Confessional Writing About Incest: Lea Aini’s *Rose of Lebanon* and *S’domel*

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

**Abstract**

This study is devoted to the poetic representation of incest as it appears in the works of Lea Aini (b. 1962), a central feminine voice in today's Israeli literature. Aini’s works depart from the linear realism, characteristic of most Israeli writers, and resorts to alternative poetic forms, which include naturalism, grotesque, stream of consciousness, symbolism, and confessional fiction. An Inter-Textual reading of Aini’s works *Rose of Lebanon* and *S’domel* demonstrates a resemblance between her poetics and the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Kathryn Harrison, Sapphire, Sylvia Fraser, Alice Walker, and Camilla Gibb, who also wrote about incest.

**Introduction**

The connection between women's writing and violence can be discerned in Helene Cixous and Catherine Clement's *The Newly Born Women* (1975), where they call on women to bring the female experience into the sphere of writing from which it has been forcefully exiled, and thereby transform history. The woman writer, according to Cixous and Clement (1986: 96-97), "steals" language in order to make it fly. We have all learned fly/theft, the art with many techniques, for all the countries we have only had access to having by stealing/flying; we have lived in a flight/theft, stealing/flying, finding the close, concealed way-through of desire. […] The feminist text cannot be more than subversive […] She must write herself because, when the time comes for her liberation, it is the invention of a new, insurgent writing that will allow her to put the breaks and indispensable changes into effect in her history. At first, individually, on two inseparable levels: - woman, writing herself, will go back to this body that has been worse than confiscated, a body replaced with disturbing stranger, sick or dead, who so often is a bad influence, the cause and place of inhibitions. By censuring the body, breath and speech are censored at the same time.

Writing, Cixous and Clement suggest, is "the act that will 'realize' the un-censored relationship of woman to her sexuality" (ibid.: 97), a bold alternative to the phallocentric tradition. A critical characteristic of a feminist text mentioned by these authors is concerned with the "no-deal" themes, an idea that remains rather allusive, probably because women's literature underwent major developments only in the late 1970s:

That writing is what deals with the no-deal, relates to what gives no return. That something else (what history forbids, what reality excludes or doesn't admit) can manifest itself there: some other (ibid).
Another largely influential book, which similarly examines women's writing, is Alicia Ostriker's *Stealing The Language*, in which she investigates feminist writing techniques and illustrates how they can be detected in the work of women poets. In describing "stealing the language," Ostriker deals with women writers' feminist adaptations and transformations of myths. She claims that if a woman writer wishes to define her identity through language, she must find her way to the sphere of mythological language to appropriate and transform it through defamiliarization and feminization. Turning to the mythical tale in order to "steal" it signifies the woman writer's resistant attitude towards the male canon, and reflects her readiness to challenge the traditional construction of gender, which began in myths mostly depicting male protagonists and subservient goddesses that define woman according to the binary perception of "angel" or "monster" (Ostriker, 1986: 212).

Yet stealing the language has an additional meaning. The use of language to represent injustices done by men is an act of subversion because the very language used by men as a tool to oppress and humiliate women now becomes a tool of the woman writer who uses it to document and describe those violent acts and thrust her written indictment in the face of the male abuser and in the face of a silent (or complicit) society. Adrienne Rich (1992) calls this process an "act of survival," as it changes not only the male canon but life itself: "Where women write strongly as women, it is clear that their intention is to subvert and transform the life and literature they inherit" (Ostriker, 1986: 211).

Like Cixous and Clement, Luce Irigaray (1985: 68-85) [1977] argues that if women adopt the male discourse, they will talk and write like men, which will deny them their independent feminine voice. Irigaray believes that language must be changed, and this will free women of men's binary conception. She calls for a feminist style, one that resists the traditional form of writing, thereby redefining language in a way that creates space for women. Since every reality is founded and defined by discourse, the discourse must of necessity be made feminine, and this will permit the establishment of female identity and sexuality.

Irigaray (1993: 51-58) [1990] identifies the use of masculine plural (in gendered languages such as French or Hebrew) as obliterating feminine plural forms
in language and society at large. This pattern parallels Irigaray's assertion that women have no real place in the world. Changes in the current language, she suggests, could lead to a deeper, truer sexual freedom.

As for women's writing, Irigaray states: "I am a woman. I write with what I am." In her opinion, when a woman writer notes that she does not write as a woman ("genderless imagination," in Virginia Woolf's terminology) she is actually aligning herself with the masculine culture that has promoted a tradition of male codes of logos and androcentric thought. Irigaray encourages the perception that women writers must contribute to the sexual coding of language, hence emancipating it from its Gordian knot to patriarchy. Furthermore, women's writing will redeem the female body from being an object, a process that can be traced through millennia of men's writing about women.

Sigmund Freud explored the "Oedipus Complex" between a man and his parents, and emphasized the male's attraction to his mother. Women writers probe incestuous relationships from a woman's perspective, an angle that psychoanalysis neglected until the advent of feminist psychological research.

This study is devoted to what Cixous and Clement called the "no-deal" themes, that is, specifically, the rare exploration and exposure of incest as it appears in the works of Lea Aini (born 1962), a central feminine voice in today's Israeli literature, who gives the theme of incest a major significance (Shirav, 2010). Although Aini published her first work in 1988, only a small number of literary studies were dedicated to her work, generally, dealing with Holocaust themes in her works (Hetzroni, 1992, Lentin, 2000, Naveh, 2000, and Kosh-Zohar, 2009: 73-81). Feminist gaze was suggested by Shirav (2010) and Rudin (2012: 248-256). One reason for this absence is the radical feminist themes in her writing, which break taboos. Likewise, her young adult novel, Hi Yuli (1995) presents an anti-hero girl that experiences sexual harassment in a chapter called "Dancing with Wolves," an homage to Clarissa Pinkola Estes's Women Who Run with the Wolves (1992).

Another explanation stems from Aini's poetics: she departs from the linear realism characteristic of the majority of Israeli literature in the past sixty years, and
employs intricate poetic forms, including naturalism, grotesque, stream of consciousness, symbolism, and confessional fiction.

An Inter-Textual reading of Aini’s works belongs to a marginal corpus of women writers who deal with incest. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley was one of the first women to write a novel about an incestuous father-daughter relationship, a work said to have some autobiographical roots. Kathryn Harrison, Sapphire, Sylvia Fraser, Alice Walker, and Camilla Gibb explore incest with the following features:

a. A preference for genres such as autobiography, memoirs, and confessional fiction, which spark the reader's empathy and response; they also narrow the aesthetic space, which leads the reader to greater involvement. These genres present a narrator who speaks in the first person, a form that generates intimacy and the sense of a hyper-realistic "truthful" text.

b. Use of the first person narration allows the author to withdraw from established literary language or syntax and produce a new feminist form, undermining canonic literary rules.

c. Correspondence with a given cultural myth, which is "robbed" of its primary/common interpretation and presented in a revised version fitted to an incest story.

d. Emphasis on the role of the molesting father, but also of the mother ("mother blaming") and the often complicit part played by society.

e. Revelation of the incestuous abuse to a relative or an outsider to emphasize that the story is not a secret but a crime that needs to be exposed, i.e. a public matter, not just a personal episode.

f. A description of the physical and psychological effect of the sexual abuse (e.g. erasure of femininity, isolation, self-hate, eating disorders, bedwetting, inability to establish romantic relationships, forfeiting motherhood, rage).

g. Incest as a traumatic event creates a writer who documents the horror on the one hand, and designs a new poetics on the other. The sexual abuse makes the writer a victim, but also gives her a new identity as a feminist writer who protests against violence and empower her readers.
In this paper Aini’s *Rose of Lebanon* and "S’dommel" (God's Sodom), both dealing with incest as their main theme, are examined using the above literary features.  

**Women Writing About Incest**

As part of the "memoir boom," Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010: 152-154) define a new form of memoirs—"Sexual Stories"—as a distinct subgenre of autobiography. It includes several narratives of sexuality: sexual identifications, sexual transformations and sexual violence. Narratives of sexuality emerged in the late 1960s as part of "coming out" stories. Later the women's movement encouraged the discourse and motivated women to convey stories of childhood sexual violence and incest. According to Leigh Gilmore's (2001: 6), narratives of this kind belong to the "trauma memoirs" genre, which affirms that not only can language represent trauma, but that "without language, experience is nothing."

With regard to Mary Shelley's novelette *Mathilda*, written in 1819-1820, Elizabeth Nitchie (2005: 7) writes: "it would be hard to find a more self-revealing work. [...] Although the main narrative, that of the father's incestuous love for his daughter, his suicide, and Mathilda's consequent withdrawal from society to a lonely heath, is not in any real sense autobiographical, many elements in it are drawn from reality." For this critic the "biographical elements are clear" since she sees the character of Mathilda as "Mary herself" (ibid., 12).

Reading this pioneer work about incest explains why it was not published at the time it was written. Shelley's novelette explores for the first time the Electra syndrome from both sides: a father's attraction to his daughter, and the daughter’s secret yearning to marry her father. This is a wish that Mathilda knows cannot be realized; so she hopes for its fulfillment in the afterlife.

Shelley's poetics define women’s future writing about incest. Mathilda tells her story in her own words and her tale unfolds in the form of a letter to her close friend, Woodville. She narrates her story in a lyric voice, and reveals, step by step, her incestuous story. She describes his reentry into her life when she was sixteen years old, his declarations of love, his letters, the way he saw her as a mythological persona, and his obsession that she was a reflection of her mother, who died prematurely and left him distraught and alone.
In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), the entire neighborhood knows about the incestuous abuse suffered by Pecola. The people around her know that she is pregnant with her father's baby. But instead of helping her escape, they ignore her, or blame her for her situation. Their statements: "'Well, they ought to take her out of school'. 'Ought to. She carry some of the blame'" (p. 189), show how society blames the victim and not the abuser, a process that Kathleen Barry (1979: 35) defines as "the rape paradigm":

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 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.

The turning point in the current rise of autobiographical narratives about incest is the novel *My Father's House*, by the Canadian writer Sylvia Fraser, first published in 1987. Fraser demonstrates the flexibility of memoir, describing her life story from early childhood when her father first molested her. It is not a genuine autobiography, since Fraser uses literary techniques that have commonly distinguished memoir from autobiography, namely a narration that follows facts and "true" events. This groundbreaking novel represents a new writing model—an incest narrative that resurfaced with greater frequency in the works of women writers in the 1990s and 2000s.

*The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker comprises few genres as it combines the epistolary novel, diary, and confessional fiction. The protagonist, Celie, writes most of the letters/confessions. Incest is only a small part of the violence experienced by the female characters of the novel, but it affects Celie's life, as the main cause for her resignation.

In *Push* (1996), written by Sapphire, the poetic choice of the confessional form, as Hannah Naveh notes (1987: 97), produces an account of a deviant relationship with one of the parents. The choice to focus on the character's past, including sexual molestation and its insistent silence, allows Precious, the protagonist, to forgive herself and to retain her moral stature in her own eyes.
The confessional fiction genre allows Precious, an illiterate young woman, to tell her story in her own words unlike the educated protagonists of Mathilda, My Father's House, The Kiss and Rose of Lebanon. For the first time in her life, Precious writes in sentences that are connected not only by reason but also by association. Spelling, grammar and syntax are replete with mistakes, intermixed with slang and mimetic poetry. Correct tenses and rules of punctuation are ignored. Politically correct norms are eliminated. Marginal details (phone numbers, addresses) are added to the text, and naturalist descriptions are used, giving the reader the sense of a non-literary modus.

Telling their story in their own language, Precious and Celie could express their inner world without censorship, and use their deconstructive writing to shatter stereotypes and cultural institutions.

Unlike these representations, incest is not a common theme in Israeli literature, and only a small number of works portray incestuous abuse (Shirav, 2010). However, it has been a dominant theme in the works of the Israeli writer Lea Aini.


In Aini’s stories, the national narrative is frequently secondary to the characters’ personal story. Her autobiography, Rose of Lebanon, conveys her personal story for the first time, and includes accounts of persistent sexual harassment by her father, a Holocaust survivor originally from Greece. The novel has two main time plots. The first describes Aini's childhood, a period in which she describes her relations with the members of her family. The second outlines the period of the First Lebanon War (1982), when she volunteered at a hospital once a week to tend to a soldier who tried to commit suicide by shooting himself in the head, and subsequently fell into a coma. The protagonist Vered, who is really Lea, reveals the incident of incest to Jonathan, the comatose soldier.

In radical feminist poetics, Aini opts to write concurrently about two difficult situations: the constant state of war between Arabs and Jews, and the war she must wage within her home, a theme that appears in My Father's House by Sylvia Fraser. The state of Israel and Aini are both striving to survive and manage the violence directed at them ("What a war, every day, in order not to lose life," p. 116), but in the
novel Aini criticizes Israel's violence, not only in the public realm but in the private realm too. Describing the Six Day War (1967), she recounts the aggression in her kindergarten, thereby preferring not to depict Israel as defending itself from Arab armies but as the aggressor: the boys in the kindergarten try to hurt her and her friend. These boys were to become soldiers, like the soldiers in Jonathan's ward who see him as a traitor. They ridicule him, and even abuse him for not kowtowing to the national ethos. The medical staff is no different in their reaction to Jonathan, and the military authorities refuse to acknowledge him as a casualty of war.

The external violence between countries and peoples parallels the internal violence in the speaker's life. Aini characterizes herself as a "stained child" (p. 29) in light of her parents' abuse – an inattentive mother and a seductive father. She describes her father's touch as something that "oversteps the boundaries of what is right" (p. 101), and his endless incestuous attempts since her early childhood parallel the aggression of the Israeli army. Aini’s preoccupation with both levels of aggressions suggests that the violence in the public sphere infiltrates into the Israeli home.

The consequences of the incestuous abuse on the young protagonist are manifested in weight gain and eating disorders (as in My Father's House, The Kiss, Push, and Mouthing the Words9), poor health, fear of men, inability to study, isolation, bedwetting (as featured in Push), and, similar to The Kiss, an attempt to erase her femininity. She neglects her body and wears dowdy clothes in an effort to appear less attractive to her father: "I am his transparent daughter, the one whose body is a brain" (p. 449).

The description of Aini's father functions on several levels. Apart from being depicted as a monster and an abuser, she shows her father’s positive traits, especially when she needs protection from her mother. She reveals his past as an inmate in Auschwitz and the abuse he suffered at the hands of the Nazis. Nevertheless, the victim became an abuser and her home became "a concentration camp" (p. 116). She accuses her father of surviving the concentration camp merely to resurrect it for his daughter, amid the indifference on the part of the people around her.10
When she finally tells her mother about her father's habit of opening the bathroom door when she is showering, her mother accuses her of lying (p. 165). Her family physician minimizes the situation, ascribing it to her economic circumstances. Lonely and unsupported, she clings to two things: her loving and empathetic grandmother, and her writing.

Kate Millet (1970: 23-58) espoused that sexual politics starts with socialization, and one critical tool is sexual violence against women. Writing about the abuse, exposing the violence, and turning the ugly into beautiful create an effective escape.

Out of the horror of sexual and psychological abuse and a society that made her transparent, a sensitive novelist emerges. Aini presents language as a weapon of war: "The higher my language, the lower his interest with me – for the moment" (p. 189). Her father asks her to write his Holocaust story, part of the untold tragedy of the Jews of Greece. As the author, she is now in control and refuses to record her father or use his words. Instead, she writes an autobiography, in which her father's survival is intertwined with her survival as a victim of his abuse.

*Rose of Lebanon* feminizes the masculine narrative of "war" by claiming that wars are not fought in the public sphere alone but also in the private one. In addition to writing about incest, Aini writes about other marginal abused women, omitted from Israeli metanarratives: her sister, beaten by her husband; her grandmother, sold as a child to her grandfather; her grandmother's neighbor Lunera, brutalized by the Nazis; her female friends in the army, sexually abused by the disciplinary officer; or her grandmother’s neighbor, the prostitute, abused by her clients. By blending her personal narrative with the history of the state, she asserts that political malaise (Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982) parallels family dysfunction (p. 116).

On a mythological level, the narrator tells of her picture cards, among them one of Jephthah's daughter, dancing with her girlfriends (p. 398). The analogy between Vered and Jephthah's daughter stems from the narrator's feeling of being crucified by her father, just as Jephthah's daughter was sacrificed by her father (Judges, 11). The biblical story recounts how Jephthah, appointed to lead the army of the people of Gilead against the Ammonites, hastily vows before God that should he
triumph in battle, he would sacrifice the first person that approaches him upon his return. On his way home, his only daughter welcomes him. Learning of his vow, she and her friends flee to the mountains for two months, lamenting her virginity. On her return, Jephthah executes his vow.

In the biblical incident, the virginity of Jephthah's daughter is highlighted. Uneasily, the biblical story exudes an odd feeling of incest and forbidden pagan behavior. Jephthah's daughter subsequently becomes a mythological figure whose fate the women of Israel mourn four days every year (Judges 11: 40).

Juxtaposing Jephthah's daughter myth with that of Dympna, which appears in Harrison's memoir *The Kiss*, facilitates a new reading of the biblical story:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Dympna</th>
<th>Jephthah's daughter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Her murderer</td>
<td>Her father</td>
<td>Her father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for the murder</td>
<td>Refusal to marry</td>
<td>Her father's vow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>her father</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After her death</td>
<td>Canonized (Christianity)</td>
<td>Becomes the center of a Jewish women's ritual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Bible does not state that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter out of incestuous love. However, the elusiveness of the text and its emphasis on her virginity raises a suspicion that the biblical author obscured the incest motif. Mieke Bal (1988: 45) maintains that the ritual in which young women greeted victors was well known in Antiquity. This statement suggests that the murder of Jephthah's daughter was a violent act rather than a misfortune. In this light, the motive for the killing was Jephthah's latent wish to preserve his daughter’s virginity.

The biblical narrator’s apprehension with the subject matter is quite obvious. Interestingly, Hebrew has no equivalence for the word to "molest," and still today, the word for "abuse" bears physical, sexual, or mental connotations. Evelyn Reed (1975) offers a new understanding of the incest taboo. She has argued that the incest taboo was not originally a taboo against incest, but rather "a social law of supreme force" (p.
Confessional Writing About Incest: Lea Aini's *Rose of Lebanon* and *S'domel*

Confessional Fiction is a genre defined by Naveh (1987: 10), as

> The confessing person does not examine his or her deeds and behavior according to rules imposed from outside, but according to the instructions of an inner traditional-conscientious system which is slightly individual and slightly universal (ibid.).

Naveh notes (1987: 14) that the framework of confessional fiction is flexible and has fewer rules and formulaic constraints (ibid.: 232). It allows an “unreliable” narrator to present extreme and disturbing social issues in a morally ailing and decaying society; the presentation of his/her story exposes a society plagued by hypocrisy and lies (ibid.: 234).

For this specific reason, women writers utilize the confession genre when they deal with violence against women. Violence against women is perceived as a personal matter and not a systemic one. Patriarchal society silence women in the courts and in public. Thereby, the novella "God's Sodom" by Lea Aini relates the violent situation to which the protagonist was subjected and how her will to be free of it led her to commit a murder (Naveh: 236).

*Neder* (vow, in Hebrew), the female narrator in "God's Sodom,” unfolds the confession in a language of many literacy levels—low as well as poetic—to depict an abusive society that turns the world into *S’domel* (God's Sodom). This oxymoron signifies the connection between absolute evil represented by Sodom, known for its sexual transgressions, and *el*—God. Neder's father is a decorated, award-winning police officer who successfully hides the sexual abuse he inflicts on his daughter. Furthermore, his job enables him to abuse other male and female children. In this novella, a police officer is a pedophile, and the head of the national revenue department is a serial sex offender. In the eyes of the narrator/protagonist, Israel becomes *S’domel*—a country that abandons children and women. Hence, Neder appoints herself an "executioner" (pp. 56, 113).

After her abusive father dies of a stroke, Neder kills her mother, who for years ignored her daughter’s suffering. Neder assumes her mother's identity and moves into another town.
Confessional Writing About Incest: Lea Aini's *Rose of Lebanon* and *S'domel*

an old age home called *Margo'ot* (relaxation in Hebrew). In this remote home, the same patriarchal system operates, making it an inseparable part of God's Sodom. Old Amnon Stolz (whose surname is German for 'proud') does not cease to sexually harass the female residents, and takes pride in his violent behavior, until Neder comes to their rescue and causes him to suffer a fatal stroke.

Thus, three Sodom-like circles are depicted: Neder’s home, the old age home, and the social system.

When investigated, Neder, a social worker, writes the future protocol of her trial, which resembles the prototype of a trial involving sexual abuse. First, she notes that by the letter of the law the case of her father's abuse of her "is no longer legally valid" (p. 84). Then she imagines how the prosecution presents her case:

So maybe it's all in her mind? How many times in the past have we heard of children with a vivid memory who make up things even of this sort? [...] Thus it turns out that a father's innocent kiss will suddenly be thought—I beg your pardon—oral sex. And the occasional non-kiss by the mother—criminal neglect [...] But look—the mother is a women without a flaw. Not a single day did she miss work. A responsible and decent woman [...]. And the father? Ladies and gentlemen, the father was a police officer. A veteran officer in the Israel Police. The number of awards he won—and every year by the way, is impossible to count here [...]. And also the girl—so everyone remembers her, always dressed clean and shining. [...] Her school marks too—excellent. At primary school, at high school, at university [...] The accused gained impressive achievements and excellent evaluations [...]. Can these actually attest to a suffering girl-woman? Can this, in your view, be the result to be expected of an abuse bag? Now look here—all the books argue the opposite. All the experts are of one opinion: this can't be the true future of one of that kind. A whore? Certainly! A drug addict? Absolutely! A cruel mother who repeats her parents crimes? Obviously (pp. 84-85).

In summing up, the prosecutor explains:

Therefore, if indeed the plaintiff insists on accusing us of murder of her childhood—better she should know that she is not charging her parents but society as a whole; and if that is the case, better she should prepare herself for a great onslaught by our fears. For a counter-claim by our repulsion. We shall fight her to the death [...] (p. 87).

The biblical myth of the Binding of Isaac enables Aini to suggest a myth concerning the sexual abuse of a girl, and shows a society resembling Sodom. The motif of cleanliness, characteristic of Neder's biological mother, and of Tessia, one of the three "replacement" mothers whom Neder finds in the old age home, is meant to stress the filth of society and the intention to create an impression of morality. Neder's selection of the laundry room as the site for the harassment of Amnon Stolz illustrates her wish to expose the image of cleanliness alongside reality. In the absence of God she notes:
"I perform human justice. Very small doses. A drop here and there" (p. 18). That same society which has ignored the crime committed against her ignores Neder's crime, because the "house mother" at the old age home is unaware that Neder is disguised as her mother and that she is not an old woman. Even after causing Stolz to suffer a heart attack she is able to slip away from the crime scene and not be linked to his death. At the end of the confession, aware of the price she will have to pay for her actions, she declares that she will represent herself before the court "standing absolutely straight" (p. 113) as "The law was born only to cover our nakedness" (p. 86).

Neder's confession, which at times becomes naturalistic, leading the reader into scenes of rape and abuse, creates a precise account of what was done to her. This offers an explanation for her actions as a mentally unstable person. The reader understands that Neder is a woman whose life has been ruined by sexual abuse. The murder she committed devastated the course of her life but could never heal her psychological wound.

**Conclusion**

Kathleen Gough (1975: 61) notes that "language made possible not only a division and cooperation in labor but also all forms of tradition, rules, morality and cultural learning." Since the late 1980s, women writers have changed the face of world literature thematically and poetically. Their most valuable tool is language. By its means, they tell stories of sexual violence previously untold, and, as shown here of incestuous abuse. Through Intertextual investigations, they have also "stolen" and feminized the masculine language of myth to undermine its patriarchal underpinnings. The purpose of these writers in changing the meaning of language is to transform accepted "rules," "morality," and "cultural learning," and to represent women's experience while directing criticism at society's rules and apparent lack of morality.

In this study, the unique role of women writers as exposers of the "no-deal" themes neglected by male writers has been explored in the writings of Lea Aini. Writing about incest certainly encourages writers to use a personal voice (and genres) that reveals the "truth" and evokes female testimony. Moreover, contemporary women
writers are finally experiencing the freedom to tell the incest story not only as an autobiography or a memoir, but also as fiction.

Incest as a distinct literary genre yields an intimate story, told mostly in the first person, as an autobiography, memoir or confessional fiction. However, as evident in Aini’s works, the personal story is also a public matter. Both works demonstrate the connection between incest and writing as social protest and survival mechanism. Whether the abuser is a police officer or a Holocaust survivor, Aini tells her own personal trauma and calls upon her readers to protect the victim and stop the prevalent literary and social silence.

**Bibliography**

**Primary Sources:**


Secondary Resources:


Ben-Dov, Nitza. "'And she had not known man': on the ending of the story of Jephthah's daughter, on the ending of Judges, on the ending of the story of Michal, Saul's daughter and on other endings". *Leafs Of Discourse*, Vol. 48, pp. 7-16, 2002 (Hebrew).


Confessional Writing About Incest: Lea Aini's Rose of Lebanon and S'domel


---

1 Psychological/sociological research shows that father-daughter incestuous abuse is the most common type of incest today; see e.g. Vander Mey and Neff, (1986) and Russell (1999).

2 Even when the work is written as a novel, that is fiction, differentiating the life of the character from that of the author, the genres of the confessional diary and the lyric novel are discernable; both have a narrator who tells her story in the first person.

3 In Aini's novel *Someone Must Be Here* (1995), incest takes place in the protagonist's neighbor's home.


5 Rajan (1994) suggests that the current appeal of *Mathilda* lies in its introjections of the Thing (or in Lacan's term the "Real") that cannot be incorporated into the Romantic canon. "For Lacan we..."
encounter the Real only by missing it: Mathilda’s narrativization of this Thing through a story of ‘incest’ that misrecognizes a figure for trauma as its cause is, in this sense, an encounter with a Real that makes itself felt only as a resistance to its textualization. Unable to represent the Real, the text encrypts it, communicating on the level of affect rather than content. Moreover, what is encrypted, transmitted to a reader named in the text yet withdrawn by its actual transmission to Godwin, is on some level the (un)readability of the primal scene of trauma. For if Mathilda addresses her story to Woodville and thus reenters the circuit of communication at the point of death, Mary Shelley at the same time discards her text by sending it to her father, who might be expected to read the text only to bury it once again.6 However, Gillingham (2003) resists any simple attributions of transparency or strict causality to the relation between the author and her text.

6 And see her first novel, Sand Tide, about a widow whose husband was killed during his service in the Israeli army. The plot portrayed her grief and unwillingness to accept his death, that is, her refusal to concur with the unwritten contract between the citizens and the country, which allows taking people's lives to protect Israel from its enemies.

7 Hebrew for Rose.

8 On the place of violence against women in historical and contemporary radical feminist discourse, see Rowland and Klein (1996).

9 The novel Mouthing the Words written by the Canadian novelist Camilla Gibb explores the severe mental disorders caused after the molested girl becomes a woman. This novel too, is poetically designed as confessional fiction.

10 On the influence of Aini's father on her works, and their dialogue on his past trauma, see Lentin (2000: 75-76, 82). Aini's father (according to an interview with Lentin, 2000: 82) proposed in his testimony as a Holocaust survival an alternative narrative to the nationalistic one adopted by Israeli society in those years, allowing the entry of motifs like victimhood and suffering to his story, which undermine the Zionist ethos.

11 Moi (1995: 53) emphasizes the role of women's writing in viewing women as part of historical development. Rose of Lebanon shows not only the involvement of women in the construct of historical narrative, but also Aini's deconstruction of the war narrative, realized in the descriptions of the women in the rear and of the soldier who was not able to fight in the war and was subsequently hospitalized.

12 Ben-Dov (2002) notes that the Hebrew Bible emphasizes the fact that Jephthah's daughter was a virgin and his only daughter and he has no one besides her.


14 A direct description of incest features in the Bible in the story of Lot's daughters (Genesis 19: 31-38), who had intercourse with their father with the expressed purpose of preserving the human race. Here the woman (Lot's eldest daughter) initiates the incest, although the event is portrayed not as a sin but as an act of survival. The biblical episode repeatedly relates that Lot, who was drunk, did not know about the incest. The story ends with the birth of Moab and Ammon from the incestuous intercourse, without indication of any punishment for breaking the taboo.