society:

Because our Leon has become a persona grata, people don't hesitate to ask his opinion about more sweeping things too, such as his position on negotiations with the Syrians, or how he feels about unilateral separation, and how he sees the likelihood of a restart to the diplomatic process. What does he predict about the chances of a new Middle East? And what about the cases of killing in Jenin and dumping toxic waste into the Kishon estuary? Does he envisage any chance of Israel joining the European Union before the end of the decade? (183).\textsuperscript{38}

Yet despite the sense of a real-life present-day narrative, as the plot unfolds, Lily metamorphoses from a human being into a tigress and it becomes evident to the reader that the novel mixes genres, retreating from realism to surrealism. In choosing a distinctly surreal course, Kimchi appears to follow in Orly Castel-Bloom’s steps, veering from realism to surrealistic elements of folktales and myths.

Unlike Castel-Bloom who restores Mina to the real world at the end of a fantastic journey, Kimchi starts her novel with realistic descriptions and ends it as a surreal tale, without returning to the realistic form. In the end, Lily as tigress, parts company with the familiar urban world, and begins a journey to her new home, together with her new son, a tiger cub that she received as a present while she was still a human being. Three questions arise: Why does Kimchi make a sharp transition from realism to surrealism? What takes place in the passage between the two styles? And how does this transition effect the reader's response to the text?

As a child, Lily experienced sexual harassment at the hands of the dentist, Doctor Dorian Boyanjo. She relates that when her parents left to run errands while she was having dental treatment, he would grope her body under her clothes. Lily recounts this terrible experience, as well as the sexual harassment she suffers at her

\textsuperscript{37} Alona Kimchi (2004), \textit{Lily La Tigresse}, Jerusalem: Keter and Yediot Ahronot Books.

\textsuperscript{38} English translation is the author’s.
present workplace. She also recalls the violent pattern in the relationship between Leon and Nina, her good friend. Beside inflicting mental and spatial violence, Leon is liable lash out physically too, beginning moderately (shoving, slapping, punching) and ending totally immoderately (kicks in the stomach and face, smashing her head into a wall, swinging heavy objects), and pulverizing Ninush with blows until all the makeup he bought her at the duty-free store can't cover over the torn lips or the bleeding eyes or the cartilage of the shattered nose (28). 39

As the novel progresses, Lily reveals the reality of Nina's oppressed life: relationships with numerous abusers, prostitution, and working for Chingis Magomatov, a loathsome human trafficker. Lily finds it difficult to understand Nina's behavior. But for Nina, a new immigrant with no financial resources, total dependency on any man seems the only way she could survive. Leon, the woman-beater and abuser, becomes a public figure who preaches feminism, and is voted "Man of the Year" by a syndicate of women's journals in Israel. His activity, which includes attending feminist conferences, photo-ops with women workers at support centers for rape survivors, and meetings with female members of Knesset, grotesquely highlights the distorted public image of a violent man.

In the opening framework of a realistic description, readers are shown the lives of men who beat woman: they continuously objectify women, keeping what takes place in the private sphere hidden from the public eye, and winning the status of family man. Only after Leon has gained wide public acclaim does the novel shift from its realistic to surrealistic descriptions. Lily gradually becomes a tigress, and when the change is complete, she avenges Nina's murder. She lies in wait for Leon, and kills him, tearing his body to shreds. With this act, she shows that there is a difference between agency and abuse, and while society ignores violence against women, she decides to make her own moral conviction a reality.

It becomes quite clear to Lily that Nina will never leave Leon, and will certainly not press charges against him. The transition to a surreal world is needed in order to punish the abusive man. Juxtaposing the fantastic and the real allows Kimchi to mirror actual events: the world in which oppressive, beating, and abusive men are protected. Therefore, an alternative system of reward and punishment is needed to protect women in distress. In the precincts of the realistic world, Lily becomes

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39 English translation is the author's.
accustomed to the reality of Nina's harsh life, and sees her as a kind of "deficient woman devoid of feelings" (42). After Leon murders Nina, Lily is the one who "changes her skin," and becomes Leon's judge and executioner. At the end of the novel, Lily and Nina’s first meeting is related. Nina was raped while Lily observed frozen, unable to act. Upon transforming into an animal, she is no longer powerless and could wreak vengeance on Leon. Such circumstances call for abandoning the behavioral and poetic social code; hence, Lily's change into an animal in the surreal part of the novel becomes a metamorphosis that allows her to finally impose terror. One symbol that emphasizes Lily's transformation is the use and development of the sense of sight. The motif of sight throughout the novel indicates that with her transformation into a tigress, Lily’s vision becomes better than that of humans, and this vision carries moral implications. Lily and the tiger cub pace through the natural domain, and the human map becomes "circles in dark green" (305). Male distribution in the public space is abolished, as is the realistic distinction between past and future. Lily strides forward strong and assured, leaving behind a world of vulnerability and dependency on a system that emerges as realistic, but in fact is devoid of reason. The supernatural becomes her weapon against men's violence, as she finally accepts her transformation. The fantastic world restores her powers, similar to the process, which takes place in The Mina Lisa, and in the other works which are discussed here – And the Rat Laughed and "Uncover Her Face."

Rape and Rape Trial: the Symbolist Realistic Story – Orly Castle-Bloom’s "Bent Double"

In Orly Castel-Bloom's second collection of stories, Hostile Surroundings, the writer turns to naturalism to describe the reality of women who experience sexual exploitation by men. Objectifying women is characteristic of the story "Bent Double," which depicts the prostitution of a pregnant woman. This blunt story evokes doubt in the reader, not only because of its non-literary language, but also due to the unusual plot: the protagonist's partner is unsuccessful in obtaining funds for their move and instead becomes her pimp: 

At four a person sick with rotten teeth appeared and told me to undress, that this was his deal with Uri, that I should put out for him and he'd lend Uri the truck and would buy the furniture at such-and-such a price. It sucks going to bed with someone with a rotten mouth, especially when you're pregnant and in the fourth month yet, and you want to keep it in. I don't want to describe it, just to say that in the middle I stopped him because I couldn't take it any more and I asked him to give me air, he was killing my belly… (24)." A deal is a deal" (ibid.), her partner's friend tells her, unwilling to stop the forced sexual act. "You're not such a big deal anyway. Turn over, and that's it" (ibid.). To survive the rest of the rape the woman injects herself with a drug, aware that this is likely to harm the fetus. When the ordeal ends, the woman leaves the apartment and implores the shopkeeper to call a cab. She tells him that she is pregnant and fears a miscarriage. But the shopkeeper, who knows she is a drug addict, does not believe her, because in his eyes pregnancy is the domain of "decent" women. The narrator tries to appeal to the shopkeeper's feelings: "Man, you and me, we're Jews, right? So make the call and lend me a golda (ten shekels)" (ibid.); but their shared Jewishness is not translated into solidarity, and the narrator is thrown out of the store.

Thus a violent male circle is formed, beginning with the pimping of a woman, continuing with her rape, and ending with ignoring her plea for help. The attitude that the rape survivor is a "loose" woman is realized through the behavior of the shopkeeper, who treats her with contempt and disregard. "People passed by me and didn't stop" (25), the narrator says, stressing her loneliness, which resembles the case of the Jewish girl in And the Rat Laughed who was abandoned after her entire family was killed. The woman in Castel-Bloom's is disregarded because she was a drug addict. The story ends with a devastating miscarriage in a shopping center.

The uniqueness of "Bent Double" lies in the fact that the abuse does not end in the sexual act, but continues through the woman’s profound alienation, when the people around her reject her pleas for help.

Castel-Bloom chooses to portray a woman drug addict to demonstrate the way marginality intensifies the severity of this rape. Furthermore, the narrator's marginality augments the disregard for the act and the total lack of.

The choice of ending the story in the city's center is noteworthy because it emphasizes the hostility, and alienation marginalized women suffer. The storyline
outlines "rape economics" by using defamiliarization as a technique that arises from having a drug addict as the main character, and the ‘incorrect’ language used by the characters. Similar to Nina's acceptance of Leon's violence in Lily La Tigresse, this woman accepts her marginality and inferiority. When a woman of a lower economic class is raped, the environment rejects her pain and condemns her. However, even Mina (The Mina Lisa) who belongs to a higher economic status never presses charges against her physically abusive husband. What underscores the connection between economic class and the ability to fight is a reality, which allows men to rape and to act violently towards women. This is a reality that many female survivors accept with resignation and with mistrust in the legal system.

“Bent Double” also depicts "acquaintance rape," which occurs in the woman’s apartment, and thus conflicts with the stereotype of a crime that takes place outdoors, at night, perpetrated by strangers. In such conditions, women, like the narrator in "Bent Double" who appears in the eyes of the environment as "inferior" and as "inviting violent behavior," do not receive protection. The choice of naturalism helps Castel-Bloom present the experience of a "marginal" woman—a drug addict, who undergoes the experience of the "margins”—rape and miscarriage, creating a fit between content, form, and social acceptance. The result of this defamiliarization in the story is a new understanding of voiceless women.

Science Fiction and Child Molestation – Nava Semels' And the Rat Laughed

Unlike many representations of violence against women in Israeli literature, child sexual abuse is a rare theme and appears only in few works. While several works describe child sexual abuse in allusive ways and as a subplot – like "Heathcliff" by Orly Castel-Bloom (1987), Sarah, Sarah by Ronit Matalon (2000), Eden by Yael Hedaya (2006), and Short Story Master by Maya Arad (2009) – the novel And the Rat Laughed (2001) by Nava Semel focuses on the sexual abuse of a five year old girl.

The novel And the Rat Laughed tells the story of a Jewish girl hidden in a pit under a farmhouse during World War II. While she is hiding in the pit, a shelter paid

42 Unlike violence toward men, violence directed toward women tends to come from those they know (French, Teays and Purdy, 1998: 2).
43 Nava Semel (2001), And the Rat Laughed, Tel Aviv: Miskel – Yediot Aharonot Books and Chemed Books. Citations taken from the Australian edition:
Nava Semel (2008), And the Rat Laughed, Translated by Miriam Schlesinger, Hybrid Publishers.
for by the girl’s parents, she is raped repeatedly by the farmer’s son.44 Semel’s writing style combines diverse poetics—science fiction, memoir, written evidence of a hearsay witness, poems, legend, and stream of consciousness. Although they appear to be sometimes contradictory, these diverse techniques merge into a single testimony about the girl's survival despite the sexual assault she endured during the Holocaust. This girl then becomes a woman who deals with the trauma of this rape throughout her adult life.45 The choice of different stylistic modes establishes the point that the story cannot be conveyed by realistic means, but has to crystallize into a "testimony."

The novel starts with the question of "how to tell the story", for the narrative situation requires the grandmother-survivor to testify in front of her granddaughter for a school assignment. Conflicting forces are evident: the desire to tell and perpetuate the story against the desire to protect her granddaughter; and the desire to use literary devices such as "beginning," "end," "hero," "narrative continuity," against the inability to build a coherent and linear narrative.

The "old woman" who remains nameless in the story, realizes that "her story is a tale of amputees" (35), i.e., it is difficult to recount experiences of a child under the age of five. She had no real language then with which to describe the vicious rape of a helpless child; nor did she possess the narrative tools to construct an orderly testimony.

From the fragments of sentences lodged in the grandmother's consciousness, the reader is able to reconstruct the story of the horrific abuse:

44 Among the women authors who have portrayed sexual violence against children in their works we can find Lea Aini and Alona Kimchi. Aini describes in her novels Sdommel (God's Sodom), Someone Must be Here and Rose of Lebanon, incestuous relationships between a father and a daughter, pointing her blame on the mothers who ignore the abusive act and do nothing to prevent it. Aini's poetics includes writing fictional confession, memoir and stream of consciousness – three genres that produce intimacy between the character and the reader. This intimacy serves the character's story in way that the story presented reads as true testimony. See: Lea Aini (2001), Sdommel, Bnei-Brak: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House; Lea Aini (1995), Someone Must be Here, Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad/Siman Kriah; Aini, Leah (2009), Rose of Lebanon, Or Yehuda: Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan.

45 The rape trauma syndrome is divided into two phases, which can disrupt the physical, psychological, social or sexual aspects of a survivor's life. The acute or disruptive phase can last from days to weeks and is characterized by general stress response symptoms. During the second phase - the long-term process of reorganization – the survivor has the recovery task of restoring order to his or her lifestyle and re-establishing a sense of control in the world. See: Ann Wolbert Burgess (1995), "Rape Trauma Syndrome," In Patricia Searles and Ronald J. Berger (Eds.) Rape and Society: Readings on the Problem of Sexual Assault, Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford: Westview Press, 239-245.
The footsteps of the farmer’s son. At five she could count already. Up to ten, and one more. Coming down, closer, his legs heavy, the wooden ladder creaking. The ninth rung is shaky. Ave Maria, Holy Mother, make him stumble and crash. But the farmer’s son knows about the weak rung, and he treads carefully. She counts till she runs out of numbers. She doesn’t know exactly how old he was. To her he was a man. How could she tell? A breed of giants, mean, deceitful, treacherous. She never wanted to grow up (25-26).

Semel avoids describing the child's awful experience, and uses synecdochic language in which every word represents a meaning that is not mentioned. This method allows her to tell the story allusively. Even as the Polish farmer shouts, "Stepan, what are you looking for down there?" (40) The reader must fill in the missing parts, and can never fully recreate what took place between the farmer's son and the little girl in the pit:

Jewish skin, so soft, so smooth.
Jewish undies.
Don’t you dare open your Jewish mouth, or I’ll kill you.
How could she tell now?
Either way, it will end in death (28).

In five short, broken sentences the old woman is able to restore the story of the abuse in her consciousness. In her conversation with her granddaughter, fifty five years later, the grandmother resolves to root out "the story between her legs" (49) in order to give language to the past, "and not because the explicit word is not known to her" (ibid.). The legal words to describe the deeds of the farmer's son—rape, sexual abuse, physical violence, pedophilia, and intimidation—are not uttered (like the testimony of "Eva" quoted above and the other female characters that were mentioned – Mina and Ninush). The familiar "explicit word" does not feature as the one able to describe the personal trauma of the grandmother, who kept it as a secret for over fifty years. The desire to protect the granddaughter merges with the inability to retell the event. Hence, the granddaughter's appeal to her teacher at the end of the testimony, and the statement in her exercise book, "I don't have a story" (65). Shoshana Felman's (2002) typology, explaining the gap between the two narratives – social/legal and literary, could shed some light on Semel's poetics:

A trial is presumed to be a search for truth, but, technically, it is a search for a decision, and thus, in essence, it seeks not simply truth but a finality: a force of resolution. A literary text is,
on the other hand, a search for meaning, for expression, for heightened significance, and for symbolic understanding\(^{46}\).

The need to compose orderly and coherent testimony fails, and the granddaughter succeeds in documenting only a "legend" her grandmother tells her. Hearing the "legend" evokes doubt concerning the story since she cannot interpret it. That "awful" legend (84) is, in fact, a transformation of testimony into a format that encompasses both her inability to recount the horror, and her wish to protect her granddaughter. She chooses to convey a narrative, which seems to resonate with the poetics of a folktale, removing the parts dealing with extreme trauma, horror, and fear. The "legend" is a fantastic tale grounded in the myth of the creation of the world. It concerns the desire of a rat, after the Creation, to acquire the ability to laugh. The choice of rat as protagonist allows the grandmother to distance herself from the events, as well as use symbolic and metaphorical language, clear to herself and to the reader, but remains obscure to her twelve-year-old granddaughter. The story of her ongoing rape is deflected to the margins of the narrative, and becomes a subplot.

The reader, who joins the grandmother's stream of consciousness, is able to compose the fragmented testimony of her escape as a child—-from the Nazi machine and from the farmer's son. The granddaughter does not grasp the meaning of the events because the combination of an evidence-giving genre and the fantastic tale confuses her. But eventually she does document her grandmother's story, and their conversation evolves from a dialogue of testimony into a dialogue of female initiation.

Through idiosyncratic codes, the grandmother transmits to her granddaughter her personal story, at a decisive crossroads in the latter's life, her bat-mitzva. The girl painfully notes that she has not received a gift from her grandmother. However, the grandmother's testimony is her initiation gift. Mircea Eliade asserts that the initiation process youth experiences when they learn to function as adults in their given society, includes identifying the spiritual and cultural values of that society. Among them are

required behavioral patterns, and formative institutions of that society, as well as tribal-religious traditions and hallowed myths. (x). 47

Eliade's portrayal refers to a normative hegemonic initiation, while the grandmother's story fits this definition in a different manner: the social traditions that the grandmother transmits to her granddaughter are associated with oppression of minorities (Jews and women).

The fourth part of the novel, named "The Dream," written as a science fiction piece ("scientific marvelous" according Todorov's typology), 48 takes place in 2099, and turns the private story of the girl and the rat into a well known and researched public story. By that point in history, the story has undergone various transformations and its origins have been lost, a matter of great significance to the anthropologist, Rima Energeli.

In this futuristic version, the balance of power is overturned, and the victimizer, Stepan, becomes the girl's victim, similar to the ending of Lily La Tigresse. The narrator notes, "this capsize of roles shocks me" (166). She feels that the original story is distorted, and therefore is determined to investigate the origins of the poem cycle on the Internet. Like Mina's doubt in Flora's supernatural powers in The Mina Lisa, Rima provokes uncertainty in the story. But unlike Castel-Bloom's novel, here the reader knows it is a dream and needs to fill in the missing part – the identity of the dreamer that could well be the grandmother, the granddaughter, the priest who saved the girl, or even the attacker. 49

48 Marvelous’ because the supernatural is explained in a rational manner, but according to laws which contemporary science does not acknowledge. Todorov, 56.
49 For discussion on the “second rape” syndrome that is implied in the story, see Tsipy Grinberg (1984), “The Image of the Rape Victim in the Israeli Press,” Noga, 8: 8-12 (Hebrew). Grinberg surveys the image of the rape survivor in the Israeli press and in her research shows how the presentation of rape survivors in the leading journals results in the construction of their negative social image. In her opinion, the Israeli press conducts a "character assassination" of a rape survivor:

This character assassination also hardens the one-dimensional treatment of these victims as a sexual object [...]. The word 'raped woman' signifies in fact a negative quality, characteristic of a group in the population, so it is automatically assumed that the woman on whom this definition has been stuck has other undesirable qualities (10).

The attitude of the press to rape survivors as the blameworthy and seductresses stems from the fact that in our society myths exist that only licentious or "immoral" women are raped, hence Grinberg's conclusion that our society maintains a process of blaming the survivor.
In this section of Semel’s book, a collection of poems describing child molesting is rejected by the audience, which in fact distorts them so that the helpless girl is portrayed as bloodthirsty. The choice of the futuristic genre allows the author to expose not only the awful abuse suffered by the protagonist, but also the systemic denial and manipulation inherent in many cases of rape. In those circumstances, where a society sides with the aggressor (verdicts in sexual violence cases are often lenient with the victimizers),\textsuperscript{50} not surprisingly, many rape survivors choose not to press charges, especially at a young age.\textsuperscript{51} As the novel comes to an end, the priest, a patriarchal figure, who saved the girl from her molester, writes about his repulsion not only at effect of the rape but most importantly at the rapist, who contrary to the survivor, suffered no consequences for his crime and was able to get on with his life.

"Uncover Her Face" - Ronit Matalon

Discussing women's writing about rape has two layers: describing the act itself as seen in Castel-Bloom’s, Kimchi’s and Semel's\textsuperscript{52} works, and representing rape trials, as is discussed in Ronit Matalon’s novella. In \textit{And the Rat Laughed} by Nava Semel, the personal story of sexual abuse turns into a public story and becomes twisted in a way that puts the blame on the survivor. Matalon's "Uncover Her Face"\textsuperscript{53} is a symbolistic novella, which highlights the biases that characterize rape trials, and unlike Semel's social criticism, it focuses on a misogynic legal system, as explored and exposed in \textit{And the Rat Laughed}, \textit{The Mina Lisa}, and in "Bent Double."

Matalon's fiction as seen in her books \textit{Strangers at Home} (1992),\textsuperscript{54} \textit{The One Facing Us} (1995),\textsuperscript{55} and \textit{Sarah, Sarah} (2000),\textsuperscript{56} is realistic while portraying narratives

\textsuperscript{50} Bogush and Don-Yihye (1999) in a study on discrimination against women in the courts in Israel point out that the district courts and the magistrate courts hand down light sentences to sex offenders, and the average penalty is only about 15\% of the maximal penalty set by law. Also, they state that the court hardly distinguishes sex offenses from the usual offenses of bodily harm in terms of the severity of the punishment (250-260). Rina Bogush, and Rachel Don-Yihye (1999), \textit{Gender and Trial: Discrimination against Women in Israeli Courts}, Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies.

\textsuperscript{51} Ben-Shalom (1982) reports that only 20\% of incidents of sexual abuse of children are reported to the police. This, she maintains, is due to several causes: fear accompanied by guilt feelings makes the little girl who has been attacked keep her secret; families aware of an act of this kind sometimes choose not to complain so as to save the girl further suffering; also because this act is considered a "mark of disgrace," which is liable to bring dishonor on the child and her family, families avoid pressing charges. Yochi Ben-Shalom (1982), "As harsh as death, as hard as hell: The origins and process of violence against women," \textit{Noga}, 6: 8-12, 31-33 (Hebrew).

\textsuperscript{52} See also Semel's story, "Private Holocaust," which deals with rape in a foreign country: Nava Semel, (1998) [1985], \textit{A Hat of Glass}, Tel-Aviv: Sifriat Poalim Publishing House.

\textsuperscript{53} Ronit Matalon (2006), \textit{Uncover her Face}, Tel-Aviv: Am-Oved.

\textsuperscript{54} Ronit Matalon (1992), \textit{Strangers at Home}, Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad.
that are not linear.\(^5\) The poetic turning point in Matalon's writing is detected in the symbolist novella "Uncover Her Face" (2006), when an unnamed protagonist wishes to burn down her lover's house. The climax of the journey to her lover's house is a gang rape "in one of the structures under construction in the buildings opposite" (26). There she meets a man, who measures the length of her calves and thighs, her waist, her chest, her neck, and her forehead. Then he lifts the protagonist over his shoulders and "unloads" her onto "something that looked like a camping-bed" (ibid.). The protagonist identifies this man and his two companions as "the construction workers." One of them asks her: "Do you consent to a gang rape?" (27).

After being "invited" to participate in gang rape, as if rape is part of a game, the protagonist asks, "What is the precise difference between gang and ordinary?" (27), a question that reveals her opinion that there is no difference whatsoever between gang rape and rape committed by a single rapist. She decides to cooperate with the "construction workers," as does the main character of "Bent Double," but then changes her mind and asks to use the lavatory. The worker explains that "emptying out is against the rules" (28). When the gang rape begins, the reader realizes that the enforced act is not sexual, and the female protagonist becomes the accused in a Kafkaesque court house in which she is asked questions, but is forbidden to use the words "yes," "no," "black," or "white" in her answers. This quick transformation from the rape scene to the trial scene does not eliminate the rape. It is a poetic choice to build the plot as a dream-plot, similar to the feeling of being "out of order" while having to participate in rape trial. Matalon's poetics imitate the survivor's feeling of groundlessness – out of time and out of place.

The three men start by describing her relations with her married lover. She must respond by coming up with various words to confirm or deny what is said. Here a woman is forced to hear intimate details about herself from strangers who apparently attest to her "despicable" character; She is denied the right to confirm or reject what they say, and all she has left with is the word "maybe" which casts doubt on the testimony itself. This situation may explain the trust crisis between survivors of

\(^5\) Ronit Matalon (1995), The One Facing Us, Tel-Aviv: Am-Oved.
\(^6\) Ronit Matalon (2000), Sarah, Sarah, Tel-Aviv: Am-Oved.
\(^7\) And see Hanan Haver (2007), The Story and the Nation: Critical Readings in the Canon of Hebrew literature, Tel-Aviv: Resling, 337 (Hebrew).
rape and the legal system. The lack of trust is the main reason for female violence against male abusers, as described in novels like *Lily La Tigresse* and *Mina Lisa*.

The process in which the voice of rape survivors fades into silence at rape trials is described by Bilski as "mute violence,"58 a phrase that signifies how the survivor's voice — shaped and formed in the court by means of rigid rules of procedure and legal categories — can potentially be obliterated. The phrase becomes real in Matalon's work, as the rape trial she depicts consists of an examination of the survivor, and the rape, in which masculine drivel dominates, and in which the men attempt to direct and control her answers. Having tried to obey the rules and answer "maybe" and "certainly," the survivor disregards the rules and shouts out, "Yes! No! Black! White!" (31) and suffers a violent response from the men. She chooses muteness, and later is released from the humiliating trial.

Matalon thus describes a "paradigm of rape" that transposes the discussion from what takes place in the characters' lives to what takes place in the courtroom. According to Kathleen Barry,

When raped, a victim is expected to have escaped unharmed against overwhelming odds that include fraud, deception, physical force and violence, manipulation, and sheer terror. If she cannot extricate herself from the situation in which the rape takes place, then it is assumed that she was to some degree complicit in the assault; consequently it is no longer considered an assault and she is not truly a victim. Her victimization is proven or disproven on the worth of her word, the test of her character, the chasteness of her past sexual life, the mode of her dress [...]. Nothing outside of herself, not even her assailant, explains the rape. This is the rape paradigm. (35)59

By using diverse symbols, Matalon connects Barry's statement to the "Israeli situation" and to violence against women. The camping-bed, like the male fraternity of the Israeli military ethos, is placed as a counter-analogy to women's vulnerability. The attitude to the rape case of the first-person narrator strengthens the connection between militarism and rape, as discussed by Susan Sered.60 She claims that "rape is an act of violence and conquest that structures the gender hierarchy and repeatedly pronounces it for real" (8). She notes that sexual harassment is so prevalent in the Israel Defense Forces that most women soldiers see it as routine and do not file
formal complaints. Violence against women during their military service is a dominant theme in Leah Aini's memoir *Rose of Lebanon* that describes the routine sexual harassment in the Israeli army, and shows how the discipline officer, who represented law and order, sexually abused her and her female friends in the military base.

For that reason, cases of gang rape in Israel could be seen as a kind of gendered "rite of passage," in which rapists receive light punishments, and in which the dichotomy between "good" girls and "loose" girls is perpetuated. Furthermore, in late 1998, when a gang rape of a high school girl by her classmates in Ramat Hasharon was reported, the school principal called the violent act "an operational slip-up by an 'elite unit'" (Sered, 14). The school principal saw the event as marginal compared with the important task of serving in the army. This attitude might explain, why later, while serving in the army, men may feel that they have the right to abuse women.

The journey of the main character of "Uncover Her Face" to burn down her lover's house represents the existing patriarchal establishment, but as she notes, "[e]very human action contains its defeat" (37), and so the arson fails. She is unable to triumph over her lover or to transform the existing order. It is interesting to note that the female protagonist selects to start the fire with a Sabbath candle. But instead of using candlesticks, she attaches the candles to her fingers and sets fire to the clothes hanging outside the house. By changing the sacred into the grotesque –candlesticks into hands – she transforms the base and foundation of the patriarchal order and its existing rituals, both religious and social.

The choice of burning down the house does not stem only from the tie between the house and the oppressive patriarchal establishment, but through her understanding that since love cannot exist within this establishment (the same

establishment that rejects lesbian relationships, bisexuels, or coupling between Arabs and Jews), it has to be destroyed. Marriage as a social structure cannot permit a romance between the main character and a married man. The affair threatens and challenges the social order, and therefore the she is punished by a sexual assault and a biased trial. In the end, burning the house can eliminate only the physical structure, not the existing sexist social structure. In an interview with Amalia Rosenblum, Matalon stated:

In my story no one is hurt except my heroine. Who gets hurt there, who? Everything stays in place: the courthouse, the bourgeoisie, the house of the bourgeoisie, the target, the wise farmer, the rapists. No one is hurt or shoulders the dubious ambivalent cross of suffering—except my heroine. The house does not burn down in the end […]. And the one who ultimately eats her text again and again—and it's very hard to chew paper—is my heroine.62

Thus suffering remains the lot of the protagonist, who is forced by the judge to eat her writings. This could be an allusion to the additional "house" she wants to set on fire—"the house" of male canonic literature which shuns women writers. Here her goal would be to create a different subversive literature capable of dislodging recognized boundaries. A literature not "wasted on a sideshow," in the words of this character who corresponds with the real life author Amalia Kahana-Carmon.63 The arson, whose purpose is renewed creation, is a subversive measure that establishes the protagonist as an independent writer, stepping out of the narrow boundaries allotted to Israeli women artists, and out of their exclusion from the national narrative. The prophet Ezekiel eats the scroll that contains the words of God (Ezekiel 3: 1-4), but the main character of the novella eats her own words, and has no need for the words of others. The consumed scroll transforms Ezekiel into a prophet, but the protagonist’s

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63 The assertion "I can't be wasted on a sideshow" is taken from the seminal article by the writer Amalia Kahana-Carmon, "To be Wasted on a Sideshow," Yediot Aharonot, 15 Sept. 1985, 22-23 (Hebrew). It deals with the Janus-faced criticism in respect to women's literature and men's literature in Israel. Kahana-Carmon is concerned, among other things, with the role of the Israeli woman writer as 'helpmate' to the Israeli male writer:

According to the dominant approach, it behooves the I of "Mrs. Pencil" to be a kind of helpmate for him, standing alongside the mainstream shoulder to shoulder with him, but as a separate entity on her own, who completes him, and both together function as a team, in which each knows his/her place and his/her tasks. (23)

Kahana-Carmon's writing has been met with a great deal of ambivalence. About this ambivalent criticism see: Esther Fuchs (1987), Israeli Mythogynies: Women in Contemporary Hebrew Fiction, Albany, N.Y. : SUNY P, 87-94.
writings, and her testimony, despite the efforts to silence her, enables her to create own unique language.

The use of a symbolist style mixed with fantastic events demonstrates how Matalon confronts chauvinist rules. She causes the reader to suspect the narrative, and this in turn enables the reader to undermine the male-hegemony that oppresses women. Therefore, in the end, there are two pauses in the text— the first, experienced after reading the surreal events (poetics), and the second, after reading about the institutional violence against the protagonist (thematic) during the rape trial. The first can be resolved when the reader interprets the event as a dream-narrative. The second makes the reader question the validity of the legal system.

**Conclusion**

Helen Fisher contends that once women become financially independent, they express their sexuality with more freedom and also rewrite new codes of sexual behavior and sexual habits.64 One way of re-writing the patriarchal sexual codes is by representing abusive and violent male behavior against women in literature in a way that promotes a shift in the relationship between the sexes, and clarifies that the common traditional patterns do not allow women to live fully or even survive.65

The four women writers examined in this article knowingly turn their backs on realistic poetics when describing sexual, physical, mental, and spatial violence perpetrated against women. Each of the works fashions a unique poetic model, which constructs the story of violence: rape, pedophilia, sexual abuse, mute violence, and physical/psychological violence. Turning away from realistic poetics and adopting "fantastic tale" motifs narrows the aesthetic distance between reader and the harsh violence being depicted, leading the reader to greater involvement with the text. Their exposure to the usual and routine violence observed within a realistic story, which at

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65 Similarly, to write as a woman, as suggested by Cixous and Clement (1986), is "the act that will 'realize' the un-censored relationship of woman to her sexuality," an alternative to the phallocentric tradition. In addition to the way women will express their bodies and their sexuality, and to the new poetics they will create, Cixous and Clement claim that women's writing will deal with "the no-deal" themes, meaning themes that cannot been traced in male writers' works. Violence against women, as presented in this study, is certainly a marginal theme in Israeli men writers' works, and a dominant one in women writers' work. (97)

Helen Cixous, and Catherine Clement (1986) [1975], *The Newly Born Women*, Translated by Betsy Wing. Manchester UP.
its radical fulfillment is presented non-realistically,\(^6\) becomes an effective defamiliarization of violence against women in patriarchal society. The new representation demands deeper recognition of the reality of women's lives.

The ideological position that emerges from the analysis of the different works is a clear understanding that the existing linguistic codes cannot be found in the female story of sexual, physical, psychological and spatial violence, because at stake are male hegemonic codes that are incapable of representing the female experience. Like the testimony of the rape survivor who was presented in this article, and sets forth a "non-routine" story of rape, the writings considered here encourage change in how the "violence story" is told, in order to truly portray the horrors, but also to enable the story to break free of the accepted journalistic-legal narrative. This underscores the conclusion that emotional trauma cannot assume a foreign linguistic, intellectual, and factual garb. Change of the existing discourse is essential to encourage many more survivors of violence to come forward, tell their stories, and press charges against their attackers, transforming the paradigm of abused women. A radical feminist poetics that combines different genres is better able to reflect the individual female trauma; hence female testimony cannot be bound to the existing realistic codes—in literature and outside of it because horror has poetics of its own.

Todorov states that "the fantastic is based essentially on a hesitation of the reader – a reader who identifies with the chief character – as to the nature of an uncanny event. This hesitation may be resolved so that the event is acknowledged as reality, or so that event is identified as the fruit of imagination or the result of an illusion."\(^6\)

The resolution of the conflict between the fantastic and the real world in the works explored here could be achieved via a feminist reading that undermines hegemonic patriarchal arrangements and rules that, ironically, are presented as supernatural in the sense of being illogical. The hesitation Todorov cites is able to fade as the reader identifies with the abused character and sees the fantastic poetics as

\(^6\) See Mendelson-Maoz (2009: 28) who deals with the technique of reducing or enlarging the aesthetic space which affect the moral reading of the text. Adia Mendelson-Maoz (2009), Literature as Moral Laboratory: Reading Selected 20th-Century Hebrew Prose, Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press (Hebrew).

\(^6\) Todorov, 157.
a tool which provides a better understanding of women's oppression. The supernatural events in these works of fiction are literary masks emphasizing actual events taking place in the real world. Changing the violent plotlines of the real world now remains in the readers’ hands.

References:

Primary Resources


**Secondary Resources**


Cixous, Helen and Clement, Catherine (1986) [1975]. *The Newly Born Women*. Translated by Betsy Wing. Manchester UP.


