The Female Rootless Character in Hebrew Prose: Initial Attempts at Shaping her Image

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Abstract
The rootless character -- ha'talush -- was a significant and central figure in Hebrew prose at the turn of the twentieth century. The talush is perceived as a character representing the problems of the contemporary young Jew. This figure provided a kind of social and national criticism of Jewish society in the Diaspora, and in the Land of Israel later on, and became a way in which a critical literary discourse could be conducted thematically and poetically between different generations of writers. At the beginning of the twentieth century, this discourse was male oriented. However, along the male talush, a female rootless character emerged. This essay brings attention to the rootless female characters not only as secondary characters, but also as the protagonists in several major works: "Be-veit Aviha" (Her Father's Home, 1900) and Miriam (1921) by M. Y. Berdichevsky, "Melafefonim" (Cucumbers, 1909) by Y.D. Berkowitz and "Genia" (1904) by U.N. Gnessin— all take place in the Diaspora. "Bamavó" (At the Entrance, 1924) by Dov Kimchi and "Prazon" (Demilitarized Zone, 1940) by Isaac Shenhar are stories that take place during the Yishuv period in the land of Israel.

Introduction
The rootless character -- ha'talush -- was a significant and central figure in Hebrew prose at the turn of the twentieth century. Isaac Dov Berkowitz was the first to identify the term in the title of his story, “Talush” (1904).¹ The name reflected specific characteristics endemic to the time. It became a metaphor for the precarious existence of the anti-hero protagonist not uncommon to early Hebrew literature. While a number of terms had attempted to define the specific features of this character, none were as successful as Berkowitz's. In various stories written by Micha Josef Berdichevsky, Isaac Dov Berkowitz, Uri Nissan Gnessin, Josef Haim Brenner, and others, the rootless protagonist was characterized through geographical and psychological distances from his family, often because he felt disconnected from the tradition of his ancestors and was therefore banished from his father's table. In a number of stories, the archetype was described as leaving his hometown and moving to a big city to study, thus also distancing himself from Jewish tradition and education. He wanted to be cosmopolitan, but tragically, he always ended losing his way as well as his identity without the option of returning home. And if he does manage a return, then it is a late return and doomed to fail. As an intellectual devoted

¹ Nurit Govrin, Tlishut Ve'Hitchadshut (Alienation and Regeneration): 17.
to philosophical issues, he was poverty-stricken and lived under miserable conditions. But being intelligent, he nevertheless felt superior to his surroundings. His worldly failure was predictable, because he did not possess the ability to cope either with life, or with the disparity between the existing reality and his ideology.

The figure of the rootless protagonist, which developed in Hebrew literature during the Revival period, was shaped, according to Hamutal Bar Yosef, by the influence of European Decadence. Bar Yosef argues that Hebrew authors both rejected and adopted the Decadence; hence, quite a few of its features were absorbed in their work. Yosef Haim Brenner, she indicates, uses the term in his literary reviews, but always derogatorily. Even still, in the Me’orer (Awakening), the journal he founded and edited, he published several Decadence-inspired works.

The decadent male archetype was a man in a state of physical and mental degeneration. He had a faulty and twisted morality. He was depressed, neurotic, passive and had no specific ideology, but the most distinct and significant characteristic of the decadent personality was his ‘ennui’ [inner torment]. His natural state of mind was to be in the doldrums; he lived with a sense of emptiness and helplessness. The decadent female archetype, on the other hand, was a ‘femme fatale,’ passionate and even cruel. Like in earlier world literature in which women were often perceived as the epitome of nature— the more natural she became, the more animalistic, and bestial. As Bar Yosef points out, not every characteristic of the Decadence and the decadent personality were adopted by Hebrew writers. It is possible to find various permutations of the rootless character, which employ some decadent features while others are rejected. For example, although a decadent protagonist is not supposed to have an ideology, in many cases he does have a specific ideology or clear idea, or at least is able to set a goal for himself. Brenner’s protagonist adopts the revival ideology as seen in Abramson in Around the Point (1904), or Oved Etzot (Perplexed). In Micha Yosef Berdichevsky's Mahanayin ("Two

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2 Hamutal Bar Yosef, Decadence in Hebrew Literature: 116.
3 Bar Yosef, Romanticism, and Decadence: 175-176.
4 Bar Yosef, Decadence in European Literature: 38-43.
Camps"), a protagonist has his own ideology, following cognitive thoughts and logic, and not submitting to sentimental emotions. The most prominent decadent characters of the period are Gnessin's protagonists in his impressionist novellas. Their rootlessness is deterministic, and the styling is closely related to their inner world. As Bar Yosef states, this lyrical-impressionistic style is one of the features of decadent prose.5 (64-65)

Many works present the talush character as being passionate about the written word. This was seen in his compulsive reading of secular literature, or by being a writer himself, sometimes seen composing his autobiography or researching Hebrew literature. The talush set a goal for himself, or lived according to an idea he believed in and adhered to, but he was bound to fail because he was an extremist and lacked balance in his life. The protagonist's frequent romantic failure marked this defeat as well. While the talush might have been superior intellectually to other men, physically and sexually he felt and in fact was inferior. His relationships with women were problematic and unrealized for they entailed setting down roots along with misconceptions about intercourse and reproduction.

While the issue of erotic failure was connected to rootlessness, in fact, this was not the real reason for his predicament. While many stories did focus on this dilemma, others from the early twentieth century also described talush characters that were potent, charismatic, and courted by women. Though here too, they often suffered from sexual dysfunction and were unable to develop a significant, long-term commitment.6

In its initial appearance in Hebrew literature, the character's rootlessness was described as a result of the emotional and spiritual rift he experienced when exposed to the values of the Haskala movement, the Jewish Enlightenment. Secular texts and

5 Ibid.

6 For example, Adamovich, the protagonist of the novel Be'Ein Matara (Aimless) by Yesh'yahu Bershadsky (1899), or Ephraim Margalit, the protagonist of the novel Etzel (Beside) by U. N. Gnessin, are two men desired by many women but they cannot devote themselves to one woman or to the notion of love (More on this in Dan Miron's, Kivun Orot (Adjusting Lights: 176, note 62).
universal philosophical ideas steered him away from his ancestral tradition. Later, other kinds of detachment, resulting from the reality of the pioneers in the Land of Israel, were also described.

Hebrew-Israeli writers perceived the *talush* as a character representing the problems of the contemporary young Jew. It provided a kind of social-national criticism of the Jewish society in the Diaspora, and in the Land of Israel later on, and was a way in which a critical literary discourse could be conducted thematically and poetically between different generations of writers. The discourse was male oriented: male authors writing about male protagonists and their experiences. There are two reasons for this. The first is the social and historical circumstances and conditions whereby young Jews were exposed to secular texts and the *Haskala* movement’s new ideas, causing them to develop a spiritual rift. By contrast, only a small number of daughters were privileged enough to receive a religious Jewish literary education like their male counterparts. If the ban from his father’s table, and the geographical wanderings were emotionally and practically difficult for the male *talush*, presumably for the few young women who dared to rebel it was even more daunting. And since not many girls were given the opportunity to study religious Jewish literature, their sense of rupture resulting from heretical ideas did not evolve into a prominent phenomenon.

Tova Cohen distinguishes between the characteristics of the male *maskil* and the female *maskilah* (progressive thinkers). During the second generation of the Jewish Enlightenment, girls were exposed to Hebrew literature and *Haskalah* literature with the consent of their fathers and through guided reading. But the young Jewish male, according to Shmuel S. Wereses, was forced to be a pioneer and become

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7 Dan Miron points out a literary dialogue between generations conducted in various ways, including through the image of the *talush*. *Bodedim Be-Mo’adam* (When Loners Come Together): 151-295.

8 A later period, when the ideas of *Haskalah* started to permeate more widely into Jewish society.

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a *maskil* through independent, non-systematic enquiries and reading, usually against his parents' wishes.10

The second reason that explains why the literature of that period dealt mostly with male characters, can be seen through the strong connection between the values of masculinity and nationalism.11 As a hero during the period of national resurgence, the *talush* did not accommodate the 'product' Jewish nationalism was trying to create. He did not fit the stereotypical maleness formulated by Zionist thinkers like Theodore Herzl and Max Nordau. Ironically, he was often perceived as 'feminine' in many ways, leading to an overt critique of the dominant masculine discourse, and of the correspondence between the 'new Jew' and the 'new Man.' Indeed, the *talush* can be seen as the underbelly of the connection between nationalism and masculinity, mirroring the flaws of the Jewish society in the Diaspora, and later of Jewish-Israeli society in the Promised Land.

The existence of the female rootless character was noticed previously in the study of Hebrew literature.12 However, she was usually included as a supporting character to the protagonist, if she existed at all.13 Yael Shenkar claims that there are two main reasons why female rootless characters in Hebrew literature at the turn of


12 Zipora Cagan pointed out that Berdichevsky’s protagonists, for example, are young males and females, leaving their parents’ home and their home town to go to university to study in a big foreign city and they are doomed to social and cultural alienation. (*Acharit Davar* ["Epilogue"]: 227); Dan Miron argues that at the turn of the century young secular female figures who allowed themselves the freedom to lead an emotional and intellectual life, began to appear in Hebrew literature, for example Rachel in Berdichevsky's *Orva Prach* (Raven Flies. *Orva Prach* is an Aramaic idiom which means: baseless), or some of Gnessin's female characters (*Kivun Orot* [Back to Focus]: 37-38); This author maintains that it also indicated Rachel from *Orva Prach* as a rootless soul mate to Elimelech, the protagonist of the story, hence they will never be able to have a rooted relationship, not with each other nor with others (Shait 2000: 16-17). Ronit Gez in her study on the national narrative in male and female authors’ fiction, also points out the existence of the female rootless character in Hebrew literature of the Revival period.

13 Sheila Jelen, for example, claims that the female equivalent of the *talush*, was completely absent in Hebrew literature at the beginning of the twentieth century (Hebrew Gender and Modernity: 192).
the twentieth century were not major rootless characters. The first was historical: one could not be split between worlds in which they were not included. With few exceptions, women were banned from religious and secular study. Therefore, they could not experience this conflict. Yet, Shenkar notes that according to Iris Parush, several women during the Jewish Enlightenment had an advantage because their reading life was not monitored.

The second reason for their marginality stems from the fact that the leading narrative at the time focused on men who, according to Hanan Hever, became “the normative national subject.” Shenkar agrees with Hever that the description of an individual protagonist was actually perceived as the representative 'Jewish' model. But, she further posits that the marginalization of female characters in Hebrew literature was not only the result of the historical fact that they could not choose their education, but, she believes, was also due to their overall inferior status in the national community. Shenkar points toward the scarceness of rootless female characters in Hebrew literature as a conspicuous, although not an absolute, absence. She finds female rootlessness given a more meaningful voice in autobiographical women's literature of the period.

This essay discusses rootless female characters in early twentieth century Hebrew literature, not only as secondary characters, but also as the protagonists in several major texts. Although the talush was considered a male character, at this time female rootless characters began to appear in Hebrew literature. These female protagonists, created by male authors, were few and differed in their degrees of

14 Yael Shenkar, Ha'Tlushot min Ha'Sifrut (The female rootless characters): 402.


16 Hever, Guru Lachem min Ha'Galitzaim (Beware of Galicianers): 74.


18 Shenkar explores the autobiography Lo Nichanti (I did not surrender) by Puah Racovsky, born in 1865, a Zionist activist, and feminist. Her book was translated from Yiddish into Hebrew and was
freedom, independence, and assertiveness, or alternatively, in degrees of their subordination to the patriarchal establishment. This essay focuses on the descriptions of the rootless female character in the study of Hebrew literature and places her alongside the rootless male character, both because she indeed existed at that time, and because historiographically, it is evident that as women's Hebrew-Israeli literature emerged, the presence of the female rootless character developed too. Nonetheless, later appearances of rootless female characters created by Israeli women authors, and their role in Hebrew-Israeli literature are subject for a separate study. Here the initial presence of this figure in works which take place in the Diaspora will be examined, in addition to some works which take place in the land of Israel. "Be-veit Aviha" (Her Father's Home, 1900) and Miriam (1921) by Micha Josef Berdichevsky, "Melafefonim" (Cucumbers, 1909) by Isaac Dov Berkowitz,19 and "Genia" (1904) by Uri Nissan Gnessin take place in the Diaspora. "Bamavo" (At the Entrance, 1924) by Dov Kimchi and "Prazon" (Demilitarized Zone, 1940) by Isaac Shenhar are stories that occur during the Yishuv period in the land of Israel. The absence of author Dvora Baron in this discussion is intentional. Although she was already a popular and respected writer at the beginning of the twentieth century, she did not play a part in the rootlessness literary discourse. Among many stories, Baron wrote only three about male rootless characters, two of which she later shelved.20

19 The story was originally published in Yiddish in 1906, titled "Zucchini", see Avner Holtzman, Anatomy of Rootlessness: 122, note 23.

20 In the early twentieth century Baron wrote three rootless stories: "Bchinot" ("Exams," 1910), Shokolad ("Chocolate," 1912), and - Kitzo shel Sender Ziv ("The End of Sender Ziv," 1919). Nurit Govrin believes that the effect of Berdichevsky's rootless stories is evident in these stories and they include details of the narrator's biography. These are the only rootless stories by Baron. Why she stopped writing about rootless characters is unclear, claims Govrin. Perhaps she wanted to dissociate herself from the generation characterized by rootless stories, or perhaps she preferred the previous generations’ stories to highlight an independent non-historical position, beyond place and time. (Govrin, Ha-Mahazit Harishona [The first half]: 184-193). Sheila Jelen concurs (All writers are Jews, all writers are men: 189-200). In addition, it seems that although aspects of alienation and loneliness can be found in her other stories dealing with female characters, Dvora Baron did not illustrate a real female rootless protagonist, perhaps because this conflict was not experienced by many women, while women’s misery and their inferior place in Jewish society were more relevant for many women, who were denied the education and independence Baron received.
Female Rootless Characters in the Diaspora

Micha Josef Berdichevsky, one of the major leading writers of his time, whose work included numerous rootless stories centering on male protagonists also wrote stories with female rootless protagonists, who sought an education or a new life. Berdichevsky presented two different cases – the first, where a young woman was a prisoner in her father’s home, and only her imagination drifted to distant worlds ("Beveit Aviha"), and the second, where the female protagonist wandered and underwent various experiences ("Miriam"). However, Miriam’s life choices, despite a certain degree of liberalism, were subjected to restrictions by the patriarchal system.

The very short story "Beveit Aviha" ("In Her Father’s Home") illustrated the inner world of a young woman in her wealthy father's home, dreaming of life in distant places. This nameless girl experienced rootlessness while confined to a space controlled by her father. She felt she no longer belonged to her home and the world she lived in. Her rootlessness was the result of inner feelings, not the result of intellectual pondering or rational thinking. The fact that she had not had the benefit of a Jewish education was emphasized: "she did not read and could not know her textual patrimony.”21 She felt detached and alienated, as if life had something more to offer, but she could not figure it out. Like many educated apostates, she despised, if only unconsciously, Jews with side curls and head coverings. She hated "all the spineless men, the long sideburns, the uncombed beards and the long clothes. She feels she does not belong to them at all."22 She was not like Menahem, the rootless male in Berdichevsky's story of the same title, who was described as being far away from his family, studying philosophy. Though these were both short stories from Berdichevsky's collection Mibayit U-Michutz (From Within and Without, 1900), the differences between them were quite plain. Whereas certain story titles were named after their male protagonists, such as, "Menachem" or "Yehonatan," in this story, the

21 Berdichewsky, Be'veit Aviha: 21.
22 Ibid., 21.
young female character remained unnamed and the story's title emphasized her father's importance.

Although the young woman was in a confined space, in her mind, she was free, and she imagined herself fleeing from her father's restrictions and the constraints of the Jewish world. She imagined herself living outside the Jewish town, letting loose, dancing, and enjoying her physicality that contained a subtle hint of eroticism. As opposed to the male rootless character, the young woman’s rebellion was not intellectual but rather driven by longing. On the one hand, her dream expressed the stereotypical cultural and political differences between men and women: she was nature; he was culture; she was a passionate and intuitive dance; he was science and scholarship. On the other hand, the rootless male was continually described as hating his body, while Berdichevsky provided the girl with implied erotic freedom to express her increasing sexuality without shame or prudish modesty. Furtively, behind closed doors, the reader is exposed to a typical young Jewish woman seeking to be freed from the restrictions of tradition in an oppressed world under the double regime of father and religion. In contrast, Miriam, the novel's protagonist, received a broad education and a sense of legitimacy in her journey of self-discovery.

According to Avner Holtzman, in 1905 Berdichevsky conceived of the character Miriam, and outlined a plausible novel in his diary: the story of a Jewish girl straying from her surroundings and leaving to study at a university in Western Europe and find love. She falls in love with her best friend's husband, and commits suicide when she realizes that her love could never be fulfilled. Fifteen years later, when Berdichevsky finally embarked on the writing of the novel, he deviated from the original plot. The novel did not follow the route of Miriam's life in a linear fashion, but rather flickered in and out at different points.23 Namely, it was no longer just a story of a female rootless character per se, but became a chronicle of milieu and era. Dan Miron believes that a novel named after a woman, makes readers believe that they are

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about to find a novel similar to *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina*, in which the protagonist’s romantic and dramatic love lives are foregrounded. But Berdichevsky's subtitle, "Life in Two Towns," clarifies that collective Jewish life will be discussed at length, along with Miriam's wanderings.  

Unlike other girls, Miriam is described in the novel as receiving an education:

> When a Jewish boy goes to the heder he learns to read, and to understand the meaning of the Book of Leviticus [...] But for the daughters of Israel, all the activity of this life is like a closed book. They are denied these echoes of the past and they have no spiritual soil in which to be nourished. Sabbaths and festivals are the only crumbs of learning they have. They are free from the obligation to study, from the bulk of the commandments, and from prayer. The little vouchsafed to them is like wine that has lost its flavor.

Unlike the young woman described in the story "Beveit Aviha," Miriam at thirteen was clearly different from her peers in the manner in which she experienced the world:

> Miriam was now thirteen. [...] She did not let her imagination run away with her as most girls do, but grasped things by insight. [...] She began to read the Russian novelists and a new spirit awoke in her.

Miriam matured and became a beautiful educated young woman, who was compelled to leave her father's home and her hometown after her father's store burned down and with it his means of supporting her. She arrived in Honyrad, at Yehiel Eichenstein's home, who provided for her. Miriam received a Jewish education and became familiar with works of Jewish and Russian literature, which nurtured her curiosity. Berdichevsky portrays a non-traditional young Jewish woman who did not wish to marry and have children. In this respect, she was bold and rebellious, going against motherhood and other traditional female roles. This phenomenon was consistent with the rootless males' incompetence, because he rarely married, or had children. Yeruham, the *Maskil* from the group of *Maskilim* Miriam met in Honyrad, believed that the Jewish people needed young women like her. But tension developed, for on the one hand the young *Maskil* wanted his partner to understand the literary works he

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26 Ibid., 249.
studied, but on the other hand, such girls were not destined for marriage like gardens which could not bear fruit:

Girls like her are necessary to the House of Israel, but they are not for us... You see flowers giving off fragrance – but the garden is closed. The Hebrew reader [the Maskil] possessed a Jewish mother, pouring out her soul in supplication through the prayer book, but he had no Hebrew sister. Were the poet to sing songs of love, his beloved would not understand his language. There is no bond between equal souls. There is strength in Hebrew literature and a desire to enlighten, but it lacks tenderness and disregards the relation between sexes. There is no ear to listen to the mouth.

Despite the freedom of thought she had, Miriam was always under patriarchal control. The novel ends with the death of Yechiel, and once again, Miriam was at a crossroads, alone in the world, without support or protection. Despite her many skills, it did not occur to her to live alone. Under the influence of Tolstoynian texts, she assisted Koch, the doctor, in treating patients and took refuge with him. In spite of being opinionated, educated, and independent, Miriam relied on her father's aid and later on, on other father figures. This ending, with Miriam working as a nurse alongside a physician, is unusual compared to the endings of other contemporary rootless stories where the story usually ended with the rootless character feeling lost, desperate, lonely, and contemplating suicide. Placing Miriam as a nurse by a doctor's side might seem an appropriate solution to female rootlessness at the time. Certain male rootless protagonists, in later Hebrew literature, also chose similar solutions. Yosef Landa, Yehuda Yaari's protagonist in K'Or Yahel ("When the Candle was Burning," 1937), was one such example. At the end of the story, he stayed with Saadya the Yemenite at the Ha'shiloah Pool, nursing lepers. And Tanhum, Yitzhak Shenhar's protagonist in Megilat Tanhum (Book of Tanhum, 1942) remained with a rabbi in the ultra-Orthodox Jerusalem neighborhood of Mea Shearim, serving him and his flock.

Another prominent female rootless character was Shifra, the protagonist in Berkowitz's Melafefonim (Cucumbers), first published in Yiddish (1906) and then in Hebrew (1909). Similar to Berkowitz's male protagonists in the stories "Baneichar"
"Abroad") and "Viduy" ("Confession"), Shifra returned to her parents' village after spending time in the big city. Her story differed from the narrative of the male rootless protagonist. She worked as a seamstress but could not find a suitable mate, so she returned to her parents' home in the hope of finding a husband there. The conflict was more typical to a 'conventional' female dilemma, and not that of the educated rootless male. Her rootlessness, as in the case of Dr. Vinik, Berkowitz's protagonist in Talush ("Rootless," 1904) was a result of the gap between two worlds -- the new polite, sterile, urban world of the bourgeois, and the old rural unsophisticated and tainted world.

Shifra, unlike Berdichevsky's Miriam, was not well educated and was not an intellectual, although she wanted to be seen as such. The root of her crisis was the gap between her aspiration to marry a successful city scholar and the reality in which she was forced to accept the rural butcher's son. She wanted to be regarded as a worldly woman, but in fact became a poor villager. This gap between ambition and reality characterized the protagonists' crisis in rootless male stories, but the content here was gender-based. It is important to note that unlike Miriam, Shifra did not try to cross over to the male domain and remain an old single urban woman. For her, the desire to marry was of paramount importance. Like many rootless stories describing the protagonists' mental and physical deterioration, Shifra's decline was anticipated.

As the story concludes, she lived with her parents, physically re-surrendering to the rules of the old world. She neglected her appearance as she became psychologically and emotionally distressed, to the extent that she even considered drowning herself in the river. This story demonstrates a bitter and realistic scenario of a young Jewish girl who did not receive an education but was drawn to and longed for the New World. When she could not find an eligible groom, she returned to her previous 'primitive' world where she felt despondent and lonely. Holzman suggests an alternative interpretation of the story, finding features of parody and caricature in Shifra's character. He claims that various elements such as Shifra's so-called secular education are presented from a parodical perspective. According to Holtzman,
Berkowitz implemented a well-known pattern that described a young man returning home after studying abroad in the big city, wishing to implement his new ideas that often conflicted with those of his traditional father.

This motif is presented here as a parody. Instead of philosophical books, Shifra brought romantic Russian novels back to the village. On several occasions, she was revealed as being ignorant and provincial. Holtzman believes she was not the female version of the talush, but rather its sad caricature. Yet, he admits that the story might not be mocking Shifra, but rather protesting against Jewish tradition that oppressed women. These were women who under different conditions could have flourished intellectually. Since by his own admission, Berkowitz rejected the possibility that he mocked his protagonist, and because his female protagonists in three other stories did not appear to be ridiculed (although as Holtzman suggests, they differ from Shifra by not being intellectually pretentious), it seems that Shifra's story depicts the tragedy of women in Jewish society.

From the entire list of the female rootless characters discussed in this essay, the most daring and bold, and the one most resembling the male rootless character, was Genia, Gnessin's protagonist. Genia was a young woman who stumbled upon a group of Zionist activists promoting the idea of the revival of the Hebrew language. She became passionate about these ideas and soon established a group of women activists to build a Hebrew school for girls. Despite the prejudice against her, she managed to establish the school and recruit teachers. Genia was perceived as a flirtatious woman, because she had many lovers and was not chaste as a 'daughter of Israel' was expected to be. Someway, this perceived lack of modesty was translated into professional and pedagogical incompetence, particularly among men who once had a romantic relationship with her. But Genia was not deterred and not only ran her school successfully, but after a few months of being romantically involved with David and

30 Ibid., 129.
with Zionism, she became bored and moved on, wandering to new places, new ideologies, and new love.

Shenkar claims that Genia did not "rise to the level of an actual telusha," because the process of her enlightenment was not based on any real ideological or intellectual motivation, but rather was an excuse playing into her "desire for men." This argument robs her of the privilege that is given to the male talush whereby many are described as following one ideological notion or another, due to their desire to be close to the object of their love and not simply out of some pure devotion to the idea itself. Berkowitz, Bershadsky, Brenner, and others give numerous examples of this phenomenon in their stories. Therefore, even if Genia's interest in Zionism and the revival of the Hebrew language were the result of her love for David, she was not different than male rootless characters. It would be wrong to understand Genia from her lovers' point of view. The reader though can see her as she sees herself – authentic and sincere. Men, she remarked, "Are not willing to accept that [her sincerity]." If this same sentiment were expressed by a male talush known for his erotic failure and inability to commit to a woman or an ideological concept, this explanation would be plausible. But coming from Genia this was not accepted. Seen through the male perspective as a "False Maskilah"-- an expression, according to Tova Cohen, given during the Enlightenment to the social class that experienced the transition from the "old" world to the "new" world only through external markers, as compared to the "real" Maskilim who stressed in-depth study of European culture while reshaping Jewish society. Due to women's superficial education and swift adjustment to a modern lifestyle, the "new woman" was identified with the "pseudo intellectuals." Genia, unlike the male rootless character, is passionate, very active and acclimatizes quickly to new situations.

Upon examining the four stories presented so far, it is clear that although Gnessin's story "Genia" was published years before Berdichevskys' "Miriam,"

31 Shenkar, The female rootless characters: 404.
32 Gnessin, Genia: 42.
Gnessin's hero enjoyed far more freedom from a feminist point of view, and experienced a deeper sense of rootlessness. Unlike Miriam who at the end of the novel is engaged in meaningful work while being rooted in one place, Genia continues to wander from one place to the other, from one ideology to the next. She is the wandering female Jew: "She can only take her stick and backpack - and go onward and forward."³⁴

Out of these four young women, Berkowitz' Shifra is the exceptional protagonist. She is the only one whose ultimate goal is to get married, a defined purpose that even if shared by any male rootless character, was never his sole purpose. Female rootless characters faced the same problems as their male contemporaries: rebelling against their father and the possibility of being banned from their household, familiarity with secular texts and a new world, distancing themselves from tradition, exposure to new ideas, universal or Zionist— all contributing to changing ideologies, and other instabilities.

**The Promised Land: New Dilemmas**

The above were issues that were raised in Diaspora fiction. However, when the *talush* relocates to the land of Israel, his rootlessness does not disappear. While the context may have changed, the protagonist's characteristics do not. It is apparent that young women faced similar problems in this new setting.

Describing the young Jews who came to the land of Israel as pioneers, various writers, like Brenner for example, wanted to illustrate the difficulties and problems the enthusiastic youth encountered upon their arrival and the subsequent disappointments. These authors were not afraid to demonstrate that the state of rootlessness was not necessarily “cured” by migration to the land of Israel. The young Jews who immigrated to *Eretz* faced various struggles: physical labor in the burning hot sun, the need to defend themselves in conflicts with local Arabs, 'old Yishuv' Jews who still lived like the Jews in the Diaspora, and the lack of European intellectual

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³⁴ Gnessin, *Genia*: 46.
culture. Second Aliyah writers, such as Brenner, and Agnon and Third Aliyah writers, such as Shenhar, and Yaari described young Jews' difficult and failed experiences, as they remained rootless and discouraged. The two stories presented here highlight the problematic issues of the rootless female character. They clearly parallel those of the rootless male, but are presented from a female perspective. The first story is "Bamavo" ("At the Entrance") by Dov Kimchi, a Second Aliyah author, and the second story is "Prazon" ("Demilitarized Zone") by Yitzhak Shenhar, a Third Aliyah author. The first story takes place in Jerusalem near the old Yishuv, and the second takes place in a pioneering labor settlement in the Galilee.

"Bamavo" is an impressionistic story, which shows the world of young Ora Gefen, who lives with her family in Jerusalem and often sees the world through a veil of tears and obfuscation. In many ways, her circumstances are similar to those of the escapist rootless heroes in Gnessin's impressionist novels. The story portrays Ora's experience of growing up, her infatuation with Gabriel Dvorkin, her best friend's fiancé, her rejection of two other suitors, her escape from her father's house for one night, and her return home the following morning, disappointed and discouraged. The story concentrates mainly on Eros, sexual desire, and its failure, and on Ora's state of mind. Questions faced by the talush, such as the nature of renewed life in the land of Israel, pioneering, secular life, and the city of Jerusalem linger in the background. In the same manner as Gnessin's impressionistic stories (as opposed to Brenner's), this piece implicitly dealt with larger national questions. "Bamavo" focused on the protagonist's personal issues while issues of contemporary life in the land of Israel were relegated to the background and suppressed.

Although Ora resided in her father's home in the Old City, the heart of Jerusalem's long established religious community, she led a secular life. Ora changed her last name from Weinstock to Gefen (vine) in an attempt to erase the remnants of the Diaspora from her life. She refused to let Bialik's poem, "Be'ir Ha-Hreiga" ("The City of Slaughter"), a powerful lament on the 1903 Kishinev pogrom, be read in her presence. She could not bear to hear it without weeping. This was symptomatic of the
repression of national and Jewish affairs while the focus remained on the self. Gabriel, Hannah's fiancé, teased her that they would find her a husband "who wears tails on his head," a reference to the shtreimel, a traditional fur hat worn by Hassidic Jews.

Contrary to Ora who recoiled from the Jewish past, her admirer, the librarian Nehemya Zeid, missed the Ukraine, his birthplace. Referring to Eretz, he remarked: "This is not my homeland." This emotional adversity, which many immigrants experienced -- of having "two homelands" -- was concealed, elicited, and suppressed, diminishing deeper problematic issues and their dramatic implications.

Another issue relegated to the background of the story was pioneering, as demonstrated in the figure of Gabriel Dvorkin, Hannah's fiancé, a sculptor and painter who chose to become a pioneer-farmer in the Galilee. His tanned skin, his roughened muscles, and his overt masculinity smote Ora. On the one hand, he was the antithesis of the weak wandering Jewish man, but on the other hand, he did not lack refinement and intellect. Although the theme of pioneering remains in the background of the story, it reminds the reader that there was another option for living in the land of Israel besides the intellectual urban lifestyle that Ora and her privileged friends enjoyed.

Despite her father's disapproval, Ora graduated from the teachers' seminary. Still, her path in life was unclear and she was uneasy and anxious about the future. She felt "an endless limitless emptiness." The feeling that was vague even to Ora herself, is actually a female manifestation of Gnessin's anxious and escapist protagonists. Here too, as well as in some of Gnessin stories, it seemed that sexual life was essential to the main plot. Nevertheless, the sexual crisis intensified her sense of despair. Ora was torn between her forbidden love for Gabriel and her two suitors, Nechemia Zaid, the librarian, and Yekutiel Zivin, the poet, both of whom were pale and not 'masculine' enough compared to Gabriel.

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35 Ibid., 216.
36 Ibid., 217.
37 Kimchi, Bamavo: 290.
Feeling suffocated and unable to resolve the crisis caused her to chop off her long impressive tresses. In light of her father's anger, for the first time in her life, she was forced to sleep away from her parents' home. Her rebellion and the so-called 'expulsion' from her father's home were not religious, spiritual, or intellectual, yet still it was her rebellious attempt to gain some independence. The crisis was essentially emotional and reflected a kind of self-punishment and self-castration. Like the biblical Samson who lost his physical power when his hair was cut, her source of beauty and erotic power was radically curtailed with this act of defiance. The next day, when she left Hannah's house and met Gabriel Dvorkin on her way home, she felt that “It is not as if the ground has been swept from under her- it is that she has never been standing on firm ground in the first place.” At the end of the story, she returned to her parents' home and threw herself sobbing against her mother. The story might seem like a 'land of Israel' story, but at the same time it could have taken place anywhere in the Diaspora. Ora's romantic dilemma, coupled with anxiety and escapism, was no different than that of many rootless males, particularly Gnessin's protagonists, who were more sensitive and emotional.

While in "Bamavo" the contemporary issues remained in the background, "Prazon" takes place in a settlement and emphasized the hardship of pioneering life in pre-state Israel. This was a relatively late story (1940) that portrayed the fundamental questions of its time. The story outlined Hava Mohar's misgivings. She was a young woman accustomed to balls, evening gowns, and a refined life. Along the Eros dilemma, the question of whether to continue to live in the land of Israel, after it turned out to be so disappointing, was central. Hava accepted her widowed father's authority and left Europe with him, but she could not seem to shake off the extreme sense of foreignness. Her father was influenced to move to the land of Israel by Zionist emissaries, but felt misled. He was disappointed and regretted forcing his daughter to live a desolate life in a remote place. Hava also regretted this transition, mainly because her father was completely uprooted from his home. At first, it seemed

38 Ibid., 293.
to her that the change might be good for them, but she soon discovered a different reality; life in a remote community, lack of cultural life, and hard labor under the scorching sun were not fitted to her nature. She wished for a quiet, comfortable bourgeois life. She believed the people around her suffered immensely, asking: "Have you already crossed the invisible bridge and fallen into the camp of the silent who have renounced all renouncements?"

Hava's mother passed away years before in Europe and their home was now run by a Yemenite cleaner. Hava was exempt from housework and was constantly asked why she did not have a job and or do something useful, as it was not customary to lead an idle life in the land of Israel. She once reacted: "my main activity is standing on the banks of life, observing it from the sideline." Hava, a big city girl, accustomed to an active social life, became lonely and did not acclimatized. She did not understand the girls around her "who wear shorts and exhaust themselves in hard labor." Golani, a man from her hometown, who lived nearby in a kvuza, [collective settlement] courted her. But communal life was too rough for her. She could not give up high-heel sandals, pretty dresses, and a parasol to protect her from the sun. She viewed the Land of Israel as "a patchwork of East and West, [-] of empty poetic phrases and feigned renewal." She was apprehensive about the collective enterprise: "what will happen to the individual?" This question is also raised in the rootless male pioneering stories, whereby they encountered extreme difficulty in giving up their individual needs for the needs of the community. Hava's feelings about life in the land of Israel coincided with the male pioneers' feelings as described in the literature of that time. Yet, in this story, the reader gets a new perspective, a feminine point of view. The story ended on a cautiously optimistic note. While anticipating the sunrise, Hava wondered if fate led her to the land of Israel so that she would meet Golani again.

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39 Shenhar, Prazon: 52.
40 Ibid., 43.
41 Ibid., 55.
42 Kvuza is a collective farmstead, precursor to the kibbutz commune.
43 Shenhar, Prazon: 52.
their European hometown, he was involved with another woman. He might be, after all, the one meant to be her soul mate and husband. Resolving the Eros issue appeared to be the solution that might answer Hava's rootlessness. This resolution was unlike the contemporary male rootlessness stories, where redemption and relief were achieved by working the land, and where Eros was associated with the conquest of the 'female' [mother] land.

**Summary**

Female rootless protagonists in Hebrew literature of the early the twentieth century are quite rare. However, they do exist and indicate an attempt to introduce a female perspective on contemporary issues. Regrettably, their male authors did not always manage to neutralize their biased perspectives. The protagonists' characteristics vary. Some are described as being completely bound to their fathers’ restrictions; others are depicted as independent and not subjected to patriarchal restrictions. There are those that fluctuate between independence and male imposed limitations. Later on, when Hebrew literary works of women authors, such as Yehudit Hendel, Shulamit Har-Even, and Amalia Kahana-Carmon, emerge, other female rootless characters surfaced as well. They were confronted by questions about the status of women in Israel, within the context of a global feminist discourse. While these later works are the subject for a separate study, this essay marks an initial attempt to conceptualize the figure of the female rootless protagonist and to point out the variable range of independence and liberation they portrayed. "Genia," as mentioned, a relatively early story, is also the most audacious.

These early manifestations are quite significant, developing during a time when the male figure narrative defined the history of Jewish society, as reflected in Hebrew fiction. It is critical to appreciate the inclusion of the female counterpart of the rootless protagonist – an increasingly popular character in Hebrew literature at the turn of the twentieth century.

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44 Ibid., 56.
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