After Twenty Years: On the Place of “Women in Judaism” in Feminist Reading of Modern Hebrew Literature

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Introduction

Reading the articles published in Women in Judaism over the past twenty years affords us a comprehensive view of the main concerns of scholars who have examined Modern Hebrew Literature from a feminist approach. Clearly, these articles illustrate a connection between feminist theory and Modern Hebrew literature.

Before proceeding to an analysis of the journal’s articles, I first wish to address the basic question of the meaning of the theory of Feminist Reading, offering a possible interpretation.

What is Feminist Reading?

Elaine Showalter’s typology (1981: 251) divides feminist research into two prominent parts: feminist reading, which includes feminist criticism, and analysis of the characteristics of Women's' Writing as an antithesis to canonic male writing.

Showalter (1997) depicts the dichotomy characterizing female descriptions in hegemonous texts - descriptions of two polarized female models: the angel and the monster.¹ This traditional tagging of female characters has been called ‘textual harassment’ (Jacobus, 1986: 85). Due to the custom of writers, both male and female, to create a distorted female character - as a result of the influence of cultural stereotypes on the shaping and construction of characters² - we, the readers, must commit a “survival act” (Rich, 1992), by exposing stereotypes in order to become reacquainted with the character. This act contrasts with the distorted acquaintance derived from the presentation of women as “other,” according to the hegemonous

¹ In order to resolve the distorted presentation of women in male texts, Showalter offers the solutions of female writing and research of female literature (shifting from endocentric feminist criticism to gynocentric feminist criticism). Thus, as opposed to the examination of history - up until now - according to male terms, it is to be examined in female terms in the future (Showalter, 1981).

² According to Connell (1987), the source of female stereotypes is the family institute, schools, the media, and other societal bodies, which construct and advance these stereotypes, in order to support the subjugation of women to men. The act of opposing a biased representation of women is a prominent feature of liberal feminism (ibid: 32-37).

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notion of women diverting from the norm, i.e. from men. Similarly, an analysis of the female character does not necessarily reveal feminine behavior. Contrary to biology, by which the woman becomes a woman, human behavior is not characterized by the biological dichotomy of man-woman. Hence, “masculinity” and “femininity” are social functions that may be attributed both to men and to women, despite the patriarchal desire to attribute gender to biological sex, thus deepening the gap between the sexes. This patriarchal tendency to emphasize the polarity of the sexes had resulted in the profound commitment of feminism to show that those “feminine” qualities developed by patriarchy, such as sweetness, modesty and submission, are not biological dictated, and do not necessarily characterize women. Thus, one must steer away from stereotypical ”female” descriptions, including new ones describing women as strong and peace seeking, which have duplicated the binary dichotomy between men and women (Moi, 1997).

Orly Lubin (2003: 63-80) suggests reading the text contrary to the way in which it wishes to be read, that is - reading the text against itself. The reader has to read

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3 According to Rich (1976), one of the most popular stereotypes in human society views women as “characters of expectation:” “waiting to be addressed, waiting for their period and fearing it won’t come, waiting for men to return from the battlefield, from work, waiting for the children to grow up, expecting another child or the end of their menstruation.” (pp. 67-68) This stereotype is intended to explain women’s inferiority, alongside the superiority of men who are not characterized by the dimension of expectation, and hence are not weakened by it, thereby maintaining an active approach by which they may gain a central place in the world.

4 Patriarchy maintains two principles: man controls woman, and the older man controls the younger man. The family is the main institute of patriarchy, which helps it conduct the socialization that preserves male supremacy (Millett, 1970).

5 The industrial revolution brought about new norms of gender. These changes are not only related to the concept of “feminine,” but also to the way in which “masculine” is interpreted (in this context, Connell’s books 1992, 1995 are noteworthy). One now finds various sorts of masculinity, with “creative” combinations of “feminine” features alongside “masculine” ones, in ways that alter masculinity, breaking it away from the hegemonous framework of the concept. According to Lupton (2000), masculinity is actually a plurality of masculinities, so that it is not hegemonous, but rather comprises a plurality of qualities. This expresses the dynamic nature of man, who is not static, and is time and place dependent. The variety that characterizes masculinity pertains not only to the differentiation between heterosexual and homosexual masculinity, but also to the understanding that there are various types within heterosexual masculinity in dialogue with each other. This is in keeping with the emergence of new heterosexual patterns of masculinity that cannot be restricted to the acceptable pattern of Fashionable Heterosexuality. These new patterns show that even the majority of heterosexual men are not homogenous, rather conducting inner otherness (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 1997).

6 See, too, Hofstede’s research (Hofstede, 1998: 6-17), which presents the clusters of qualities attributed to men versus the clusters of qualities attributed to women, dwelling upon the stereotypes underlying each cluster of qualities.
whatever the text does not include. According to this reading, the female character of the text is no longer “other,” and the female experience is as valid and central as is that of the male one. This is called “subversive” reading, and may be conducted by women and men alike. It is actually called “reading from the periphery.” The reader who approaches the text with a feminist viewpoint asks new questions in the realm of sexual and gender otherness - questions with ramifications in the psychological, sociological and historical perceptions expressed in the text.

Lubin (2003: 63-80) claims that the “other” in the story may be man or woman, since the “other” is whoever is converted into an object by the hegemonous cultural center, by eliminating their uniqueness, blurring their humanity and regarding them in a controlling and objectifying manner. Feminist reading itself, according to Lubin (2003: 63-80), writes out the narrative and establishes the objectified element as the central subject. This reading is maintained in the hegemonous text, and the reader of this text is posited as the “other.”

According to Pam Morris (1993: 37-57), the feminist school of thought wishes to examine “gender blindness” regarding the issues connected to women in the context of literary research. Literary research was controlled for years by phallic critique, and even when it dealt with texts of blurred meanings in terms of gender, it did not deal with the blurriness - rather presenting an equivocal critique in order to refrain from impinging upon the patriarchal world view and world order. The purpose of phallic critique is to prevent a weakening of the dominance of male patriarchy. For this reason, this interpretation is offered to maintain the existing order, and to eradicate the gender issues often raised by a writer’s subversive desire to ponder the existing order. One may note that the implied reader of the texts was obviously male; hence, a discussion of the gender issues challenging the existing order is seen to be totally irrelevant. Morris claims that reverting back to the canon is not only a return to the canonic work, but also to canonic research, characterized by “gender blindness” (Morris, 1993: 37-57).7

7 This blindness not only characterizes the disregard of gender issues in the canonic text, but also the segregating and dispossessing of female creators from the canonic literary history - dispossess...
I wish to claim that the study of gender issues advances the discussion of female characters presented in the literary text, whether they are central characters or supporting, secondary ones. The reading of a literary text that presents a female character requires awareness of the historical placing of the text. Examining female characters anchored in history promotes a critical viewing of the limited place allotted to women, and the biased shaping of their character - as a pawn in the hands of the patriarchal institute. Ancient texts, such as the Hebrew Bible, represent historical norms according to which women’s subjugation to men is taken for granted. As part of the cultural canon, these texts preserve their centrality, yet one must distinguish between their poetic values and their biased and didactic gender approach. Feminist research will treat the hegemonic arrangements critically, and will not merely accept whatever is described. Many canonic texts present a typological female character in order to fixate a certain form of femininity, and this phenomenon must be addressed by literary criticism. In response to the attempt to construct a unified and “worthy” femininity, Gillian Beer (1997) claims that she, as a woman, represents herself alone; hence - feminine-textual representations do not necessarily indicate facts existing in reality. This viewpoint releases us from mythical approaches to women, and encourages otherness among women. In this manner, the literary female character is restored along with her uniqueness and self, while the biased gender approach of the canonic text is weakened.8

Helene Cixous (1997) notes the binary worldview distinguishing “masculine” from “feminine”: culture vs. nature; father vs. mother; rational vs. emotion. Subjects in pairs appear repeatedly, with the inner hierarchy of the pair clearly understood. There are few creators who manage to “avoid” a dichotomous presentation of the world. Rachel Elior (2001) shows how this binary approach is expressed in Jewish texts, committed by critics claiming that the writing of female creators is “feminine” and therefore inferior. Thus, literature becomes male literature (the creators) for men (readers). In response to the expulsion of female creators from literary history, Pearce (1991) claims that a similar act should be conducted against works of men. Instead of reading and studying texts written by male creators, she recommends choosing the writings of female creators, since studying texts and creators that are hostile to one’s gender identity is not enjoyable, nor is it worthy for female researchers to dedicate their lives to them. 8 Moi (1995: 47) claims that female readers are not satisfied with female characters undergoing experiences similar to theirs, but rather yearn for female models with whom they can identify. These models will present strong and impressive role models whose identities are not dependent on men.
thereby producing a separation between men and women according to various criteria of nearness or distance from attributes of holy and mundane, pure and impure - causing women to be segregated into a private sphere, while the men are given place in the public one. Moreover, the population of women is also rendered a clear-cut binary division, employing the dichotomy of honor and shame, modesty and licentiousness, whose aims are to fixate the traditional-patriarchal order. We can thus understand the notion underlying the discrimination, segregation, silencing, and eradicating of memories of women of various cultures and religions throughout history.  

In this reality, according to Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, our aim as readers of feminist texts is not necessarily to criticize, accuse, judge, or praise. We should examine how the text invites the readers, as members of a specific society, to understand the meaning of “being a woman” or “being a man,” thereby confirming or challenging existing cultural norms. This examination stems from the understanding that literature is not detached from the culture in which it appears, and actually represents social processes. Thus, the process of interpreting a literary work is actually the interpretation of the society in which we live, with its beneficial and humiliating patterns. Moreover, literature is not only influenced but also itself influences the way in which society perceives itself and the world (Belsey and Moore, 1997).

After the reader has conducted a feminist reading of a canonic text, she or he continues with this reading, applying it to texts created by women. The feminist movement carries the banner of researching female literature, after a long tradition of women segregated from the literary canon.

As stated by Chaya Shacham (2001: 7), “The focusing of feminist criticism on female writing marks the cultural-political space, but no less than that - the psychological one, in which female creativity takes place. However, the main contribution of this

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9 The religious language associates nature with the untamed, sacrilege, breaking through fences, unclear dangers of the private realm. This is of course the realm of the women (Elior, 2001). Thus, attempts were made to show that the segregation of women is for their own good - to save them from themselves, and to keep them from emulating the negative female model - “Lilith”.
criticism that accompanies female creation is its centralization, so that it shifts from being a private and intimate tool of expression to a lever of cultural change.”

These words, to my mind, extend the role of feminist reading from the realm of literary methodology to the possession of political power. In a similar vein, Julia Kristeva (1997) claims that the action of analysis and interpretation is a political one, during which the phenomena is granted meaning. Since analysis grants meaning and existence to phenomena, there are those who will wish to reduce the analysis of certain elements, in order to eradicate meanings that they do not wish to exist. Kristeva’s words clarify the importance of interpretation from a feminist angle, and the importance of focusing on the female experience - an analysis that not only presents the experience, but also grants it meaning and actual existence in the world.

Distinguishing between the articles according to the method employed by each researcher, we encounter four focuses of interest:

a. Feminist reading of women writers' works, examining representations of women, gender conflicts, relationships between sexes;

b. Presenting theoretical / poetic models that arise from reading Modern Hebrew literature;

c. Suggestions of feminist reading of works written by men authors;

d. Deconstructive reading of misogynist myths.

A. Feminist reading of women writers' works, examining representations of women, gender conflicts, and relationships between sexes.

In this category of studies, we may examine two main scientific paths: first, articles that deal with canonical writers (for example, Dvora Baron, Leah Goldberg, Yona Wallach, Zelda, Shulamith Hareven and Dahlia Ravikovitch); and secondly, scholars that chose to analyze the writing of new writers or to rediscover a writer, whose works did not receive academic attention (for example, Savyon Liebrecht, Nava Semel, Lea Aini, and Alona Kimhi).

Some of these writers - like Ronit Matalon and Orly Castel-Bloom - lacked canonical status when the article dealing with their works was published, whereas a few years
later, they indeed achieved a central place in the literary sphere. This fact indicates the
innovative viewpoint held by the articles' writers and the editor of the journal, given
that promotion in the academic sphere is based on publications that mostly deal with
canonical writers. Moreover, several articles were the first to expose the English reader to works of Modern Hebrew literature that had not been translated at the time
of the article's publication (for example, Someone Must be Here and Sdommel by Lea
Aini and Uncover Her Face by Ronit Matalon).

Einat Baram Eshel (2011) was the first to examine the importance of Dvora Baron’s
early story Zug Mitkotet... (skitza) (A Quarreling Couple... [sketch]), about a young
married couple drawn into a verbal and physical altercation. She proposed that this
early story already showed intimations of symbolism and complexity that characterize
Baron’s later stories, as well as the first signs of the blurring and encoding of female
protest that are characteristic of the second half of her work. Baron did this mainly by
adapting the conventions of early twentieth-century male literature - private themes,
short genres and fragmented language - and employing their meaning and purpose for
female needs.

Baram Eshel’s historical examination also helps to understand and appreciate Baron's
artistic project: Dvora Baron began writing during the Tkufat Hat’hiya at the end of
the Haskalah (Hebrew Enlightenment). While one attribute of the Haskalah was its
seemingly progressive attitudes to women’s education, in actuality, the Maskilim
themselves still continued to encourage women’s traditional roles as wife and mother,
and did not consider self-realization a reason for a woman’s education. Thus, a
woman writer at the time had to deal with significant questions pertaining to personal
and social identity, especially in the case of Baron, a young woman of only seventeen,
who had just left her parents’ home and was taking her first steps within a patriarchal
literary system. Against this background, Zug Mitkotet has a particularly symbolic
function. Through it, Baron takes a deep look at the inner core of married life,
shattering the romantic myth of marriage’s power of self-fulfillment. As she recounts
the routine, intimate details of a married couple’s life, she exposes the mechanisms of
oppression, deprivation, and discrimination that are hidden deep within, behind closed
doors, in those private spaces where the woman is secluded. She weaves a connection between male sexuality and the oppression and exploitation of women, as she tackles the humiliation and violence that husbands often foist on their wives.

One of the story’s main functions is exposing those possessive structures that ostensibly are there to protect women but in fact betray them. By this, Baron refutes the age-old myth of married life as a “happily-ever-after” fairy tale.

The story can be read also with autobiographic prism. Sonia, the hero, is Baron’s tangible representation. Sonia’s struggle with her powerful husband represents Baron’s struggle for principles in the literary world - principles of value and identity. Sonia strives for her rights to gaze (in the mirror and out the window), to express herself, and to interpret her experiences on her own. Baron, similarly, strives for her rights to observe (within and without), to express herself, and to express her experiences independently as a woman writer. Sonia struggles against her husband by using the very devices that he uses; Baron copes with her male-dominated surroundings by using those devices that the male authors of her era used, adapting them for her own, individual needs.

Several articles have been devoted to Leah Goldberg's work. Rachel Feldhay Brenner (2002) brings a new reading of Goldberg's play, *Lady of the Castle* (1954). Her interpretation shows the pioneering act of writing the play. Written at a time when the ideal of the “new” Israeli Jew and the notion of *shlilat hagola*, the negation of the Diaspora, were intensely promoted - *Lady of the Castle* presents the story of Lena, a Holocaust orphan in post-war Central Europe, who is kept hidden away in a Castle by its former owner, Count Zabrodsky, under the deception that the war is still going on. Lena is rescued from her captor by two members of the Israeli Yishuv: Dora, a Youth Aliyah social worker on a mission to discover the surviving Jewish children in Europe and transfer them to Israel, and Sand, a librarian searching for remnants of Jewish libraries for the National Library in Jerusalem. The conflict that emerges between them and Lena runs counter to the popular myth of the Holocaust victim gratefully embracing the hope of a new future embodied in the heroically idealistic Israeli. Dora, who was born and grew up in Lena’s hometown, immigrated to Israel before the war.
She identifies with the notion of the “new” Israeli Jew and impresses upon Lena the vision of the victim’s rebirth in Israel. It is with tremendous anguish, mistrust, and reluctance that Lena yields to Dora’s pressure and agrees to resettle in Israel. The drama foregrounds a deep emotional and conceptual disparity between the ideological “new” Israeli stance of the rescuer and the unmitigated anguish and loss of the survivor. *Lady of the Castle* does not resolve this tension but, rather, ends on a note of superficial and uneasy truce.

Yaakova Sacerdoti suggests a Buberian reading of Leah Goldberg’s “Nissim Venifla’ot,” as running counter to post-colonial readings that accused Goldberg of an Orientalist point of view.

According to Sacerdoti (2014), the narrator in “Nissim Venifla’ot” presents two ways to appease the human yearning for happiness and love. The first is by peeling off the layer of resentment hiding one’s strengths. The second is a type of “human bartering” - the "I" and the “Thou” fulfill each other’s needs. Dr. Klumba’Rosh offers Nissim and Eliyahu economic security, education, and love. They in return replace his loneliness and grief with laughter and joy. Nobody’s Aunt would embrace all kids and fulfill their needs for shelter, attention, and adult guidance. Hence, they would fill her life with adventure, mischief, laughter, and humor. Nobody’s Aunt desperately clings to the spark of life the children have brought to her world and is unwilling to forego even a crumb of the happiness she finds in their presence. When she discovers that they have neither included her in their plans, nor asked for her advice, she protests: “You should know that if you are planning to operate a wandering circus and run away from home, I will be the one to pester you any way I can (…) I want a moment of silence (…) I would like to speak.” (Goldberg, 2010, Nissim: 50) Nobody’s Aunt is offended by the children's betrayal. They have removed her from the circle she worked so hard to be part of, and the fear of emptiness returning to her world re-emerges. However, her anger subsides as she realizes that she needs the kids as much as they need her. Addressing Nissim, she says: “Soon I'll be very old and I won't have anyone to take care of me (…) you will be a grown man by then. Perhaps you and Eliyahu might return a favor for a favor. I will be your aunt.” (Ibid: 40)
Therefore, in “Nissim Venifla’ot,” Leah Goldberg called for a social and personal renewal, one that would materialize only after humans learn to relate to others as a “thou” rather than an “it.” Nobody’s Aunt, the lonely and toothless female, is the one who inspired her fellow characters to realize that the world could become a better place once humans became attentive to their neighbors’ needs. She starts by creating change in her own neighborhood and city. Her story reflects the Israeli social environment and educates her readers to become more relevant in their respective communities.

The poetry of Yona Wallach has gleaned two interesting studies. Many scholars believe that Wallach’s main contribution to Modern Hebrew poetics pertains to her creative use of the language, particularly her ingenious ability to flex it for her highly subjective expression. Zafrira Lidovsky Cohen (2002), in her close reading of Wallach’s “Precisely” and “Let the Words,” shows that the influence of Chaim Nachman Bialik’s essay “Revealment and Concealment in Language” on Wallach’s perception of words, and consequently on her poetic art, must not be underestimated.

Revisiting the enduring philosophical question pertaining to the nature of language and words’ meanings, Wallach’s conception in “Precisely” and “Let the Words” is an admixture of Kabbalistic lore and Renaissance Neo-Platonism. It is the same supposition Bialik argues forcefully in the first part of “Revealment and Concealment,” namely, that language is genuinely natural and words directly reveal the essence of things. What Bialik does best in prose, Wallach renders in poetry. In “Let the Words,” Wallach asserts that the “sheet of ice” melts away with desire, allowing - in Bialik’s words - “an internal language, that of solitude and the soul”, to come forth.

Prescribing to Bialik’s romantic portrayal of the poetic quest, Wallach is ever in pursuit of the personal property of things. Always fleeing that which is fixed and inert in language, she uses words as unique “working tools” to penetrate her consciousness, in search of the “living I inside” and its cognition of things as perceived in the fleeing, never-to-be-repeated moment. Under her hands, in Bialik’s words, “long established words are constantly being pulled off their setting…new combinations and
associations are introduced…the profane turns sacred and the sacred profane.” Only the sense of ontological nothingness that comes to dominate Bialik’s essay, beginning with part II of his “Revealment and Concealment,” never befalls Wallach’s poetic scheme. In fact, Wallach leaves Bialik’s essay just at the onset of its ultimate conclusion: “It is clear that language with all its associations does not introduce us at all into the inner area, the essence of things, but that, on the contrary, language itself stands as a barrier before them…”

Wallach is not a postmodernist skeptic overwhelmed by a language system that veils the human subject from his or her individuality and Self. She certainly believes that words can escape the constraints of their structural meanings. She believes in the so-called “magical” powers of words and is convinced, as Walt Whitman was, that all words are spiritual, and as Victor Hugo thought, that “le mot, qu’on le sache, est un être vivant… le mot est le verbe, et le verbe est Dieu.” (Lidovsky Cohen, 2002)

Ruth Tsoffar (2006) claims, regarding Wallach’s poem "Tefillin," that Wallach’s theater pieces, among which the poem “Tefillin” is obviously prominent, ironically criticizes male power to redefine the female subject. A striking staging of an alternative to this negative identification thus results from the powerful speech acts, which she, the female, constructs. In her newly negotiated gender politics, Wallach asserts that what is at stake is not the sexual act itself as much as its imagined antecedent. Power relations of gender, class, religion, or social position as well as politics, biases, and awareness—all indicate that what we bring with us to the sexual act determines the act itself. One could argue that as long as it is possible to narrate these heterosexual terms, a mental collaboration - orgasmic and productive - is possible. Obviously, her mentally active role neutralizes her role as body qua body, the objectified position of the female body.

The implication of having a stage set is essential for an adequate rendering of Wallach’s poem. The conventional, private male gaze in the poem and of the reader is replaced by the public arena. The sensational performance draws on the ritualistic daily activity of laying tefillin; it also encourages repetition, legitimizes and canonizes the sexual act as a planned, designed piece of acting rather than an impulsive one-
night stand. The violence is also framed and reduced to a controlled, carefully directed performance. The result is that the continual production of “Tefillin” on stage promises the endless renewal of the female body, while it prohibits the reproduction of the male body. On that stage, Wallach’s female body emerges not as biographic, literal, or metonymic but rather as a liberated agent capable of contention and victorious subversion.

Varda Koch Ocker (2006) introduces Zelda's writing to the American reader. She states that Zelda’s poems presuppose a Jewish literary education. She uses various Kabbalistic and Hasidic terms to convey the fluid boundaries between death and life, imprisoning grief and liberating maturation. Zelda's poetry can be seen as a poetic expression of the tenets of Habad, a Hasidic movement that was led by masters belonging to her father’s family. Habad proposed to attain knowledge of the divine through hitbonenut, contemplation, and constant reflection on God, in order to bridge the gap between the transcendental experience of a world without divinity and the immanent longings for a world united within divinity.

The poet is a contemplative, lyrical self who observes a variety of daily phenomena and seeks their hidden meaning. Zelda, is the first female orthodox Jewish poet to consistently draw on the rich corpus of Jewish mystical literature, thought by both traditional and modern scholars to have been written by men (unlike Christianity, Judaism has not had its female mystics). Its symbols and imagery are pivotal to her poetry. Instead of using erotic imagery, as many mystics famously did, she evokes a contemplative feminine self that is anchored in a domestic, physically narrow life around the home, the balcony and courtyard, the shopkeepers, and the downtrodden of the neighborhood. Yet, this very humble self appropriates the language of Jewish mysticism in her search for meaning, for the mark of God in the world.

An important corpus of articles have been dedicated to Holocaust literature, written by women writers, although most studies that explore Holocaust literature discuss men writers such as Primo Levy, Aharon Appelfeld, Elie Wiesel and David Grossman. Hence, these studies open a door for a new examination of Holocaust literature.
Dvir Abramovich (2002) explores Holocaust representations in Savyon Liebrecht’s short stories. One may note that Liebrecht’s work has received mixed responses, from scholars, on the one hand, who see her writing as canonical, and on the other - researchers who associate her body of work with popular writing.

Abramovich claims that, at the core of Liebrecht’s corpus, there is a desire to shock the reader into an awareness of how disinterested and indifferent the present generation of Israelis can be to the murder and pain of millions. Moreover, she relates how the unspoken code of silence encouraged by the state (aided and abetted by official and educational utilities) has resulted in young Israelis believing they must sever and repress any attachment to those perceived as passive victims.

According to Abramovich, Liebrecht’s stories tap the abrasive and anguished vein of relationships between Holocaust parents and their conflicted children and grandchildren. It is often the case that Liebrecht portrays the aftershocks that reverberate through the lives of the survivors’ offspring as the memories of the Holocaust come to the fore. The basic method of Liebrecht’s writing is to present the reader with two antithetical world views, two opposed aspects of the same inseparable reality. She peoples her narrative with characters that are emotionally crippled from direct or indirect effects of the Holocaust and who are trying to repress or preserve memory. Typically, the horrific past that engages the characters is fully realized and dramatized in scenes where it is either revealed piecemeal, or less commonly, flares up in an uncontrolled outburst.

Rachel Feldhay Brenner writes about the story “The Witness,” written by Shulamith Hareven. “The Witness” actually rules out the possibility of a mutually acceptable modus vivendi between Israelis and Holocaust survivors. Shlomek, an orphaned Holocaust refugee, arrives in Israel in 1940. The aggressive, practically unanimous, denial of the Holocaust victims’ testimony isolates him in his new home. The story is told from the point of view of Yotam, the educator in charge of Shlomek’s rehabilitation who, like his newly arrived pupil, was born in Poland. Yotam espouses the ideology of the Israeli “hero” and wishes to turn Shlomek into a “real” sabra. The emotional discrepancy, which characterizes the relationships between the boy and his
teacher, results in the exclusion of the survivor (Feldhay Brenner, 2002). Here we can trace, once again, the subversive point of view of Israeli women writers depicting the price that Holocaust survivors had to pay as “others” in the Zionist sphere.

A unique place has been given to Ronit Matalon's first novel, The One Facing Us (1995). Dvir Abramovich (2003) claims that the novel is a meditation on the role that memory plays in the pursuit of the past and the individual’s search for identity among the contrarieties of life. The collection of vignettes has been distilled through the sieve of time and through the less than objective agendas of those in the present, subjectively recalling their own versions, which are filtered through Esther. She, in turn, gleans much from the not-always truthful reminisces and strikingly powerful silences which blur the boundaries between the past and the present. As the novel draws to a close, Uncle Sicourelle hands Esther her passport, which he had kept from her, together with a plane ticket and a roll of bills. He tells her, “I want you to do whatever you want. Go conquer the world, ya Esther. You show them” (Matalon, 284). Uncle Sicourelle wants his niece to break the shackles of madness, failure, and stasis, which had bound her relatives. Esther’s calling is to look the world in the eye, to focus her intense gaze and sound her voice, while finding an exit out of the maze of the past. Abramovich defines the novel as a masterpiece, and today, fifteen years later, this novel is one of the most distinguished works in Modern Hebrew literature.

A close reading of the novel Textile, written by Orly Castel-Bloom, was offered by Shai Rudin (2010). The novel won the Lea Goldberg Prize in 2007.

In her book Textile, Castel-Bloom creates a society where war has become a way of life and casualties of war are prevalent - metaphorically (the fear of being bereaved) and geographically (living near cemeteries). The individual feels isolated and has difficulty forming social connections. Building relationships based on communication is mostly implausible. This miscommunication and lack of communication can be traced, for example, to Lyrit's ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) on the one hand, and the lack of interaction of couples on the other. This is paralleled by the “price” Israelis have paid since the beginning of the Israeli-Arab conflict. All the characters in the novel are presented as dysfunctional. They cannot connect with
others: "Shlomi's ability to express himself orally is weak." (27) Lyrit cannot listen, even when Dael tries to share with her his harrowing events in the army. Audrey Grinholtz, Mandy's mother, cannot carry on a dialogue with her daughter, yet demands that she stay married. Mandy stops listening to Irad's stories and fires her workers by text messages. She forces Lyrit, as her own mother forced her, to run the factory without making any changes. Dr. Carmi Yagoda knows how to practice "the illusion of listening and interest." Irad does not communicate with his family, listening only to himself, forgetting his cell phone at home; this suggests a lack of any desire to deal with family matters while he is away on business. Lyrit remarks that she likes being with Mandy just after she has recovered from surgery, because then her mother is docile. The lonely Bahat associates mainly with animals. Her daughters send her text messages pronouncing their love, but she interprets this as a close relationship between them. Dael calls his girlfriend hoping for a sympathetic ear, but finds her mobile phone turned off. Furthermore, he often substitutes human dialogue with reading.

The “human textile” that Castel-Bloom weaves is a tapestry of separation, non-communication and the lack of deep mutual relationships in which the individual gives up his or her ego for the "other." In this reality, where "words are merely spoken into space," it is no surprise that not only does coupledom fail but so do any other social interactions, whether they exist between one Israeli and another, or between Jews and Arabs.

An important role of feminist journals is to explore marginal writers, women whose works did not gain academic interest. In her pioneer research of Ella Bat-Tsion's poetry (Gabriella Elisha, b.1954), Adia Mendelson-Maoz (2006) writes:

"Ella Bat-Tsion is a poet of the margins. In three decades of creative work, she has published more than ten books, many in the most distinguished publishing houses in Israel, as well as numerous publications in the daily press and in various journals from “Moznaim,” “Iton 77,” and “Siman Kri’aa” to “Meshiv Haruach,” a journal of Jewish poetry, and the online journal “Hadag Hanonya.” Yet despite all of this, Ella Bat-Tsion is a poet of the margins. She does not belong to any literary generation or group, and in her way even challenges traditional generational classifications; she deals with womanly love, and, unconventionally, with the love of God; she is not a political figure - she stays hidden from the public eye. Ella Bat-Tsion is a poet of the margins because all her books receive only a few lines of criticism, and every mapping of Hebrew poetry will overlook her. Yet it is just for these reasons that I
find it important to pay attention to her, to recognize her distinct voice and through the discussion of her poetry, to redeem the margins of Hebrew poetry from forgetfulness.

Her poems of the 1970s and 1980s deal, in intimate and translucent language, with womanly love, music, loneliness, and the writing process. Often they remind us of Japanese haiku poetry, seeming to follow a fleeting vision, to paint a short and focused picture describing an entire world in few words. Her longer poems usually address another person - often her lover - presenting a dialogue, describing a memory, or drawing a picture of an intimate moment. Although many of her poems invoke sadness, they do not express protest but rather acceptance. This is also true in her lesbian poems: the sexual relationships, described with tenderness and sensitivity, create a picture of intimate and personal love. In the early 1990s, Gabriella Elisha changed her name to Ella Bat-Tsion, and in 1994 published *The Book of God’s Dreams*. From this point on, Ella Bat-Tsion has portrayed different poetry: her loneliness transforms into a desire to merge with the Transcendent, and womanly love changes to intimate (non-sexual) relations with God. Her addressee is God, who gives her a new purpose but demands that she turn her back on whomever she was before.

Her poetic language is infused with a new vocabulary, religious and kabalistic in nature; the gentleness gives way to an intensive, sometimes violent, process of effacing a previous identity and assuming a new one which will lead, eventually, to peace and tranquility.

This article opened a door for new studies exploring Bat-Tsion's work, proving the importance of a poet that had not (yet) entered the Canon.


The title of the book presents a distinct feminine trait - motherhood. The motherhood presented is the subject’s source of strength, a condition for the female subject’s self-fulfillment. Motherhood also means a profound commitment to one’s offspring and
utter responsibility for it. The motherhood in the book is a mind-altering connection, the existential point of departure for the life stories presented in the poems - the private and general, the personal and national. Ravikovitch’s approach to the national aspect in the book’s poems lacks a historical perspective, but shows that by virtue of the responsibility embodied in the maternal identity, a moral responsibility is also created on the social-political level. Motherhood also means a complete duty towards others, and Ravikovitch expands this duty beyond the individual that is connected by blood. Namely, Ravikovitch shares the ideological framing of motherhood as a universal essence that crosses nationalities and ethnic identities. The elementary bond of mothers and children gives rise to an intuitive identification with the other, unconnected by ties of nationality, religion or language. In the political poems, the discussion of the political and public reality focuses primarily on her motherhood. It enables the speaker to enter the public discourse - which is predominantly male - in a safe manner, because the hegemonic arrangements include a perception according to which the world of women is limited to motherhood and the private sphere. The source of this perception lies in the thought pattern that divides the world into the private and public spheres, which are consistent with the distinction between the sexes, and are deeply rooted in Israeli and Western culture as a whole.

Buchweitz's article illustrates how the personal and the political intertwine in the book, and how the identity of the speaker is the point of departure that connects the two levels: her identity as a woman-mother in the lyrical poems and her public life in the political poems. The title represents a unifying framework, a definition of identity from which the self, others and the public are all assessed. Accordingly, the personal poems are only seemingly distinct from the political ones; in fact, both emerge from the same feminine, maternal viewpoint. Ultimately, there is no disparity between the perspective that observes the painful political reality and the one that observes the tormented personal story. This reading of the poems has established the merging of motherhood and ethos, the shifting of maternal characteristics from the private domain to the public sphere, connecting it all to the speaker’s private, particular world.
Zafrira Lidovsky Cohen (2015) has analyzed the gender perceptions that appear in the controversial novel *Lily La Tigresse*, written by Alona Kimhi.

She asserts that the image of a well-built and almighty Jewish male body, dreamt of by the Zionist revolutionaries of the early twentieth century, has remained - in Kimhi's view - a beau ideal in present-day Israel. However, the idealization of a healthy Jewish male body has not given rise to the healthy Jewish nation desired by the Zionist forefathers, but rather to a self-appointed socio-cultural elite that seeks to sustain its position at the top by violently excluding all others, who are pushed to the margins and left to invent their own identities.

To conclude this category of a feminist reading of Modern Hebrew Women Literature - the most significant research category of the last twenty years, we can see several trends present. The subjects of research span from classic writers such as Dvora Baron to contemporary writers, such as Alona Kimhi. Interestingly, contemporary writers are also preoccupied with the issues that had occupied canonical writers such as Dvora Baron, who had attempted to undermine the masculine way of writing, and the way in which male writers depicted women or “others.”

**B. Presenting theoretical / poetic models that arise from reading modern Hebrew literature**

In this category, we can trace studies that offer poetic models based upon the reading of works written by women-writers. A poetic model can be based on the reading of one writer's works, or it can be developed through the analysis of works written by several writers - in specific historic periods or along several generations of writers.

Focusing on the theme of violence in modern Hebrew literature, Shai Rudin (2012) examines the literary techniques employed by four leading Israeli women writers, Orly Castel-Bloom, Alona Kimchi, Nava Semel, and Ronit Matalon, to characterize and describe violence against women. The study reveals the individual and subversive poetic path each takes in representing the horror that is being portrayed. 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, although not as a super-narrative. By focusing on violence against women, these writers find their own feminist niche and separate themselves from leading Israeli male authors, 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. 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 in which literature presents violence against women, or in other words, transforms physical horror into literary description.

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 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 a 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 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 of the struggle against male violence. This exploration could eventually answer Tzvetan Todorov's question "what is the fantastic?" and reveal its literary and social functions.

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, thus 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.

Heddy Shait's essay (2014) 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 (rootless) 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 freedom, independence, and assertiveness, or alternatively, in degrees of their subordination to the patriarchal establishment.

Female rootless protagonists in Hebrew literature of the early twentieth century are quite rare. However, they do exist and indicate an attempt to introduce a female perspective of 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 emerged, other female rootless characters surfaced as well. They were confronted with questions about the status of women in Israel, within the context of a global feminist discourse. As noted by Shait, "Genia" by U.N. Gnessin (1904) - 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.

Shai Rudin (2014) suggests an inter-textual reading of works belonging to a marginal corpus of women writers who deal with incest (in European/American/Hebrew literature). 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 (Mathilda, 1819). Kathryn Harrison, Sapphire, Sylvia Fraser, Alice Walker, Camilla Gibb, and Lea Aini explore incest in their novels with the following poetic 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. Sexual abuse turns the writer into a victim, but also gives her a new identity as a feminist writer who protests against violence and empowers her readers.

Another interesting poetic model is the one arising from Reina Rutlinger-Reiner’s study (2008). The uniqueness of this research is a result of the combination between religion and feminism. Orthodox feminism has encouraged many women to become more expressive and active in the public sphere as well as in the religious sphere. Women prayer groups exist in some communities and many young women attend thriving higher-education centers [midrashot] in order to study the Jewish canon intensively. Women litigators appear in rabbinical courts, and educators and community leaders encourage social and political activism. The orthodox women's organization, “Kolech,” works intensively to improve orthodox women's status in society, and deals with injustices that women encounter especially in legal situations.
Theater can be considered another means for “conscious-raising” activities, self-expression, and activism.

Most orthodox female actors feel that they are contributing to the establishment of a new kind of Jewish theater, which may serve as an alternative to the secular Israeli theater that they find crude and abusive. This is perhaps the reason that they engage in original playwriting, instead of dealing with existing plays from the Western repertoire or spending time searching for suitable materials in theater archives. They convert texts from the Jewish canon (from the Bible, prayers, the Talmud and Midrash and other rabbinic sources) into dramatic forms, or they base the plays on life histories and personal monologues. The original theater that they create reflects contemporary political and social issues, using language, which draws from ancient Jewish texts and which, therefore, does not always appeal to audiences who are not familiar with these sources. Although Israeli orthodox women criticize their own society, they do not create theater as a subversive art that communicates with the “outside” world and adjacent Israeli communities. Their art is directed internally and as such it empowers their community and reflects its position (in most cases right-wing and nationalistic) vis-à-vis the “others” (secular, left-wing). Theater as a “conscious-raising” activity calls for self-expression in the public sphere, although orthodox women have been educated to modesty in dress, language and even in thought mode. It is a public “safe” space where they can express religious aspirations and social convictions or vent negative feelings. Orthodox women's theater contributes to the subtle changes taking place in the national-religious society particularly with regard to the status of women.

To conclude this category, it seems that theoretical models do not constitute a common research subject, and one hopes this will change in future years. However, it is noteworthy that in connection to Jewish feminist research, the journal Women in Judaism demonstrates the concept of ‘feminisms,’ as it encompasses representations and works of women of various sectors of Judaism, in the desire to render a faithful reflection of the lives and creations of Jewish women, whomsoever they are.
C. Feminist reading of works written by men authors

Male authors comprise most of the canon of Modern Hebrew Literature. Feminist research goes back to canonic literary works, studying their female representations, and the way in which they depict gender issues. While traditional research has ignored gender themes, contemporary feminist research has focused on the female characters and the gender messages. This research often conducts “subversive reading” by reading the text against its primary meaning, in which women are marginal and violence toward them is complacently accepted.

Ester Fuchs (2001) analyzes the ways in which Igal Mossinsohn constructs women as an aggregate “other.” She explains that the reading of major Palmach texts for their representations of women is important for several reasons. For one thing, the Palmach era is regarded often nostalgically as the cultural and intellectual expression of true socialist Zionism, unadulterated by bourgeois anti-equalitarian prejudices that allegedly infiltrated the Israeli value system in the 1950s, in the wake of the mass migrations from Eastern Europe and Arab countries. The Palmach Generation was touted as the first Sabra or native literary generation, unencumbered by stereotypes of sexism, ethno-centrism and racism. Devotion to nationalist and socialist ideals could not accommodate racism or sexism, and the authors of the Palmach generation were devoted to these ideals, even as they probed the extent to which the actual realities of the emerging state measured up to these ideals.

Though socialist Zionism was devoted to the concept of gender equality, the fundamental ethos was fed by a male-centered and male-dominated culture, which - despite its objection to traditional patriarchy - continued to focus on men as the subject of culture and civilization. Not only did socialist Zionism reject the romantic European ethos, but the attachment to family and marriage was also frowned upon. Woman represented family and marriage. Man was the apotheosis of the new dream.

Much of Mossinsohn's early work revolves around the struggle of the Yishuv, or Jewish settlements in pre-state Israel, for liberation. Women are peripheral characters
in the national drama, but they are not altogether absent. As supporting characters, they also fulfill some necessary duties in the public realm.

Even though women appear as participants in the war effort, they are contextualized within the framework of male desire or lack thereof. In Mossinsohn's *Gray as Sack*, "The Appointed Hour," while Ronya's resourceful behavior under British surveillance is briefly and ambiguously reported in the story, the details of her physical appearance as perceived by Amikam through the window are reported with great precision. It is also significant that Moti Dror all but loses interest in Ronya after her valiant intervention in the broader struggle. He was interested in her when she was the passive victim, as she appears at the beginning of the story - a passive refugee who finds temporary shelter in his home. Ronya becomes an object of desire for Amikam as he discovers her lovely body under the half open gown. Shoshana, Amikam's wife, who returns from a military mission, does not hold any fascination for him. It is at the very moment of Shoshana's transition into the male world of public action that she becomes irrelevant to him as an object of desire.

Other stories by Mossinsohn portray women as passive by-standers incapable of understanding the political urgencies of the time. In "One Small Boat" (Sira Ahat Ktana), Hana Meirson refuses to accept her husband David's decision to undertake a dangerous mission. She becomes silent and unresponsive as he tries to defend his duty to join the national struggle. The juxtaposition between David's supreme self-sacrifice and Hana's self-indulgence is extreme. As the story continues, the reader begins to wonder whether David's mysterious disappearance may be linked to Hana's hostile refusal to bid him goodbye shortly before his last departure. Hana fails to fulfill her mission at the home front. She does not come through as the supportive counterweight that loyal wives are expected to be in time of war and national struggle.

In the novel *A Man's Way with a Maiden* (Derekh Gever Be'alma, 1953), once again the main characters are male. This time, their main preoccupation is not the fight against the Arabs but rather productive manual labor, a requirement of the emerging economic infrastructure and a clear priority of the implied socialist Zionist value system of the novel.
Not only are the male characters valiant fighters and hardworking laborers, they are loyal husbands. Athalia, Plato’s paraplegic daughter, shamelessly seduces Rephael Huber, who finds refuge at the home of “Plato,” his philosophy teacher, during a British curfew. The ironic tragedy is that the community, for which they sacrifice both their happiness and lives, punishes heroes like Yosef Alon and Rephael Huber. Yosef Alon, who finds out about his wife's adultery, opts for suicide, whereas Rephael Huber shoots Reuven Bloch, apparently by accident, in the wake of which he is expelled from the kibbutz.

Fuchs concludes that Mossinssohn does not differ in essence from Moshe Shamir or S. Yizhar, who also presented women at the margins of the national and social revival they portrayed. He differs from them in the degree of explicitness. He is the most outspoken among Palmach writers in his condemnation of the female “other.” To some extent, the Palmach authors - despite seeking to break away from their predecessors - continued to construct a male-centered world. In this case, they do not differ from Yosef Haim Brener, Micha Yosef Berdychevski, Chaim Nahman Bialik and even earlier authors like Mendele Mokher Sfarim.

Dvir Abramovich (2009) offers a feminist reading of the theme of violence against women in Amos Oz’ corpus. He suggests, that hand in hand with the fantasy of rape motif, one can find sequences of violence by men against women in the Oz corpus, commensurate with the patriarchal modulation that permeates the textual patina of some of Oz’ tales.

The ‘fantasy of rape' theme is most obtrusive in My Michael - the author's magnum opus and the work that rendered him international recognition. In it, Oz has his central female character, Hanna Gonen, not only daydreaming about being raped, but more importantly, experiencing enjoyment through it. Although the leitmotif of rape is foregrounded in the hero’s imaginary world, one must not permit this literary artifice to obscure the violence transmitted in the narrative.

Another factor, which masks the rape motif, is the structure of the narrative. As the story is written in the first-person narrative, with Hanna both its narrator and
chronicler, the reader is positioned to see her world and fantasies as those representing an authentic female voice and mind.

*Black Box* reinforces the misogynous notion that women respect and desire violence, and that they are - as patriarchal codes of ideologies proclaim - innately sado-masochistic. The novel taps into a sexual machismo that articulates male prejudices about domestic violence and promotes the insidious retrograde fare about women's supposed masochistic nature.

The representation of violence against female protagonists in the Oz canon encompasses within its prism manifold ventilations. It often becomes apparent only as one scratches the surface of the author's works to examine the seemingly insignificant deportment, thoughts and observations of secondary characters - the reason being that masculine hostility is frequently veiled as innocuous ruminations by a male character.

To conclude this category, we may see that a crucial part of the tradition of feminist reading is connected to a renewed reading of the canon, and examination of the oppressive systems employed and advanced by it. It seems that Israeli authors are aware of women’s marginality and the violence incurred toward them, however - the representation of themes of violence does not always invite criticism toward the existing situation.

**D. Deconstructive reading of misogynist myths**

Several studies seek misogynist biblical stories, showing how writers deconstruct the chauvinist narrative into feminist one. Here we can trace the influence of Alicia Ostriker's *Theories in Stealing the Language* (1986) on scholars who study Modern Hebrew literature.

Anat Koplowitz-Breier (2012) states that in Genesis, the voice of the Matriarch Leah is heard only twice, when she names her sons and daughter, explaining each name (Gen. 29:32-35; 30:9-13, 17-21), and during her short conversation with Rachel, her sister, discussing the mandrakes that her son Reuben brought from the fields (Gen. 30:14-15). Apart from these two occasions, Leah's voice is never heard again, not when she weds Jacob as the result of her father's scheme, nor when she is labeled “the
hated” by the biblical text, or after bearing Jacob seven children. Nonetheless, many contemporary poems, which were written on Leah, give this almost voiceless character a voice.

In her research, Koplowitz-Breier discusses the representations of Leah in Modern Hebrew poetry. For instance, in her dramatic monologue, "Leah," Anda Amir-Pinkerfeld focuses on Leah just before she was traded for her sister Rachel. Leah is the speaker, but as in other modern dramatic monologues, the audience is unknown. Although Leah speaks to Jacob calling to him: "Then you came", using the second person singular masculine "you" - it is obvious that she is speaking to herself. Amir-Pinkerfeld adds her own interpretation to the biblical text, bestowing upon Leah opinions and feelings that are missing from the original text. Amir-Pinkerfeld uses free verse for Leah's speech. No rhymes and various enjambments reflect Leah's agitated mood: "And in the morning, behold, it was Leah...." (Gen. 29:25)

The contemporary poets, who employ the dramatic monologue genre to give Leah a unique voice, have attempted to fill the gap in the biblical text in order to add their own insights to the biblical characters. While recognizing the lack of emotions in the laconic biblical narrative, the poets convey Leah’s intense feelings and depict her as the "underdog" in the Jacob-Rachel-Leah triangle. In reacting to different points in Leah's life, these poets allow her voice to transmit their respective interpretations of the biblical text. Anda Amir-Pinkerfeld is able to re-create Leah as a modern woman who chooses her destiny and affects her future consciously. Shimshon Meltzer enhances the “mandrakes episode” and enables Leah to express her agony, which is only slightly alluded to in Genesis. Yakov Azriel’s approach is quite similar to Meltzer’s, while expanding the dialogue between the sisters. Rivka Miriam's portrayal of Leah emphasizes her position as Jacob’s hated wife. In Rena Lees’ monologue, Leah is identified as "worthless merchandise," first by her father and then by Jacob. From an examination of these poems, it is feasible to assert that Leah’s newly found voices have produced new exegeses or Midrash (Koplowitz-Breier, 2012).

Reading Lea Aini’s Rose of Lebanon, Shai Rudin (2014) conducts a deconstructive reading of the biblical story of Jephthah's daughter. The narrator of the novel tells of
her picture cards, among them one of Jephthah's daughter dancing with her girlfriends (398). The analogy between Vered, the hero, and Jephthah's daughter stems from the narrator's feeling of being victimized 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 will 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 for four days every year (Judges 11: 40).

Aini's novel focuses on incest, the story that was not told in the Bible, from the point of view of the victim, silencing the father who molested his daughter.

To conclude this category, we may note that a renewed reading of misogynist texts leads to their being shattered. Women silenced by the mythical stories, which did not render their inner thoughts and feelings, are “revived” in contemporary writing. Hence, misogynist situations are read anew by a feminist reading subversive to the mythical reading. This act constitutes a key to a comprehensive understanding of feminist thought - renewed reading and an attempt to rectify a violent and discriminating reality of minorities.

Conclusion

In only twenty years of research, the journal Women in Judaism has realized the extended feminist vision of conducting a feminist reading of canonic writings, “saving” the literary works of female writers relegated to oblivion, studying women literature and examining its poetic and thematic characteristics, and discussing the way in which literature written by men represents gender themes. With the consolidation of research on Modern Hebrew literature, one hopes for new
comparative studies of the situation in Modern Hebrew literature and other bodies of literature, between representations of Jewish and non-Jewish women, and particular aspects alongside universal ones.

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