

Minorities in Modern Hebrew Literature: A Survey¹

近現代ヘブライ文学におけるマイノリティ：概観

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Summary:

Along their history, Jews often found themselves in a minority situation, and their awareness of this fact was expressed in their writings, but in modern times Jews also experienced being a majority. However, even while being an ethnic minority, they had various groups of social minorities in their midst. The present article offers a survey of the attitude towards various kinds of minorities as expressed in Modern Hebrew literature, along a division to three periods: (1) in Eastern Europe, from mid-19th to early 20th century (minorities such as orphans, the handicapped, and women as marginalized in society); (2) in Central Europe and Palestine, during the first half of the 20th century (similar minorities); (3) in the State of Israel (similar minorities, as well as Arabs, Jews of Asian and African origin and migrant workers). Our survey shows that authors of Modern Hebrew literature displayed an acute awareness of the plight of different minorities.

Key words:

Hebrew Literature, Minorities, Jews & Arabs, Ashkenazim, Mizrahim

要旨：

歴史を通じて、ユダヤ人はしばしばマイノリティの状況にあり、その意識は彼らの書くものに表現されてきた。しかし、近現代においては、ユダヤ人はマジョリティとしての立場も体験することになった。民族としてはマイノリティであっても、彼らの内部には様々な社会的マイノリティ集団を抱えていた。本稿は、近現代ヘブライ文学に表れた様々なマイノリティへの態度を概観するものである。近現代を以下の三つの時期に区分する：(1) 19世紀半ば-20世紀初頭の東欧（社会の周縁にあるマイノリティとしては、孤児、障がい者、女性など）、(2) 20世紀前半の中央ヨーロッパとパレスティナ地域（同上のマイノリティ）、(3) イスラエル国家において（同上のマイノリティに加えて、アラブ人、アジア系及びアフリカ系ユダヤ人、移民労働者）。本稿の概観を通して、近現代ヘブライ文学の著者は、様々なマイノリティの窮状を鋭く認識し、それを表現していたことが窺える。

キーワード：

ヘブライ文学、マイノリティ、ユダヤ人とアラブ人、アシュケナジーム、ミズラヒーム

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Along their history, Jews often found themselves in a minority situation, and their awareness of this fact was expressed in their writings, beginning with the Bible. Based ostensibly or truly on the historical memory of having been a suffering minority in a foreign land, laws were formulated to defend the foreigner (*ger*) living among them in their own land.² Such laws were relevant to the reality of an independent and relatively homogeneous political entity. However, after the loss of their independence, Jews lived mostly as minorities among various other nations. Only recently have Jews become once again a majority in their own independent state, although the mentality of being a persecuted minority has not yet been lost and continues to inform Israeli politics, culture and literature to various degrees. This present paper offers a concise survey of some of the manifestations of different kinds of minorities in Modern Hebrew belles-letters, which might reflect conscious and unconscious Jewish attitudes towards minorities in modern and contemporary times. In order to place the examples in context, a short description of the history of Modern Hebrew Literature [MHL] is also included.

It is generally agreed that MHL was born in Eastern Europe around the middle of the 19th century, although there are those who point to some earlier harbingers going as far back as the 18th century.³ Indeed, “Hebrew Literature” covers a wide range of genres and concerns, but if we wish to narrow it down to belletristic writings, the starting point is usually considered the publication in 1853 of the novel *Love of Zion* [*Ahavat Zion*] by Abraham Mapu (1808–1867). The writers of MHL were part of a minority, Jews living among Russians, Ukrainians, Poles and other ethnicities. They were even a minority within their own Jewish community, which communicated mostly in Yiddish, while their ambition was to revive the use of Hebrew for contemporary use, first as a literary vehicle for non-religious writing, and later, with the awakening of national aspirations, also as a spoken language. However, Jewish society itself contained certain minority groups, the description of which can sometimes be found in literature: the handicapped (blind, lame and hunchbacked figures often appear); orphans, who constitute an important recurring motive; even women, who although not technically a minority, were marginalized as far as education and social standing were concerned. Some authors have given voice to these and other categories of people whose voice was often silenced.⁴

The Hebrew culture which flourished in large parts of Eastern Europe and Russia for several decades was mostly eradicated by World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution (with a few cultural centers remaining in Poland and Lithuania until their destruction in World War II), and its center moved elsewhere. For a short while in the 1920’s this center could be found in Germany, but even

2 See, for example, Exodus 22:20, Leviticus 19:34, Deuteronomy 10:19, and many other verses.

3 See Dan Miron, *When Loners Come Together: A Portrait of Hebrew Literature at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, Tel Aviv, 1987, 57 [in Hebrew].

4 Another point of interest is the depiction in literature of the majority, i.e. the gentiles among whom Jews lived, but for this a separate study would be required.

before that, and certainly later, the main center was in Palestine, where major authors had established themselves since the beginning of the 20th century. Here too at first Jews were a minority, although a more confident one — if much smaller in number — than in Eastern Europe. Only after the establishment of the State of Israel can writers of Hebrew literature be said to have belonged to a majority. From 1948 onwards minority groups in Israeli society have not only been the Palestinian Arabs, but even certain groups of Jews, such as immigrants from Middle Eastern countries, and later from Ethiopia. From around the 1990's onwards, the presence of migrant workers has also been felt. And there are also the “traditional” minority groups, such as the handicapped and orphans; women, on the other hand, occupy a more equal position in society and as writers of literature, but some residues of marginalization still linger.

In the following, the depiction of minorities in MHL will be examined through representative examples and in three parts: I. In Eastern Europe (late 19th to early 20th century); II. In Central Europe and Palestine (early to mid-20th century); III. In the State of Israel (from 1948, with some examples going back to the former period).

I. In Eastern Europe

For centuries Jews formed a conspicuous presence in Eastern Europe, but socially and politically they were extremely marginalized. In Russia they were restricted to the Pale of Settlement and were not allowed to live in the large cities, except in certain special cases. The gradual emancipation of the Jews in Western and Central Europe failed to reach the eastern parts of the continent and Jews were under constant fear of abuse and pogroms. Jews have traditionally formed their own communities with their highly developed social life and mutual support, but by the second half of the 19th century these were gradually disintegrating under the forces of modern “Enlightenment” (*Haskalah*) and political upheavals. Many Jews tried to free themselves from the shackles of traditional society and acquire a modern education, but often found their opportunities blocked by prejudices rife in society at large. This conflict gave rise to the figure of “the detached” (*Ha-Talush*), who lost one world but could not find his place in another, which was common in Hebrew literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

But apart from the problems caused by modernity, there were the traditionally marginalized people who sometimes gained depiction in Hebrew literature as it was forming at the time. In some cases the whole Jewish people in the Diaspora was likened to a nation of handicapped and beggars, predominantly in the stories and novels by Shalom Yakob Abramovich (1835–1917, known by his pen name, Mendele Mocher Sforim) who was considered the “grandfather” of MHL (as well as of modern Yiddish literature). His influence was pivotal because the language and style of the earlier *Haskalah* writers such as Mapu lead to a dead end, while the “Mendele style” became dominant

and lead to further developments in the language and its literature. He also contributed to the establishment of the center of MHL in Odessa, which was the “capital” of Hebrew writing and publishing in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In his highly satirical works, such as *The Book of Beggars* [*Sefer hakabtsanim*] and *Vale of Weeping* [*Be'emek habacha*] (1897), the reality of Jewish life in the Pale of Settlement is depicted in all its ugliness. While the Bible views the people of Israel as a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6), here the opposite seems true. In both cases the people are regarded as a minority: in the Bible as an exalted one, but according to Abramovich as a despised and humiliated one. On the one hand Abramovich laments the Jewish helplessness as a minority, but on the other hand he offers strong critique of their society and human relations.

The novel *The Book of Beggars* appeared first in Yiddish as *Fishke the Lame* (1888), and was later rewritten by Abramovich in Hebrew (1901).⁵ It depicts a world of Jewish thieves and beggars who form a depraved microcosm of the Jewish community. One of the main figures in the book is the lame Fishke, of whom the gang of professional beggars and thieves makes use: “Now it became as clear as daylight, that I am to a gang of beggars what the bear is to the gypsies. They walk me around displaying my deformity to the crowd and turn me into their merchandise” (Chapter 21, my translation). Fishke is married to a blind woman who joins forces with the beggars, but falls in love with an orphaned, hunchbacked girl named Beila. He first saves the girl from rape, and she in turn saves his life, but their hope to run away together is frustrated; Beila is taken away by the gang and Fishke remains alone. He tells his story to two respectable Jews who are shocked by it, but then it turns out that one of the two was in fact Beila’s father who abandoned her in infancy, and is to blame for her misfortune. Abramovich thus puts the blame for the marginalizing of the helpless on respectable Jewish society, which is no less deformed than its victims, while simultaneously showing its own helplessness as being at the mercy of the abusive gentile society. The source of suffering, then, seems to be the situation of the Jews as a downtrodden minority (although this is not necessarily an excuse for their misdeeds), and Abramovich does not seem to offer a way out, although he was well aware of the growing force of Zionism, and his own Hebrew literary work can be considered part of the national awakening.

A younger contemporary of Abramovich was the main figure in the secondary “capital” of MHL, which was also a major center for Yiddish literature, namely Warsaw. This was Isaac Leib Peretz (usually known as I. L. Peretz, 1852–1915), who was indeed famous as a writer in both languages, but with an even stronger ideological commitment to Yiddish (Shaked, 24–28). Peretz is remembered today mostly as the teller and re-teller of Hassidic and folk tales in a romantic vein,

⁵ See Gershon Shaked, *Modern Hebrew Fiction*, Translated from the Hebrew by Yael Lotan, Bloomington, 2000, 15–17 (this book is a translated digest of his *Hebrew Narrative Fiction, 1880–1980*, 5 volumes, Tel Aviv, 1977–1998) [abbreviated below as “Shaked”].

but he also wrote in various other genres. Some of his stories demonstrate considerable awareness of the discrimination against women in Jewish society. In his epistolary novella “The Woman Mrs. Hannah” [*Ha’isha marat Khannah*], the eponymous character is cheated out of her father’s inheritance by her brothers, abandoned with a child by her husband who absconds to America, loses her child in poverty and finally is misused cruelly by her relatives until she loses her mind. In the story “Sinful Blood” [*Dam khote’*] Jewish women are driven to prostitution. Such stories were part of Peretz’s wider critique of Jewish society, but the depiction of the helpless woman stands out.

A few leading authors worked outside the geographical centers of Hebrew culture (see more on this below, Part II). The most conspicuous example was Micha Josef Berdyczewski (or Bin-Gorion, 1865–1921), who was considered by younger contemporary writers (such as Y. H. Brenner) as the greatest living Hebrew author, and whose influence can still be felt in the writing of some authors of much later generations (such as Amos Oz). Born in the Ukraine, he spent the latter half of his life mostly in Switzerland and Germany, writing prolifically literary and historical works as well as anthologies of Jewish legends which were published in the German language.⁶ Berdyczewski is credited with liberating Hebrew fiction from its commitment to everyday realism and from the stylistic influence of Abramovich, redefining its preoccupation from general Jewish concerns to those of the individual. In his later literary works, considered his best, mythical elements stand out, reflecting primordial archetypes; he also described gentile as well as Jewish society. In these “short novels” as Berdyczewski called them, he often depicts a large gallery of social types, high and low, mostly given to all kinds of erotic and other desires. These include *The People of the Street* [*Garei rekhov*], *Thou Shalt Build a House* [*Bayit tivne*], *The Secret Place of Thunder* [*Beseter ra’am*] and the longer *A Novel about Life in Two Townships* [originally *Miriam*]. In *The People of the Street* Berdyczewski too depicts the helplessness of a young Jewish woman; after the exalted rabbi of the town dies, his crafty son-in-law convinces his widow to marry her young daughter to the son of the town’s richest man, whose family is so questionable that no other family in town would become related to it. No one asks the girl about her preferences. However, like some other writers who can be designated as romantics or those who emphasized individual struggle over social issues, Berdyczewski’s work is not the best source of examples of the kind mentioned above or below.

The main figure in the literary center in Odessa (and for a while also in Warsaw, then in Germany and finally in Tel Aviv) was Haim Nachman Bialik (1873–1934), who was known chiefly as a genius poet, but was also a brilliant essayist and a talented writer of short stories and novellas, as well as a translator, editor and publisher, and the most admired cultural leader of his time.⁷ One

⁶ See Avner Holtzman, *Micha Josef Berdyczewski*, Jerusalem, 2011 [in Hebrew]; Shaked, 28–34.

⁷ The most recent concise biography is by Avner Holtzman, *H. N. Bialik*, Jerusalem, 2009 [in Hebrew].

of the compositions that put him in the center of Jewish culture was the epic poem “In the City of Slaughter” [*Be’ir haharega*], which was written in 1903 following the Kishinev pogroms. In it, although he portrayed the horrific suffering of the Jews at the hands of their gentile neighbors, he, somewhat like Abramovich, did not absolve them but put some of the blame on the Jews for not showing more resistance and for putting their deformities on display and continuing their existence as beggars. However, unlike Abramovich’s satire, Bialik’s poem is full of anger and rage, and readers interpreted it as a call for drastic change in Jewish existence according to the Zionist spirit. Contemporary documentation reveals that the poem may have led to action both in the organization of Jewish self-defense in Russia, and in the drive for immigration to Palestine (later known as the “Second Aliya”) which began in 1904,⁸ although in both cases there were many other factors involved.⁹

One of the major themes (among several others) related to both Bialik’s poetry and prose was that of orphanhood. Bialik’s father died when he was seven years old, and in a way he also lost his mother who sent him to live with his old grandfather, because she was too poor to feed him and his two siblings. There he was often abused by insensitive uncles and cousins. The experience of being a helpless orphan never left Bialik completely, and his very last poems, written as he was nearing the 60th year of his life, were in an incomplete series containing four long poems published under the combined title “Orphanhood” [*Yatmut*]. One of his most compelling prose pieces is the novella “Random Harvest” [*Safiakh*] which was based on his childhood experiences, first in the village where he was born and then in the town where he grew up. The Hebrew title is a biblical word (see Leviticus 25:5) relating to fruits of the Sabbatical year which must not be harvested. Bialik describes himself in the first chapter of his novella as “one of the random sons [*sefikhim*] of Israel”, and he may have borrowed the connotation from the admired poet of the *Haskalah*, Judah Leib Gordon (1830–1892), who described the Hebrew writers and readers of his generation with this word, calling them “the orphans of humankind, abandoned by their fathers and mothers”.¹⁰ From a different angle, Bialik too has a story about an orphaned, mistreated girl, although in his case it is a gentile one, Marinka, being misused by a Jewish boy, Noah, who abandons her with child in order to marry a respectable Jewish girl, rather than eloping with her as the reader might have expected. In this story, “Behind the Fence” [*Me’akhorei hagader*], Bialik criticizes the hypocritical norms of traditional Jewish society which suck out the life of its members by quenching Eros, while

8 Holtzman, *Bialik*, 19–20.

9 See the more cautious approach adopted by Shmuel Werses, in: “Between Admonition and Apologetics: Bialik’s ‘In the City of Slaughter’ and Around it”, *From Language to Language: Literary Works and their Transformation in Hebrew Literature*, Jerusalem, 1996, 119–152 [in Hebrew].

10 See Haim Nachman Bialik, *Random Harvest & Other Novellas*, Translated from the Hebrew with introductions by David Patterson & Ezra Spicehandler, London, 1999, 22.

recklessly causing suffering to marginalized and silenced individuals.¹¹ Criticism of society's injustices, as well as the theme of orphanhood, remained central to MHL throughout most of its periods.¹²

II. In Central Europe and Palestine

The center of MHL in Palestine started to evolve gradually during the first decade of the 20th Century, formed by writers who immigrated from Eastern Europe and settled mostly in Jaffa, and later in the newly-created Tel Aviv, known as “the first Hebrew city” (established 1909). Among the main figures who created this center were: S. Ben-Zion (pen name of Simcha Alter Gutman, 1870–1932), who settled in Jaffa in 1905, where in 1907–1909 he edited and published the literary magazine *Ha'omer*, and who was one of the founders of Tel Aviv; Alexander Siskind Rabinovitz (known by the acronym “Azar”, 1854–1945), who arrived in 1906; R. Binyamin (pen name of Yehoshua Redler-Feldman, 1880–1957) who arrived in 1907; Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1887–1970), who was still a fledgling writer on arriving in Jaffa in 1908, where he established his reputation (he left for Germany in 1912, returning and settling in Jerusalem in 1924); Yosef Haim Brenner (1881–1921) who, on arriving in 1909 was already a Hebrew writer of great fame and who was significantly responsible for the development of the literary center in Palestine, which he led until his murder by Arabs in the suburbs of Jaffa; the poet David Shimony (1891–1956) who arrived in 1909, left for Europe in 1911 and returned in 1920; the poet Rachel Bluwstein (1890–1931) who arrived in 1911, left for Europe in 1913 and returned in 1919; Dvora Baron (1887–1956), the outstanding woman author of the generation, who arrived in 1911; poet and short stories writer Yaakov Steinberg (1887–1947), who immigrated in 1914, went to Germany after WWI and returned in 1925; and others. Some stayed for a short period and left never to return, among them well known-writers such as Uri Nissan Gnessin (1907–8) and, much later, David Vogel (1929–30).

For a while there existed a semi-center of Hebrew literature in central Europe. Many of those who left Russia after the Revolution went first to Germany, where they were supported by Shoshana Parsitz (1892–1969), who also moved her publishing house *'Omanut* from Odessa to Bad Homburg vor der Höhe, before moving it again to Tel Aviv in 1925; by this time most of the writers who left Russia were also settled in Palestine. Others, in particular Agnon, were supported by the

11 On Bialik as a storyteller see also Shaked, 38–39.

12 It should also be noted that the most famous orphan in modern Jewish literature was created in Yiddish by Sholem Aleichem (the pen name of Sholem Rabinovich, 1859–1916), in his novel *Mott, Peysi the Cantor's Son* (1907; second incomplete volume 1916, English translations 1953, 2002 & 2009). The book opens with the famous stunning, satirical statement: “I have it good — I'm an orphan!”. It was known to generations of Hebrew readers through the early translation by Sholem Aleichem's son-in-law, the noted Hebrew and Yiddish writer I. D. Berkowits (1885–1967) and through several later translations.

businessman Salman Schocken (1877–1959), who later created the publishing house carrying his name, which operated in Germany from 1931 to 1938, and still operates in Tel Aviv and New York. Another key publisher was Abraham Yoseph Shtibel, a businessman who started his publishing house out of love for MHL first in Moscow, then with branches in Warsaw, Berlin and New York, and finally in Tel Aviv from 1929.

A few Hebrew writers were established in Central and Western Europe for longer periods, but they usually lived and created in seclusion, away from the centers of literature where Hebrew newspapers, periodicals and books were published, and where writers formed more or less amorphous literary associations (as mentioned above, first mainly Odessa and Warsaw, and later Tel Aviv). The outstanding figures among these isolated writers include: Micha Josef Berdyczewski (see above Part I), who lived for years in the provincial German city of Breslau (now Wrocław in Poland) before moving to Berlin; Y. H. Brenner, who, escaping from Russia in 1904, published Hebrew literary magazines first in London and then in Lemberg (Lvov), before immigrating to Palestine in 1909; Gershon Shoffman (1880–1972), who spent many years in the Austrian village of Wetzelsdorf near Graz, before immigrating to Palestine in 1938; and David Vogel (1891–1944) who lived in Austria and France, and although immigrating briefly to Palestine (1929–1930) returned to Europe and spent his later years in France, where he perished during the Holocaust, a fate which Shoffman was lucky enough to escape through his last-minute immigration.

From the 1920's the Hebrew center in Palestine started gaining force with the emergence of a younger generation, and also due to the arrival from Europe of many of the figures of the older one, headed by Bialik, along with the poet Shaul Tchernichovsky (1875–1943), and others. The younger generation, whose members rebelled against the literary conventions of the older one, included the poets Avraham Shlonski (1900–1973) who immigrated in 1921, and was considered the leader of the younger generation, eventually occupying a position somewhat similar to that of Bialik's in Odessa in his capacity as editor and arbiter of literary quality; Natan Alterman (1910–1970), who immigrated in 1925 and was to assume in retrospect the position of the most esteemed literary figure of his times, outshining Shlonski as a poet if not as an editor; Uri Zvi Greenberg (1896–1981), who immigrated in 1923 but soon assumed an oppositional, somewhat isolated position; prose writer Eliezer Steinman (1892–1970), who immigrated in 1924; the poet Alexander Penn (1906–1972), who arrived in 1927, and others. Established writers arrived from Europe also in the 1930's, including Haim Hazaz (1898–1973) in 1931, Lea Goldberg (1911–1970) in 1935, and Shoffman in 1938.¹³

Much of the literature written in Palestine and in Central Europe during the first decades of the 20th century still described the life of the Jews in Eastern Europe. Berdyczewski dedicated most of

13 For a further list of prose writers who immigrated in the 1920's and 1930's see Shaked, 98.

his belletristic output to the realities of the Ukraine where he was born and raised, including his last stories, written in Berlin during the two or three final years of his life.¹⁴ Agnon, while in Germany, wrote mostly stories against the background of his native Galicia (he wrote some stories with a German background years later, while in Palestine and Israel). Inversely, David Shimoni wrote much of his poetry describing life in Palestine while in Europe. It is an interesting fact that, generally speaking, the physical location of MHL writers did not restrict their writing to describing their current local; this would be true also for immigrant writers of much later generations, already in the State of Israel, such as Aharon Appelfeld who placed many of his stories in Europe or Sami Michael who wrote several novels depicting his native Iraq. Even Israeli-born writers feel compelled to “return”, at least in some of their books, to the lands from where their parents originated, for example: Amos Oz to Europe in *Unto Death* [*Ad mavei*] (1971) and in many chapters of *A Tale of Love and Darkness* [*Sipur shel 'ahavah vekhoshech*] (2002); Yoram Kaniuk to Germany in *Adam Resurrected* [*Adam Ben Kelev*] (1968) and *The Last Berliner* [*Haberlina'i ha'akharon*] (2004); David Grossman to Eastern Europe in parts of *See Under: Love* [*Ayen 'erech: 'ahava*] (1986); Dorit Rabinyan to Iran in *Persian Brides* [*Simtat ha-shkediyot be-Oumrijan*] (1995), and so on.

Yaakov Steinberg's stories written in Palestine or Germany often take place in the Jewish milieu of the Pale of Settlement. His prose, though realistic, “was refined and enhanced by his expressive language and rich poetic diction”, but it is also restrained, as he did not describe emotions directly but represented them symbolically (Shaked, 57–59). His protagonists are members of the poorer classes, often women dominated by men, whose story usually ends in defeat. The story “The Blind Girl” [*Ha'iveret*] portrays one of his most memorable characters; a young blind woman is married off to a widower with two young children who lives in an isolated house; thanks to her fine-tuned perceptive powers she soon realizes that she has been lied to about the man's age and other specifics, but only after losing her own baby girl in an epidemic does she realize that her husband is an undertaker and that they live in a graveyard. In the story “The Rabbi's Daughter” [*Bat harav*], the protagonist is impregnated by her unfeeling fiancé, and finding no way out commits suicide. The beautiful and sensitive protagonist of “A Daughter of Israel” [*Bat Yisrael*] is married off to an insensitive shop-keeper who treats her with disdain, but their mutual animosity remains suppressed; the woman must remain submissive and the best she can do is to fantasize about the unsuccessful but kind husband of her much poorer friend. In all these cases, pure, melancholic women are abused by coarse men, and have no real say in their own lives.

The oppression of Jewish woman in a male-dominated society is also one of the main themes in the stories of Dvora Baron, the first outstanding female prose writer in MHL. Most of her literary

14 See Holtzman, *Berdycewski*, 218–225.

output was produced in Tel Aviv, but her stories often take place in the Jewish communities of Lithuania (Shaked, 59–61). Female characters are treated by her with love, while her irony and contempt is directed at their enemies and at fate itself. Being a daughter of a rabbi, and having received an education unusual for a female of her time, Baron was well familiar with Jewish law, as reflected in her writing. In the story “Divorce” [*Keritut*] she relates the terrible fate of women who are forced into divorce for various reasons. In one case a loving wife is divorced, according to Jewish custom, for failing to produce a child after ten years of marriage. While the husband marries again and soon has a child, the divorced wife fades away, dies and is buried with no one to mourn her; a woman neighbor asks why she wasn’t killed in the first place rather than having been left to fade in agony: “If you cut off the head — she said angrily, tears streaming down her face — then cut it off, at least, completely, to begin with” (my translation).¹⁵

Any survey of MHL must pay special attention to the work of S. Y. Agnon, who has been recognized as its great master, and is so far the only Hebrew writer to have won the Nobel Prize for Literature (Shaked, 81–95). His writing is multi-layered, ironic and demonstrates deep psychological characterization. Agnon’s wide corpus contains many characters who may fit our subject, but only a few will be introduced below.

In the short story “Ovadia the Cripple” [*Ovadia ba’al mum*] (1921) the eponymous character is a lame, hunchbacked water-drawer who is betrothed to a servant girl of questionable reputation, and while he is hospitalized she is seduced by a male servant and gives birth to a baby boy; on leaving the hospital Ovadia finds her with the baby. The story is satirical and all the characters are ridiculed to some extent; society’s attempt to match together two misfits fails (as in the case of Abramovich’s Fishke and Beila, although for different reasons), but their situation is not hopeless, as there is a safety net (Ovadia is hospitalized for a long period at the public’s expense; his fiancé is thrown out of her mistress’ house but is taken care of by others). At the end of the story we cannot be sure whether the attempt to unite two marginalized people will succeed; there may still be some hope for them, although no great happiness.

The novel *A Simple Story* [*Sipur pashut*] (1935) is “Agnon’s masterpiece of psychological realism”.¹⁶ It is the story of the unrequited love of Hirshl Hurvitz, the son of well-to-do shop owners in a Galician town in the early 20th century, for Blume Nacht, his orphaned and penniless second cousin. Hirshl’s mother Tsirl first accepts Blume into her house as an unpaid maid, but will not accept her as a wife to Hirshl, on whom she forces marriage with Mina, the daughter of an affluent

15 Another woman writer with an even stronger feminist conviction and also wider modern education than Baron was Hawa Shapiro (1878–1943); however, she published only one collection of short stories (Warsaw, 1909), and was known mainly as a critic and publicist. Unlike Baron she did not immigrate to Palestine, and perished in Prague during the Holocaust.

16 Nitza Ben-Dov, *Agnon’s Art of Indirection: Uncovering Latent Content in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon*, Leiden, 1993, 74; Ben-Dov discusses the novel in detail on pp. 73–106.

family with which she has business connections. Hirshl acquiesces passively and carries on with his married life before suffering a mental breakdown, but after regaining his health gets back in line and resumes his matrimonial life. Although he can be considered a victim of his domineering mother, Blume is a victim twice over, once as a maid serving her relatives without being paid, and then being thrown out of their house where she might have settled permanently.

The troubled marriage of Hirshl and Mina is reversely mirrored by the surprisingly successful marriage of two minor figures in the novel. The cynical match-maker Jonah Tauber, who arranged Hirshl's betrothal to Mina at Tsirl's behest and also convinced him that he should marry her, shocked the whole town by marrying, after being widowed, a hunchbacked woman rather than one of her attractive sisters (chapters 22 & 33). While the people of the town make fun at his expense, joking that God punished him and paid him in kind for making bad matches, it turns out that he enjoys what looks like domestic bliss. The author even hints that Jonah preferred the hunchback to the more attractive Blume whom he perhaps could also have married, but who remained a spinster, rejecting other would be suitors as well.

Incidentally, it should be mentioned that like Blume, Yitzhak Kummer, the protagonist of another of Agnon's great novels, *Yesteryear* [*Tmol shilshom*] (1945), also lost his mother (Blume also lost her father after growing up). The theme of orphanhood is central to this and to other of Agnon's compositions.

Agnon manifested sensitivity to the plight of women, and some of his main protagonists are female, although, as common with Agnon, things are never simple. *Shira* is the title of Agnon's last great, incomplete novel, but although she becomes the main force in the life of its leading male character, she makes relatively few appearances in the long novel; her soul, however, continues to haunt her onetime lover, Dr. Manfred Herbst (Shaked, 91). The eponymous character in the story "Tehila" (1950) is another case; she is an extremely old woman living in the old city of Jerusalem who reveals her tragic life-story to the narrator before she dies. Tehila is considered a righteous woman (*tsadeket*) by the people who know her, but she turns out to be a complex figure, whose story allows various interpretations, allegorical and other. A special case of a woman narrator is the novella *In the Prime of Her Life* [*Bidmi yameha*] (1922).¹⁷ It is the story of Tirtza Mintz, an adolescent girl and only child, who after the untimely death of her mother finds out that the mother loved another man before marrying Tirtza's father. She decides to rectify that wrong by marrying the man herself, realizing only too late that she was trying to achieve the unachievable (Tirtza and her husband, Akavia Mazal, reappear in *A Simple Story* as the employers of Blume Nacht after she leaves Hirshl's house). Once again orphanhood is the main force dictating the fate of the protago-

17 See Ben-Dov, op cit, 107-133.

nist, but through the writing of her life story she also gains a distinct voice.¹⁸ The young Amos Oz, in whose literary work the theme of orphanhood is detectable from beginning to end, identified with Tirtza, as he confides with the readers of his autobiographical novel *A Tale of Love and Darkness* [*Sipur shel 'ahava vekhoshech*] (2002).¹⁹ In this and other cases, a fictional character gains life as much as a real one, at least among readers dedicated to literature; as mentioned below, this also happened to some of Oz's own fictional characters.

In the literature written in Palestine during the first half of the 20th century we can already find some mention of other minority groups such as Arabs, although technically they were not exactly minorities at the time, as well as Mizrahi (non-European) Jews. These subjects are discussed in the following part of the article.

III. In the State of Israel

The past 65 years have witnessed the vast flourishing of MHL in all possible genres; its success and popularity is evident through a plethora of translations into many languages throughout the world. MHL is also being taught and studied in major universities in many countries.

Scholars of literature are fond of arranging and dividing authors according to generations and groups, although such divisions do not necessarily reflect realities; after all, in most cases writing is a solitary occupation, and even when writers get together to form a group (issuing a joint literary magazine, for example) the differences between them are no less conspicuous than the similarities. Still, such divisions have a certain validity and they are often convenient in describing a specific literary milieu and providing an overview of historical developments. In each one of the generations described concisely below, dozens of novelists, poets and playwrights can be named, but in the following only a few prominent names are mentioned.

The first generation in Israeli literature is designated by scholars as “the Independence War generation”, and occasionally by its own members as the “Native Generation” (*dor ba-'aretz*), as well as by other designations.²⁰ It includes mostly writers who were born in Palestine from the late 1910's to the mid-1920's or who immigrated as small children, whose formative experience was the struggle for independence of the state. Although as in other literary “generations” there were many differences between the methods and aims of individual writers, common to them all was

18 See Nitza Ben-Dov, *Vehi Tehilatekha: Studies in the Works of S.Y. Agnon, A.B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz*, Tel-Aviv, 2006, 47–71 [in Hebrew].

19 See in the English translation by Nicholas de Lange (2005), p. 67; a second, more elaborate exposition of his deep connection to Tirtza was omitted in the English translation (it should have appeared on p. 206); see the original Hebrew pp. 90–91, 248–249; and see Ben-Dov, *Vehi*, 32–33.

20 See Shaked, 139–186; see also Avner Holtzman, “The Fiction of the ‘Generation in the Land’”, in: Tzvi Tzameret and Hanna Yablonka, eds., *The First Decade: 1948–1958*, Jerusalem 1997, 263–280 [in Hebrew].

their realistic tendency which was bound to local reality and strived to depict it in detail. Some of the leading authors associated with this generation are: S. Yizhar (pen-name of Yizhar Smilanski, 1916–2006), Yigal Mossinson (1917–1994), Benjamin Tammuz (1919–1989), Aharon Megeed (b. 1920), Moshe Shamir (1921–2004), Shlomo Nitzan (1921–2006), Haim Gouri (b. 1923), Nathan Shaham (b. 1925), Hanoch Bartov (b. 1926), Yehudit Hendel (b. 1926), and several others. Some writers belonged to the same generation chronologically, but they went their independent way literally, avoiding realism each in his own unique way, especially Yitzhak Awerbuch Orpaz (b. 1921), David Shahar (1926–1997), Pinhas Sadeh (1929–1994) and Yoram Kaniuk (1930–2013).

In the early 1970's literary scholar Gershon Shaked characterized a "New Wave" in MHL, comprised of writers who were born mainly in the 1930's and started publishing in the late 1950's and early 1960's.²¹ Again, although there were many stylistic and thematic differences between the writers in this wave, they had some common characteristics in their approach to literature, in their response to their predecessors and in their political tendencies.²² Some leading figures in this wave, which is also known as the "State Generation" (*dor hamedina*) are: Amalia Kahana-Carmon (b. 1926), Shulamit Hareven (1930–2003), Rachel Eitan (1932–1987), Aharon Appelfeld (b. 1932), A. B. Yehoshua (b. 1936), Yehoshua Kenaz (b. 1937), Amos Oz (b. 1939), and others. Some of the leading poets are: Yehuda Amichai (1924–2000), Natan Zach (b. 1930), Dan Pagis (1930–1986), David Avidan (1934–1995), Dahlia Ravikovitch (1936–2005), and several others. It should also be noted that the work of this "generation" influenced the later work of their predecessors (Shaked, 140).

There were several outstanding writers who started publishing shortly after the "New Wave" writers, or who tried to develop their own independent way of writing, although there are clear affinities between them and the earlier group; they include: Yaakov Shabtai (1934–1981), Dan Tsalka (1936–2005), Yitzhak Ben-Ner (b. 1937), Yeshayhu Koren (b. 1940), as well as the younger Haim Be'er (b. 1945), Meir Shalev (b. 1948), David Grossman (b. 1954) and others. A new group of poets also emerged, including Meir Wieseltier (b. 1941), Yair Hurvitz (1941–1988), Yona Wallach (1944–1985), and the much older Avot Yeshurun (pen name of Yehiel Perlmutter, 1904–1992), who gained his respectable position in MHL only in old age.²³

In the 1990's Avraham Balaban observed the emergence of a "Different Wave" of Hebrew writers.²⁴ These writers were generally designated as "postmodern", and unlike earlier generations

21 Gershon Shaked, *A New Wave in Hebrew Fiction*, Second Edition, Tel Aviv, 1974 [in Hebrew]; see also Shaked, 187–230; Avner Holtzman, "Hebrew Literature", in: Tzvi Tzameret and Hanna Yablonka, eds., *The Second Decade: 1958–1968*, Jerusalem, 2000, 261–278 [in Hebrew].

22 See also Avraham Balaban, *A Different Wave in Israeli Fiction: Postmodernist Israeli Fiction*, Jerusalem, 1995, 18–28 [in Hebrew].

23 See Nitza Ben Dov, "Israeli Literature", in: Tzvi Tzameret and Hanna Yablonka, eds., *The Third Decade: 1968–1978*, Jerusalem 2008, 171–186 [in Hebrew].

24 Balaban, op cit, 28–76; see also Shaked, 231–242.

cannot be said to have a common biographical background or to have formed a more or less discernible group. Some prominent writers include: Avraham Heffner (b. 1935), Yoel Hoffman (b. 1937), Gavriela Avigur-Rotem (b. 1946), Savion Liebrecht (b. 1948), Yitzhak Laor (b. 1948), Yuval Shimoni (b. 1955), Itamar Levi (b. 1956), Ronit Matalon (b. 1959), Zeruya Shalev (b. 1959), Orli Kastel-Blum (b. 1960), Etgar Keret (b. 1967), and many others. Although not all of the above can be classified as “postmodern” writers, they cannot be grouped together under different designations either. As we approach our own times it becomes more difficult to distinguish between clear literary waves for lack of historical perspective. In retrospect it may become possible to detect some patterns which underline the contemporary literary milieu.

Following the above brief exposition of literary generations in MHL since the establishment of the State of Israel, we now turn to some specific examples in the depiction of minorities in their writing under five thematic headings, with some glances back to the pre-state generation.

a. Orphans, Handicapped and the Old

The subject of orphanhood keeps appearing in MHL, sometimes against the background of the Holocaust. A prominent example is Rachel Eitan’s novel *The Fifth Heaven* [*Ba-raki’a hakhamishi*] (1962). It was a first novel by an unknown writer, but it gained immediate popularity and acclaim. The novel takes place partially in a Dickensian orphanage in 1940’s Palestine, and although its main child protagonist, Maya, is not a true orphan but the daughter of a divorced and neglectful couple, she must fend for herself as if she were alone in the world. The novel contains biting social criticism of the “progressive” Jewish society of the time.

As mentioned above, orphanhood was a major theme in the work of one of Israel’s leading authors, Amos Oz (Ben-Dov, *Vehi*, 235–285); it appeared in various guises and disguises throughout his novels and stories, culminating with *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, in which most of the disguises were dropped and his mother’s suicide when he was 12 years old is tackled head on. Among his younger contemporaries, Eleonora Lev’s partially autobiographical novel *A Certain Kind of Orphanhood* [*Sug mesuyam shel yatmut*] (1989; 1999) combines the tale of a journey to Eastern Europe with the traumas of the “second generation”, children who experienced the Holocaust through the stories and repressed memories of their parents, a theme which gradually came to occupy an important place in Israeli culture, including its literature.

The handicapped are also treated in the literature of the period, their plight sometimes mixed with other minority issues. In 2000, Savion Liebrecht published a chapter from an incomplete novel called “Su’ad”, in which the life of a handicapped and isolated Jewish man is entangled with that of a lame and orphaned Bedouin girl rejected by her village. The girl, Su’ad, enters almost by accident the life of Shimshon “the crooked”, who since childhood has been ridiculed by the people of his own village, and through her determination becomes his life partner. In this case the union of two

marginalized people succeeds admirably; the fact that the one is Jewish and the other Arab is immaterial, and the story ends with the feeling that the union of the two rejected, handicapped people almost restores cosmic order. This happy ending stands in contrast to several failed coupling of misfits in MHL mentioned above.

The marginalization of the old in a society that celebrates youth has also become a subject dealt with in MHL. An outstanding example is Yehoshua Kenaz's novel *The Way to the Cats* [*Baderech 'el hakhatulim*] (1991). From when he first started writing Kenaz demonstrated a tendency towards the grotesque; in this novel the elderly characters reach the bottom of alienation and desperation (Shaked 217; 220). Kenaz further developed the motive of the helplessness of the aged through some of the characters in the novel *Restoring Former Loves* [*Makhzir 'ahavot kodmot*] (1997). Several characters in the novel are old people who are losing either their physical or mental capacities, and even when something positive seems to enter their lives it is cruelly taken away. Kenaz seems to say that human beings are doomed to experience hell while on earth, and that there is no dignity in old age.

b. Women

The position of women in contemporary Israeli society has changed radically since the early days of MHL, although, like in most other parts of the world, they cannot be said to have gained full equality with men in terms of employment, wages and social status. In orthodox religious society the restrictions on their lives stand out even stronger. In the rest of society, although women have many opportunities for work in a wide range of professions, a "glass ceiling" often blocks their advancement. They are still often victims of sexual harassment and the traditional prejudices of patriarchal society.

Many outstanding women writers have emerged in recent generations of MHL, although even within the literary establishment they cannot be said to have occupied the front row, except in a very few cases.²⁵ In the first decades of the 20th century women came into prominence mostly as poets, including Rachel Bluwstein, Esther Raab (1894–1981) and Yocheved Bat-Miriam (1901–1980). Some of the women poets also wrote prose; one of them was Elisheva Bichovsky (1888–1949), a Russian Christian by birth who immigrated to Palestine in 1925 after developing an interest in Hebrew and Yiddish literature and marrying a Jewish writer. Apart from Hebrew poetry she also published short stories and the impressionistic novel *Alleys* [*Simta'ot*] (1929) (Shaked, 126). Lea Goldberg, a major poet and a prolific writer in many genres, published only one novel in her lifetime, *And He Is the Light* [*Vehu ha'or*] (1946); another novel was published posthumously.

²⁵ See Lily Rattok, "Every woman knows this: An afterward", in the volume edited by her: *The Other Voice: Women's Fiction in Hebrew*, Tel Aviv, 1994, 261–349 [in Hebrew]; see also Shaked, 239–242.

Goldberg's first novel is somewhat autobiographical, telling the story of a young woman returning from her studies in Germany to her birthplace in Eastern Europe where she feels entrapped, fearing also to lose her mind as did her father. There seems to be no real hope for her, although Zionist aspirations appear to provide one way out (Shaked, 126–127). The novel did not gain sufficient reception at the time, but Shaked believed that it is “probably the originating text in Hebrew literature's women's tradition” (239).

The said tradition was further developed by Amalia Kahana-Carmon, who was regarded as one of the leading authors of the “New Wave”, regardless of her gender and the fact that most of her stories were dedicated to specific female experiences. However, from the early 1970's critics began to discuss “women's literature” and identify the “feminine other”; Kahana-Carmon herself came out with a novel, *And Moon in the Valley of Ayalon* [*Veyareakh be'emek 'Ayalon*] (1971), in which she portrayed the female existential experience as markedly different from the male one, expressing a woman's longing to rehabilitate her “self” through a new language following the attrition of married life (Ben-Dov, “Israeli Literature”, 175).

Almost simultaneously with Kahana-Carmon, another writer of her generation, Shulamith Hareven, published her novel *A City of Many Days* [*'Ir yamim rabim*] (1972); the novel is a family story with a woman named Sara as its protagonist, although the city of many days, Jerusalem, with its multitude of ethnic and religious groups, itself can be said to be the novel's main character. The novel is important also for the way it presents different types of minorities, including Mizrahim and Arabs (see below). Hareven was a precursor of feminist writing in Israel, and “her perceptive depiction of the world of women is especially striking” (Shaked, 181).

Since the 1980's a distinct voice was developed in the work of many female authors, including: Gabriela Avigur-Rotem (b. 1946) in *Heatwave and Crazy Birds* [*Khamsin vetziporim meshuga'ot*] (2001) and other novels; Avirama Golan (b. 1950) in *The Ravens* [*Ha'orviv*] (2004) and others; Ilana Bernstein (b. 1957) in *Provision* [*She'era ksuta ve'onata*] (1991) and many other novels; Zeruya Shalev (b. 1959) in *Dancing, Standing Still* [*Rakadeti 'Amadeti*] (1993) and several other novels which made her an immensely popular writer in Israel and abroad; Yehudit Katzir (b. 1963) in her novellas collected in *Closing the Sea* [*Sogrim 'et hayam*] (1990), followed by several novels, the latest of which, *Zillah* (2013), focuses on the life stories of her grandmother and mother; and there are many more female authors who could be named, some of whom are mentioned in the following section.

As in the past, male authors also dealt with the inner lives of women and the social issues concerning them. For example, Amos Oz wrote his now classic novel *My Michael* [*Michael sheli*] (1968) as a confessional novel by a young wife and mother, Hanna Gonen. According to Oz, in the years following its publication, some female readers expressed their appreciation of his ability to enter a women's soul, while others told him he failed completely in that endeavor. Be that as it may,

Hanna and her husband Michael have entered the blood circle of Hebrew Literature and culture as few other literary characters ever did.

c. Mizrahim

The issues concerning non-Ashkenazi Jewish identity are wide and complicated. The term “Mizrahim” (“Orientals”) itself is misleading, as are other terms such as “Sephardim”. Firstly, here is a short attempt to classify the various identities which come under this title and put them in a historical context:

1. Sephardi and other non-Ashkenazi veteran residents of Palestine: these included Jews who were the descendants of those expelled from Spain (*Sepharad*) and whose common language was Judeo-Spanish (*Ladino*), as well as Jews who were rooted in the Middle East, who spoke Judeo-Arabic or pure Arabic (the latter were known as *Mista'arvim*). There were also small communities of Jews who immigrated from Iran, Morocco and other parts of Asia-Africa during the 19th century or earlier, and like the veteran Jewish residents lived in mixed Jewish-Arab towns (Jerusalem, Hebron, Jaffa, Safed, Tiberias and a few other places), and together with the Ashkenazi communities formed the “Old Yishuv” (as opposed to the “New Yishuv”, formed by Zionist immigrants).
2. Early Yemenite immigrants in the late 19th century: several thousand Jews immigrated from Yemen and formed their own communities, usually surviving as day laborers.
3. Individuals and families who immigrated in small numbers from Iraq, Syria and elsewhere during the British Mandate, often due to the influence of Zionist activism.
4. Mass immigration following 1948, comprising several hundred thousand people; here too distinctions must be made between immigrants from Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Morocco and elsewhere, including some specific internal distinctions (for example, Kurdish Jews as opposed to those from Baghdad). There were also clear linguistic barriers between these various groups, members of which spoke Ladino, different Arabic dialects, Kurdish, Aramaic and so on.
5. Ethiopian Jews who immigrated in the 1980's and 1990's, comprising several tens of thousands of immigrants. Due to their origin and skin color they can be said to be marginalized by both Ashkenazim and Mizrahim.

In spite of its inadequacy, the term “Mizrahi” (“Mizrahim” in plural) will be used in the following, with the necessary qualifications.

There were several Mizrahi writers, either natives of Palestine or those who arrived as small children (categories 1 and 2 above), who joined the ranks of MHL at a relatively early stage. These included: Yehuda Burla (1886–1969), born to a Sephardi family in Jerusalem, who started publishing stories and novels in the 1920's; Yitzhak Shami (1888–1949), born in Hebron to a Sephardi

mother and an Arabic-speaking father from Damascus, also started publishing in the 1920's but his output was limited (see also under d. below); and Mordechai Tabib (1910–1979), born in Rishon LeZion to parents who immigrated from Yemen and started publishing in the late 1930's. Burla wrote many novels with Sephardi characters and background, full of adventure and romance, which were popular in his time, including *His Hated Wife* [*Ishto hasnu 'ah*] (1923) and *The Adventures of Akavia* [*'Alilot 'Akavia*] (1939). Tabib's two autobiographical novels, *Like the Grass of the Field* [*Ke'esev hasade*] (1948) and *Like a Shrub in the Desert* [*Ke'ar'ar ba'arava*] (1957), depicted the conflict between the traditional world of his parents in the Yemenite community and the new secular environment.

The second wave of writing by Mizrahi authors was that by immigrants (categories 3 and 4 above), already after the establishment of the state, and mainly since the 1970's, when they stepped onto central stage of MHL. These writers include: Sami Michael (b. 1926), who was born in Baghdad and immigrated in 1949; Amnon Shamosh (b. 1929), born in Aleppo and immigrated in 1938; Eli Amir (b. 1937), born in Baghdad and immigrated in 1950; and Yitzhak Gormezano-Goren (b. 1941), born in Alexandria and immigrated in 1951. Sami Michael's first novel *Equal and More Equal* [*Shavim veshavim yoter*] (1974) may have been the harbinger of "ethnic" literature in Israeli literature (Ben-Dov, "Israeli Literature", 177), although it did have some predecessors. The novel deals with the wave of immigration following 1948, the hardship of the immigrants, and the tensions between various ethnic groups which also affected family life. The novel gave an authentic voice to the Mizrahi "other". In his later novels Michael gave voice to the Arab "other" as well (see d. below); he also wrote novels which take place in his native Iraq, such as *A Handful of Fog* [*Khofen shel 'arafel*] (1979). Michael was followed by Eli Amir in his novel *Scapegoat* [*Tarnegol kaparot*] (1983) describing the lives of young immigrants from Iraq trying to fit into kibbutz society and the predictable conflict with their tradition-bound families. The book became immensely popular in Israel, and Amir followed it with several other novels, and again like Sami Michael, also wrote about the Arab minority in Israeli society (see below). Amnon Shamosh, who personally was successfully absorbed into kibbutz society, wrote stories which take place in either his native Aleppo or in Israel; his most celebrated work combined both places (as well as Europe and America) through the three-generation history of a rich merchant family, *Michel Ezra Safra & Sons* [*Mishel 'Ezra Safra 'ubnav*] (1978), which was made into a popular television drama (1983). Shamosh also expressed his view in his stories, that Israel must find its place in the Middle East through knowledge and understanding of the surrounding Arab culture. Yitzhak Gormezano-Goren published *An Alexandrian Summer* [*Kayitz 'Aleksandroni*] in 1978, and later added two more volumes (1986, 2003) to create a trilogy expressing nostalgia for the city of his birth (as did Shamosh for Aleppo and Michael for Baghdad) (Shaked 184–5).

Somewhat different from the above group is Shimon Ballas (b. 1930), who was born in Baghdad and immigrated in 1950. He first wrote in Arabic, but from 1964, earlier than the above four, started publishing in Hebrew with the novel *The Transit Camp* [*Hama'abara*]. He continued to publish literary works as well as academic studies (having become a professor of Arabic at Haifa University), but he did not occupy as central a position or acquire as wide a readership as Michael or Amir. Mention should also be made of Shlomo Kalo (b. 1928), who was born in Sophia, Bulgaria and immigrated in 1949; his novel *The Heap* [*Ha'arema*] (1962), marked the beginning of modernist fiction in Israel as well as the beginning of writing about the plight of the immigrant Mizrahi community by immigrant writers (Shaked, 184). Of a later generation is Albert Suissa (b. 1951), who was born in Morocco and immigrated in 1963, and whose only novel, *Bound* [*'Akud*] (1990), is the story of a child in a religious Mizrahi environment.

A third wave concerns authors born in Israel to Mizrahi families, who although fully integrated into Israeli society, gave specific expression in their writing to the milieu in which they (and sometimes their parents, in their countries of origin) grew up. These include: Sarah Shilo (b. 1958), born to a mother of Iraqi origin and a father of Syrian origin (see below); Ronit Matalon (b. 1959) born to a family originating in Egypt, in *The One Facing Us* [*Ze 'im hapanim 'eleinu*] (1995) and other novels; Lea Aini (b. 1962) born to a Ladino-speaking father from Thessaloniki and an Aramaic-speaking mother from northern Iran, in *Rose of Lebanon* [*Vered halevanon*] (2009) and many other books; Dorit Rabinyan (b. 1972) born to immigrants from Iran (see above); Sami Berdugo (b. 1970), born to immigrants from Morocco, in his collection of stories *Black Girl* [*Yalda skhora*] (1999) and later novels; and also Almog Behar (b. 1978), of “mixed” origin, who should be mentioned for a short story that gained much attention, “I am from the Jews” [*'Ana min 'al-yahud*, the title is in Arabic] (2005); in this humorous story a young Israeli man starts inadvertently to speak with his grandfather’s Iraqi accent, is suspected of being an Arab and is alienated from his parents who did their best to lose their Iraqi accent and speak with the “correct” Hebrew one. Another exceptional case is the one of Sara Shilo, who without former literary experience published a novel, *No Gnomes Will Appear* [*Shum gamadim lo yavo'u*] (2005), depicting the lives of simple Mizrahi people in a border town, using their everyday language.²⁶

Ethiopian immigrants also started writing about their immigration experience and difficult absorption into Israeli society; a recent example is Dahlia Bitaulin-Sherman, who was born in Ethiopia in 1979 and immigrated in 1984, in her book *How the World Turned White* [*'Eich sheha'olam nihiya lavan*] (2013).

26 See Yehudit Henshke, “Sara Shilo’s No Gnomes Will Appear: A Linguistic Analysis”, *Hebrew Studies* 54 (2013), 265–284. On the work of several other writers belonging to the same generation of Mizrahi writers see Batya Shimony, “Identity, Status and the Shadow of the Holocaust in the Work of Second Generation Mizrahi Writers”, *BGU Review*, Third issue, Fall 2013, and other articles in the same issue: <http://in.bgu.ac.il/en/heksherim/Pages/2013.aspx>.

Most of the above writers should not, in principle, be distinguished from other Israeli-born writers who deal with their immediate milieu. Although many Mizrahi people still feel underprivileged in Israeli society, writers of Mizrahi origin are no longer confined to a niche of their own, but considered an integral part of MHL.

In between the above-mentioned waves were writers of Mizrahi origin who turned their backs on their parents' traditions, at least temporarily. An outstanding case is A.B. Yehoshua, whose literary career demonstrates the conflict in which some writers found themselves. The earlier period of his work, until the mid 1970's, showed no trace of his Sepharadi origin. Having grown up and been educated in an Ashkenazi-dominated society, and having adopted as his literary models the work of Agnon and of European and American writers (Kafka, Camus, Faulkner), Yehoshua developed a distinct style and subject matter for his short stories and novellas, which had no room for local colors. A change occurred with his first novel, *The Lover* [*Hame'ahev*] (1977), in which six characters speak alternatively; three are the members of an Ashkenazi family (Adam, his wife Asia and their daughter Dafi), but the three others are different: Arditi, Asia's lover, is a Sephardi who emigrated from Israel and on returning deserts from the army and pretends to be an Ultra-Orthodox; his ailing Sephardi grandmother; and Na'im, Adam's young Arab employee who becomes Dafi's lover. In this novel the Ashkenazi elite seems to capitulate to the once-marginalized groups in Israeli society (Shaked, 173; 224). Most of Yehoshua's following novels included Mizrahi characters, sometimes as the main protagonists, such as in *Five Seasons* [originally *Molcho*] (1987), the great Sephardi saga *Mr. Mani* [*Mar Mani*] (1990), and the historical novel *A Journey to the End of the Millennium* [*Masa' 'el tom ha'elef*] (1997). His most recent novel, *The Retrospective* [originally *Hesed Sefaradi* or *Spanish Charity*] (2011), takes place partially in Spain, the land of origin of some of his ancestors.²⁷

The Ashkenazi society, which constituted the majority of Jewish population during most of the pre-state and state periods, often looked with condescension on Mizrahi society, enjoining it to shed its "primitive" culture and adopt the ways of the majority. Still, portrayals of Mizrahim in the writing of Ashkenazi authors run a wide spectrum, from Orientalist observation to deep identification. Following are some typical examples.

Many Ashkenazim were fascinated by the culture of the Yemenite Jews, who seemed to preserve ancient ways no longer recurrent in other communities of the Jewish diaspora. Among the writers who went to great length describing the Yemenites was Israel Zarchi (1909–1947, immigrated 1929), a prolific genre writer (see below); in his documentary novel *The Village of*

27 See also Nitza Ben-Dov, "The Writer and the Critic — A Personal Testimony", in *The Revival of Hebrew Culture in the Context of Modern Judaism and in Relation to Japan: Proceedings of the 6th CISMOR Conference on Jewish Studies, 2012* (published 2013), 120–127; Yasuko Murata, "A. B. Yehoshua's *Mar Mani* — A Sephardic World with Jerusalem as a Focal Point", *ibid.*, 128–135.

Silwan [Kfar Hashiloakh] (1948) he describes the hardships of the Yemenite community during World War I and the 1920's (Shaked, 106). A more outstanding example is Haim Hazaz, who was a leading expressionist writer in MHL (Shaked, 118–123); in his lifetime Hazaz was acknowledged along with Agnon, but while the latter's work continues to occupy the central stage, Hazaz's is largely neglected. In the Story "Rakhamim" (1933) the Ashkenazi protagonist confronts a "Kurd from Zacho" named Rakhamim, who is his complete opposite, but who also reflects the protagonist's own divided self; the story ends without resolution. Hazaz too was fascinated by the Yemenites, and wrote his only two long novels about them: *Mori Said* [originally *Hayoshevet baganim*, literally: "she who dwells in the gardens", Song of Songs 8:13] (1944), and the four-part novel *Yaish* (1947–1952). The plot of the former revolves around the tensions between generations and deals with social conflicts in a tradition-bound community which finds itself in a new country and unfamiliar circumstances. The tensions are unresolved and parental authority is lost, with the eponymous character dying having lost his mind. The depiction of characters is grotesque, reminiscent of Abramovich's Eastern European grotesques. Later Hazaz tried to illustrate North African immigrants settling after the establishment of the state, in his novella *Horaizon* ['*Ofek natuy*] (1958) but the story was written with over-enthusiasm and met with less success (Holtzman, "Hebrew Literature", 264).

Natan Alterman, the most admired poet of the generation, who was also involved in current affairs through his weekly newspaper columns written in verse, manifested profound support for Mizrahi immigration following 1948, emphasizing its importance in the solidification of the newly established state. He particularly criticized the stereotypes against Moroccan immigrants, hailing a soldier who gave his life to save his comrades in "The Soldier Elbaz" [*Hakhayal 'Elbaz*] (1954) while emphasizing his Moroccan origin, and protesting against the government's policy of "selective immigration" in "The Running of the Immigrant Danino" [*Ritzato shel ha'ole danino*] (1955). His final book of verse, *Summer Revelry* [*Khagigat kayitz*] (1965), combines several narratives with seemingly unrelated poems; one of the narratives involves a Moroccan laborer who is searching for his missing daughter, and the daughter herself, who an Ashkenazi pimp tries to prostitute, but is saved thanks partially to the intervention of an "honest" criminal.²⁸

One of the earliest accounts of the plight of Mizrahi immigrants was in Yehudit Hendel's novel *Street of Steps* [*Rekhov hamadregot*] (1955), in which a Mizrahi veteran of the elite Palmach Brigade, who lives in the lower city of Haifa, is rejected and humiliated by his Askenazi girlfriend's family, who lives in the upper city.²⁹ Hendel followed such issues in *The Yard of Momo the Great*

28 For more on this, including some deeper implications, see in Ruth Kartun-Blum, *The Darkling Jester: The Menippean Poem of Natan Alterman Hagigat Kayitz (Summer Revelry)*, Tel Aviv, 1994; in particular on this issue, see the introductory chapter, 13–58 [in Hebrew].

29 A somewhat similar plot can be found in the play *Kazablan* (1954) by Yigal Mossinson, a writer of the same generation, and which was later turned into a popular musical (1966) and a film (1973).

[*Hakhatzer shel Momo hagdola*] (1969), where she deals with the realities of immigration for both Holocaust survivors and Mizrahi immigrants (Shaked, 180). Another writer of the same period, Ehud Ben-Ezer (b. 1936), published his first novel *The Quarry* [*Hamakhtseva*] (1963), describing the tensions between the established Ashkenazim and the new immigrant Mizrahim (especially Kurdish) as a battle for sex and power (Shaked, 183).

Amalia Kahana-Carmon's celebrated story "N'ima Sassoon Writes Poems" [*Ne'ima Sasson kotevet shirim*] (1963), is the coming-of-age story of a schoolgirl who falls in love with her unapproachable teacher, and tries to express her love through poems. N'ima learns that she must obey the social order which will not allow her to fulfill her romantic dream, but that on the other hand she can express her true self through her writing. The background to the story is a religious school for girls in Jerusalem, and it seems that the majority of students and teachers are Mizrahim. Kahana-Carmon describes this world with empathy and without condescension. Generations of readers have given this short story an almost mythological place in MHL, making N'ima Sassoon one of its most memorable Mizrahi characters.

Shulamith Hareven in *A City of Many Days* (see above) demonstrated deep sensitivity in portraying a veteran Sephardi family in Jerusalem, side by side with the other ethnic elements in the city during the British Mandate period.

A writer of a later generation, Savion Liebrecht, often wrote about Mizrahi characters. One of her most popular stories, which was also made into a play, is "Appels from the Desert" [*Tapukhim min hamidbar*] (1986). In the story a religious Mizrahi woman from Jerusalem goes to visit her daughter who left home and now lives in a kibbutz with her boyfriend, with the aim of bringing her back in line. However, during the short visit the mother herself is transformed and she learns to respect her daughter's way of life.

Amos Oz seems to have undergone a process of change, along with Israeli society itself. In his early work Mizrahim are non-existent, or are marginal figures at best, who seem alien to the world of the Ashkenazi protagonists. In the novel *My Michael* (1968) a Mizrahi woman is a domestic working for the narrator Hanna Gonen; she is treated from a position of superiority by Hanna, while being ogled by Hanna's husband Michael. The greengrocer or electrician may also have been Mizrahim, but they are not among the Gonens' circle of friends or acquaintances. In the story "The Hill of Evil Council" [*Har ha 'etzah hara 'ah*] from the collection by the same name (1976), Hillel, the protagonist Ashkenazi boy, is tormented by Mizrahi girls and views them stereotypically and condescendingly:

Hillel was a pudgy, awkward little boy. [. . .] Unkind, skinny girls, vicious Oriental girls, enjoyed knocking him down on a heap of gravel and pulling his blond hair. Keys and amulets hung around their necks. They emitted a pungent smell of peanuts, sweat, soap, and halvah. Hillel would always wait until they had had

enough of him and his curls. Then he would get up and shake the dust off his gym shorts and his cotton undershirt; gasping for breath, his eyes full of tears, he would bite his lip and begin to forgive. How nobly forgiveness shone in his eyes: those girls did not know what they were doing; they probably had unhappy fathers and brothers who were high up in the underworld or in football; their mothers and sisters probably went out with British soldiers. It was a terrible thing to be born an Oriental girl. And one of them had even started to grow breasts under her sweaty vest. Hillel reflected, forgave, and was filled with love of himself for his ability to understand and to forgive.³⁰

Although the author views Hillel's thoughts ironically, it is clear that he is describing a familiar experience, and repeating views heard during his childhood. Also, the Mizrahi female "other" seems to epitomize bestial sexual allure, as in the figure of the domestic in *My Michael*.

In his nonfiction book *In the Land of Israel [Po vasham be'eretz Israel]* (1983) Oz approaches the Mizrahim in the immigrant town of Beit Shemesh almost like entering a foreign country or enemy territory, somewhat like his visit to the Palestinian town of Ramallah. When he holds a conversation with some residents in a café, there seems to be no real dialogue between the two sides.

Gradually, as in actual Israeli society, Mizrahi figures became more prominent in Oz's work. In the novel *Black Box [Kufsa shkhora]* (1987), which in some ways can be considered a contemporary version of *My Michael* twenty years later (again with a main female protagonist, although this time written in the style of the epistolary novel, giving her one voice among many, while the earlier one is a confessional novel), a major figure is a Moroccan immigrant, Michel Sumo, who marries the Ashkenazi divorcee Ilana and has a daughter with her. Still, he is viewed condescendingly and with disdain by Ilana's ex-husband and their son as well as the ex-husband's lawyer, all of whom are Ashkenazim, but it is clear that he enjoys the author's sympathy at least to a certain degree, in spite of the fact that in his political views and actions he represents the author's antithesis. In the poetical novel *The Same Sea [Oto Hayam]* (1999) most characters are Mizrahi-Sephardi, although we become aware of this fact mostly through their names, without the author commenting on it. As mentioned above, orphanhood is a major theme in the work of Amos Oz, who lost his mother when he was twelve years old; according to Nitza Ben-Dov's interpretation (see above), the use of Sephardi protagonists to retell the story of a lost mother and an inconsolable son could be another disguise. Still, the use Oz makes of Sephardi protagonists as a matter of fact, indicates the change that he, and Israeli society as a whole, have undergone during the past 65 years.

³⁰ Quoted from *The Amos Oz Reader*, Selected and edited by Nitza Ben-Dov, Boston, 2009, 184–186 (here the story is titled "Life Nowadays Is Like a Stupid Party").

d. Arabs

The portrayal of Arabs in MHL goes back to the early 20th century when the writers, mostly immigrants from Eastern Europe, were still part of a Jewish minority amidst an Arab majority, although the ratio was gradually changing.³¹ Some writers, such as Y. H. Brenner, regarded the Arabs with suspicion and fear, viewing them perhaps as another form of the violent, unpredictable gentiles like the familiar ones from Russia; in the case of Brenner this fear turned out to be tragically founded, as he, with several other Jewish men including two other writers, Yosef Luidor and Zvi Schatz, were murdered by Arabs on the outskirts of Jaffa in 1921. An ongoing series of periodical disturbances and attacks on Jewish settlements as well as neighborhoods in the mixed towns increased animosity and distrust between Jews and Arabs, creating a conflict which is yet to be solved.

The literary output of the early decades of the 20th century in Palestine can be classified, among other ways, as the writing of what Brenner termed “the Eretz Israel genre”, which painted an optimistically idealized world of the pioneers and settlers and described an exotic environment for the benefit of the East European readership, versus the “anti-genre” of Brenner himself and some others who depicted the alienation of the new immigrants (Shaked, 65–68, 75–80). One of the leading “genre” writers and the most representative was Moshe Smilanski (1874–1953), who glorified the pioneers and vilified whoever opposed them, including the Arabs when they did so. However, in his stories “the Arabs were variously viewed as wretched and pathetic, remarkable and heroic (they occasionally even appeared as idealized, romantic-exotic sons of the land whom the settlers might emulate)” (Shaked, 68), and he even adopted the Arabic pen-name “Hawaja Moussa” (“Mr. Moses”) for some of his stories. Although getting to know the Arabs intimately, and even espousing peaceful coexistence with them as a member of the coexistence-promoting organization “Brit Shalom”, he no doubt patronized them from what today we would call an Orientalist viewpoint. In the story “Latifa” (1906) Smilansky introduced a theme which would reappear in future literature in various guises: the passion of a Jewish man for an Arab woman, and the impossibility of their union. The Arabs as the rivals of the Jews in the field of labour were depicted also in the stories of Meir Wilkansky (1882–1949) and others.

Unlike the East European immigrants, native writers such as the Sephardi Yehuda Burla and Yitzhak Shami (see under c above) as well as the Ashkenazi Yaacov Hurgin (1899–1990), did not view the Arabs as exotic and enjoyed a direct relationship with their culture (Shaked, 70–75). Their writing, however, was influenced by the literature of the immigrants, artistically and sometimes ideologically. Among them Yitzhak Shami was the most original writer who resisted the genre, but

31 It is estimated that by 1898 there were about 50,000 Jews in Palestine, 75,000 by 1907, 83,000 in 1922, 165,000 by 1930, 400,000 in 1936 (Shaked, 64, 99). According to the British Mandate estimate, in 1945 in Palestine there were over a million Moslems, 550,000 Jews and 135,000 Christians.

his output was small, comprising no more than six short stories and a longer novella, *The Vengeance of the Fathers* [*Nikmat ha-'avot*] (1927).³² The latter is a unique work in the writing of the time and perhaps in MHL generally, as it narrates a story of the Moslem Arab population from an internal viewpoint without any Jewish aspect to it. In diction and style it is part of contemporary Hebrew literature, but it also contains many Arabisms. The story revolves around a man from Nablus who violated the basic code of conduct by murdering his rival from Hebron during a pilgrimage to Nebi Moussa (the tomb of the prophet Moses according to Moslem tradition), flees to Egypt but returns to Hebron to die not by the hand of his avengers but by the hand of the ghosts of the patriarchs enshrined there. It would be several decades before anything similar would appear in MHL, and even then rarely from such an authentic internal position as occupied by Shami.³³ On the other hand, the work of Yehuda Burla, Shami's close friend, although also incorporating elements of his local background, is much closer to the genre writing of the immigrants. The third native writer, Yaacov Hurgin, wrote stories encompassing the lives of Jews (both Ashkenazi and Sephardi) and Arabs all over the country, including Jaffa, Jerusalem and Tiberias, noting the high if relative degree of social repression in all these societies. In one of his novellas, *In the Mountains of Ephraim* [*Bein harei 'Ephraim*], the Jewish protagonist unintentionally victimizes a young Arab woman with whom he has defied the taboos concerning love relations between Jews and Arabs (Shaked, 75).

The ongoing conflict in Palestine eventually led to the 1947 UN partition resolution, which stipulated the division of land into two independent states, although only the Jewish state was actually declared and was attacked by Arab countries and local Palestinians who opposed the partition. In the war novels written following Israel's 1948 War of Independence, it turns out that the enemy is not stereotyped, and that "the Arabs are referred to through a large scale of emotional attitudes".³⁴

Soon after the 1948 war S. Yizhar, the primary writer of the Native Generation, published "The Story of Hirbet Hizah" [*Khirbet Khiz'ah*] and "The Prisoner" [*Hashavuy*] (1949), two stories condemning the mistreatment of Arabs during the war. The former story describes the deportation of Palestinian villagers and the destruction of their village, acts which the narrator, who is one of the soldiers following orders in this case, finds unjustified and immoral. "What the hell are we doing in this place?"³⁵ he asks rhetorically, but must confess his helplessness to cause any change.

32 The novella was reissued in 1975 with an introduction by Gershon Shaked, and was translated into English (2000) and French (2006).

33 Very few later cases can be found, especially since the 1980's, for example, Tzur Shezaf's novella *Panther Trap* [*Namer beharim*] (1988), told from the point of view of a Bedouin in the Judean desert.

34 Holtzman, "The Fiction of the 'Generation in the Land'", 267 (and see also 268-269), quoting from Mishka Ben-David's detailed study of this literature (1990).

35 My translation (p. 109 in the 1968 Hebrew edition).

The story proved controversial right from its publication, and was still so 30 years later when made into a television drama, the broadcasting of which was opposed by the then minister of education (although the story was taught in schools), but was eventually broadcast as planned amidst strong national debate. In “The Prisoner” the narrator escorts a Palestinian shepherd who clearly does not have the information his captors wish him to reveal; torn between his duty and the urge to let the prisoner escape, the narrator, in spite of feeling disgust with himself, does not dare to do what his conscience tells him. In his later work, such as in the memoir *Foretellings* [*Mikdamot*] (1992), Yizhar returned nostalgically to his childhood, to a time when Jews and Arabs enjoyed warmer, peaceful relations (Shaked, 145–149).

Shulamith Hareven in *A City of Many Days* (see above) describes the friendly relations between Jews and Arabs in Jerusalem, and how the option of mutual life went stale during the British Mandate period. Hareven describes strong friendly ties between Arab and Jewish families, and even a short affair between the Jewish protagonist, Sara, and a young Arab, which is described as a matter of fact; Sara’s Jewish friend expresses her objection to it on the ground of the man being a flirt, not on the grounds of his being an Arab. Hareven views the missed opportunity with regret, but this development seems inevitable, and she does not put the blame exclusively on any one side. Later another author, Hadara Lazar (b. late 1930’s), returned to the same subject and partially to the same period in her novel *A Local Affair* [*Mekomiyim*] (2007), which is a large family saga covering the period of the Mandate and up to 1973, involving a love story between a Jewish man and an Arab woman, and revealing a past in which the coexistence of Jews and Arabs was a reality.³⁶

A. B. Yehoshua, somewhat following Yizhar but in his own unique style and typical concerns, tackled the issue of Palestinian refugees in his novella “Facing the Woods” [*Mul haye ‘arot*] (1963); it is the story of a no-longer young student who while working temporarily as a forest sentinel discovers that the forest he is guarding was planted on the ruins of a Palestinian village, and gets to know an Arab whose tongue has been cut off and who still haunts the place with his little daughter. The sentinel becomes the Arab’s passive accomplice and takes no action to prevent him from burning down the forest. The story may reflect both the guilt felt by some Israelis over the deportation of Palestinians and the destruction of their villages, and the self-assurance felt by Yehoshua regarding the strength of Israeli society which must be able to deal with such moral questions (Holtzman, “The Fiction”, 273). Yehoshua went a step further in the novel *The Lover* (above), in which he gave a unique voice to an Arab boy, Na’im, who enters the life of an Israeli family and unexpectedly becomes the lover of the daughter Dafni. Although he is not allowed to join the family, his figure makes a strong statement of the presence of the Arab “other” in Israeli society. Yehoshua

³⁶ Before and after her novel, Lazar published two non-fiction books on the subject: *In and Out of Palestine, 1940–1948* [originally *Hamandatorim*] (1990, new ed. 2003), and *Six Singular Figures* [*Shisha yekhidim: Dmuyot kaarigot ba-‘aretz bishnot hashloshim*] (2012).

dedicated much of his long novel *The Liberating Bride* [*Hakala hameshakhreret*] (2001) to their presence, in both Israel itself and the West Bank, including the parts that by then were under control of the Palestinian Authority. The entanglement of Jews and Arabs is viewed as problematic, and the need for setting borders, in both personal and national life, is viewed as a necessity, since their absence will only lead to catastrophe.

Arabs do not figure very often in Amos Oz's literary works. In one of his earliest stories, "Nomad and Viper" [*Navadim vetsefa*], from his first collection *Where the Jackals Howl* [*'Artzot hatan*] (1965), the nomad Arabs represent both danger and sexual allure. Similarly, in *My Michael* (see above) Hanna Gonen fantasizes about the Arab twins she knew as a child as potentially causing havoc and bringing sexual abandon. However, many years later, in *Scenes from Village Life* [*Tmunot mekhayey hakfar*] (2009), which is a series of inter-connected stories, appears the character of 'Adel, an Arab student on a gap year who lives in a shed near the house of Rachel, a widow whose husband was a friend of 'Adel's father. He causes some antagonism but his presence in the Jewish village is tolerated. Surprisingly, he even shares Rachel's demented father's symbol-ridden hallucination that someone is digging under the foundations of the house at night. In his political writing Oz strongly protested the injustice done to Arabs and, like Yehoshua, expressed the necessity of setting a border between Israelis and Palestinians through the two-state solution. In an article written shortly after the Six-Day War, he wrote about feeling an intruder on entering the Old City of Jerusalem and sensing the animosity of the Arabs who lived there; the city of his birth became "An Alien City".³⁷ Judging by the overtones of his writings, it seems that for Oz the Arabs remain the "other"; they deserve fair treatment and their full rights, but even if a settlement with them is achieved, he expects no warm relations with them or a close cultural affinity, as do some others on the Israeli left.

Sami Michael approaches the issue from a different perspective. As a native of Baghdad whose mother tongue was Arabic, and as a one-time member of the Israeli Communist Party, he has first-hand knowledge of the Arab world which writers such as Oz lack. His novel *Refuge* [*Khasut*] (1977) takes place in the milieu of Jewish and Arab members of the Communist Party in Haifa during the first days of the Yom Kippur War (1973); the question of who will need to give refuge to whom comes up: the Jewish family to an Arab activist who is in danger of being arrested, or the Arab party members to the Jews should Israel lose the war? Michael's novel *A Trumpet in the Wadi* [*Khatzotzra bawadi*] (1987), which also takes place in Haifa, tells of the delicate love story between Huda, a Christian Arab woman, and Alex, a Jewish immigrant from Russia. Huda becomes pregnant but Alex is killed in the Lebanon War (1982), and Huda is left with the dilemma of how to raise her child: as an Arab who will never be fully integrated into Israeli society but will be spared

37 See in *The Amos Oz Reader*, 105–110.

the duty of serving in the army or going to war, or as a Jew, who because of his mixed origin would try to prove himself worthy by going to war. Eli Amir, another native of Baghdad, also wrote a love story against the background of war in his novel *Yasmin* (2005). In this case, Nuri, a Jewish immigrant from Iraq who after the 1967 war is put in charge of Arab affairs in East Jerusalem, falls in love with a young Christian Arab widow, Yasmin, but their love comes to a dead end; their union is impossible because of the political and ethnic divide which is stronger than the common language (Arabic) which might have united them or even their love.

David Grossman's first novel (following a collection of short stories) was *The Smile of the Lamb* [*Khiyukh hagdi*] (1983). In this novel Grossman created the figure of Hilmi, an old Palestinian living in a cave outside a West Bank village, who confronts the Israeli occupation in his own way. Grossman used many Arabic words and phrases to authenticate this figure. In the following decade Grossman published two non-fiction books on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on his visits to Palestinian refugee camps and villages and his direct talks with their residents.³⁸ Like Yehoshua and Oz, Grossman emerged as a high moral voice demanding a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In a later novel, *To the End of the Land* [*'Isha borakhat mibSORah*] (2008), appears the figure of Sami, an Israeli Arab taxi driver who is a friend of the main protagonist, Ora, a Jewish woman whose son Ofer, on the verge of release from military service, is called to take part in a military operation against Palestinians in the West Bank. The dilemma of the Israeli Arabs receives a grotesque twist when Sami is required by Ora to drive Ofer to the place from which the operation is to be launched. Sami does as asked, and although Ora realizes her mistake, the trust between the two of them is broken. The book also contains a chapter describing the plight of the Palestinians who stay in Israel as illegal laborers.

As can be seen above, from about the mid-80's the depiction of Arabs in MHL becomes more frequent, including giving them their own voice, and this tendency continued into the 90's and later. Yoram Kaniuk's *Confessions of a Good Arab* [*'Aravi tov*] (1984) was first published under the Arabic-sounding pen-name Yusuf Sharara. The narrator is the son of an Arab father and a Jewish mother, who throughout his life tried to maneuver between the two worlds into which he was born. Itamar Levi (b. 1956) published *Letters of the Sun, Letters of the Moon* [*'Otiot hashemesh, 'otiot hayareah*] (1991), a novel written in the magical realism genre, told through the eyes of a 12-year-old Palestinian boy living the realities of the *Intifada* (Palestinian uprising). As in Grossman's early novel, the Arabic language occupies an important place in this Hebrew novel.

Alon Hilu (b. 1972), who was born to parents who immigrated from Damascus in the 1960's, caused public controversy with his fictional-historical novel *The House of Rajani* [*'Ahuzat Dajani*]

38 *The Yellow Wind* [originally *Hazman hatsahov*] (1987); *Sleeping on a Wire: Conversations with Palestinians in Israel* [*Nokhachim nijkadim*, literally "Present absentees"] (1992).

(2008). The novel tells the story of a Jewish immigrant in the late 19th century, who covets both the land belonging to Arabs in the area which is today Tel Aviv, and a Palestinian woman, whose son wishes to stop him but who ends up committing suicide. The story is told through the diaries of the Jewish man and the Palestinian boy, thus offering two conflicting narratives for the same events, as in the real history of the Israelis and Palestinians. Part of the controversy surrounding the novel is the author's use of the name of an authentic Jewish agronom who immigrated to Palestine, but whose real historical figure was markedly different from the figure in the novel; however, it was also criticized politically for depicting the early Zionist immigrants as brutal colonialists and the Palestinians as submissive victims.

The complex and often tragic relations between Jews and Arabs was given expression not only in novels and stories, but also in Hebrew poetry of the recent hundred years or so.³⁹ Poets often adopted unpopular moral positions opposing the common narrative which justified whatever was done to the other side in war, sometimes paying a grave personal price for their expression, as they seemed by popular opinion to be taking the Arabs' side. On the other hand there was also the somewhat unique case of Uri Zvi Greenberg (1896–1981), whose poetry contains extremely hostile expressions towards the Arabs. Unlike the majority of popular poets who were politically identified with the moderate and sometimes extreme left, Greenberg was identified with the extreme right wing, although as a poet he was also admired by people with the opposite political views. While initially believing in a possible alliance between the Jews and Arabs due to their common origin, following Arab attacks on Jews in the 1920's he started depicting them, already in his 1929 poem "Address of the Son-of-Blood" [*Ne'um ben hadam*], as blood-thirsty and base, arguing that the Jews would only prevail by force (Rogani, 42–63). However, among well-established Hebrew poets, Greenberg was the exception; no other poet expressed such extreme animosity towards the Arabs as he did.

At the opposite pole to Greenberg was the poet Avot Yeshurun (the pen name of Yehiel Perlmutter, 1904–1992) (Rogani, 64–88). Although he started publishing in the 1930's, he was considered a marginal poet until he was rediscovered in the 1970's and his work gained much esteem. His early work included a long poem cycle written in the late 1920's, *Fast and Thirst* [*Tzom ve-Tzimaon*], describing the tragic love story of a Bedouin couple with much empathy for the life of these "others" who also seemed familiar, somewhat in the exotic style of the genre prose writers of the early 20th century mentioned above. Yeshurun went a step further in his poems published between 1949 and 1961, in which he expressed, like Yizhar, empathy with the suffering of the Palestinians who became refugees as a result of the 1948 war, even comparing their suffering with

39 Haggai Rogani, *Facing the Ruined Village: Hebrew Poetry and the Jewish-Arab Conflict 1929–1967*, Haifa, 2006 [in Hebrew]. In the following only some of the poets discussed by Rogani are introduced; his book also includes detailed discussions of the poetry of Alexander Pen, Natan Alterman, Natan Zach and others.

that of the Jews in the Holocaust. The anti-establishment position expressed in his poems was one of the reasons for his marginalization, as well as his uniquely difficult poetic language, which included many words in Arabic and Yiddish, and words specifically created for his poems (all of which also make them very difficult to translate). Yeshurun maintained that his position was based on Jewish moral principles, but it was years before this became accepted by the public; eventually, a few days before his death in 1992, Yeshurun was informed of his being awarded the Israel Prize for Poetry, the highest honor bestowed by the state (a prize already received by Greenberg in 1957).

Haim Gouri (b. 1923) is often considered the most representative poet of the War of Independence, who expressed the spirit of his generation more poignantly than any other poet. However, during his extremely long and productive career — beginning in the 1940's and still ongoing 70 years later — he developed his own unique voice which puts him outside clear generational categorizations. Unlike Yizhar, in his poetry and prose written during and soon after the 1948 war, in which he participated as a junior commander, Gouri rarely gave expression to the suffering of the other side, especially the civilians caught in the fire. There is no demonization of the enemy in his writing, but on the whole he follows the common narrative of being the just side in the conflict. However, years later Gouri stated his regret for not expressing the moral conflicts at the time (Rogani, 166). In his poetry written in the following years, he portrayed the sights of desolated Arab villages and the feelings of guilt they evoked. The expression of guilt and regret, combined with nostalgia for the land as it was before the war, continued to appear regularly in Gouri's later work.⁴⁰

Yehuda Amichai (1924–2000) also fought in Israel's War of Independence, but he started publishing a little later than the other war poets, and is usually grouped with the poets who emerged in the mid 1950's. In time he became Israel's most popular poet, and also the most often translated. Although his poetry was not overtly political, it included acute positions of opposition to war, which deprives the individual of his friends and loved ones, and of moral criticism against the harm done to the Palestinians through deportation and destruction (Rogani, 188). In his poem “An Elegy to a Deserted Village” [*Alegya 'al kfar natush*], which was published in 1963 (the same year as Yehoshua's “Facing the Forests” which contains a similar theme), the poet brings back to life the people who used to inhabit the ruined village he is facing. The poem's language connects it with Bialik's “In the City of Slaughter” (above), but this time the victims are not Jews but Arabs (Rogani, 198–202). In one of his most celebrated poems, “The Place Where We Are Right” [*Hamakom shebo 'anu tzodkim*] (1962), Amichai shows how the position of being right can in fact be wrong, bringing ruin rather than hope:

⁴⁰ See Volume 3 of his collected poetry (Jerusalem, 2011), and in particular the poems in *Eival* (which appeared as a separate volume in 2009), 161–198 [in Hebrew].

From the place where we are right/ flowers will never grow/ in the spring.// The place where we are right/
is hard and trampled/ like a yard.// But doubts and loves/ dig up the world/ like a mole, a plow./ And a
whisper will be heard in the place/ where the ruined/ house once stood.⁴¹

Poetry containing political protest, mostly from the left wing but including popular mainstream poets, has become more common in Israel since the 1980's, especially following the first Lebanon War (1982). Protest poems by 45 different poets were published in the anthology edited by Tal Nitzan, *With a Pen of Iron: Hebrew Protest Poetry 1984–2004 [Be'et barzel]* (2005). The anthology includes poems by some of the best loved Israeli poets, such as Dahlia Ravikovitch (1936–2005) and Natan Zach (b. 1930), as well as by other well-established poets side by side with younger ones. Although some of the poets also express despair that their poems will have no real effect, they still feel the necessity to sound a firm moral position through them. And unlike the more circumscribed expressions of earlier poets such as Amichai, who opted for the language of understatement, these later poems are often painfully direct, evoking specific Palestinian victims (for example, Dahlia Ravikovitch, "The Story of the Arab Who Died in a Fire" [*Hasipur 'al ha'aravi shemet besrefa*], 1992; many other poems contain individual Arabic names), and condemning Israeli soldiers (Aharon Shabetai, "Lead Soldiers" [*Khayaley 'oferet*], 2002). Taken together, the poems draw a terrifying picture of the Israeli mistreatment of the Palestinian population, expressing unequivocal condemnation of Israeli actions, and give little hope for the future.

Finally, some Israeli-Arab writers became part of MHL, writing in Hebrew and some gaining wide popularity with the Israeli public. Anton Shammas (b. 1950) was born in Galilee to a Christian family, and was educated in a Haifa high school and at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He published the novel *Arabesques [Arabeskot]* (1986) following two earlier Hebrew poetry collections, but then emigrated to the USA to teach at a university and has not published any further work in Hebrew. Sayed Kashua (b. 1975) was born to a Moslem family in Tira and studied at a Jerusalem high school and the Hebrew University. He writes regularly in the Israeli press and for television, and has published three novels so far, including *Second Person Singular [Guf sheni yakhid]* (2010), which deals with the conflicts of the Arab minority when trying to fit into the Jewish majority in Israel. His novels, which deal with the realities of living as a minority in a predominantly Jewish society, gained wide popularity in Israel and abroad.⁴² Also can be mentioned the Druz poet Na'im 'Araidi (b. 1950), who published several collections of Hebrew poetry as well as a novel, *Fatal Baptism [Tvila katlanit]* (1992). Another Druz poet, Salman Masalkha (b. 1953), writes mostly in

41 *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, Edited and newly translated by Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell, New York, 1986, 34.

42 See also Kazuo Hosoda, "'Who am I?': Quest for Lost Identities in Sayed Kashua's Fiction", in *Proceedings* (above n. 24), 79–96 [in Japanese].

Arabic, but also published a Hebrew poetry book, *In Place* [*Ekhad mikan*] (2004); he also writes for the Hebrew press.

e. Migrant Workers

The conspicuous presence of a large number of legal and illegal migrant workers — Asians, Africans and East Europeans — among Israeli society in the past two or three decades leads in a full circle back to the Bible and to the admonitions to treat the “foreigner” (*ger*) fairly and justly. It would seem that Israelis to a large extent fail in following those admonitions, although several organizations have been created by conscientious Israelis to protect workers and their legal rights. This issue occupies an important place in current Israeli society and culture, including its literature. Following are a few examples of the portrayal in recent Israeli novels of foreign workers and their plight.

In *A Woman in Jerusalem* [*Shlikhuto shel hamemune 'al mash'abei 'enosh*, literally: “The Mission of the Human Resource Manager”] (2004) A. B. Yehoshua tells the fictitious story of an East European migrant worker who is killed in a Jerusalem market terror attack, and whose body remains unclaimed and unidentified for a considerable period. Eventually, the human resource manager in the factory where she used to work is charged with the mission of accompanying her body back to her home country. One interesting aspect of the novel is that only the dead woman, once she has been identified, has a name, while all the other figures are mentioned only by their professional position or their family relations to others. The manager, who is portrayed as a typical mainstream Israeli male professional, undergoes a complex process in the novel which leads to his deep identification with the dead foreign woman.

Yehoshua Kenaz’s novel *Restoring Former Loves* (above, a) includes the characters of Pilipino care workers, a man and a woman, and of the old and helpless man of whom they are in charge, and who develops a special connection with them. However, the woman is raped and murdered, the man is sent away, and the old man ends up in a nursing home. These occurrences are in line with the general atmosphere of despair which fills Kenaz’s novels. It is also in line with the unfavorable conditions of migrant workers.

IV. Conclusion

The above survey does not do justice to the wide and complex subject of the portrayal of minorities in MHL, although it may serve as a basis for further research. However, our survey demonstrates that all along its more than 150 years of ever growing production, MHL has displayed an acute awareness of the plight of different minorities. While detailing the condition of the Jews themselves as a vulnerable minority in Eastern Europe, early MHL writers did not ignore the victimization of social minorities within Jewish society, such as orphans and handicapped, or the underprivileged

place of women in that society. Once the center of MHL had moved to Palestine, where the State of Israel was later established, the awareness of other kinds of minorities also emerged, including that of Arabs, Mizrahi Jews and migrant workers. The depiction of each of these groups in literature underwent complex developments, which have been outlined in the above survey through some prominent examples. As the authors of the Bible were already aware, the position of all kinds of minorities is always a precarious one, and the defense of their rights requires a firm moral stance. The fact that society often fails in upholding such a position has been vividly described in the pages of Hebrew literature by authors who created unforgettable figures, plots and poetical lines that deserve further study and consideration.

List of literary works

The following list contains the titles of all novels, stories and poems mentioned in the above article, given here in Hebrew script and arranged alphabetically according to the name of the author (the relevant part of the article is indicated in parentheses):

- אביגור-רותם, גבריאלה
 תמסין וציפורים משוגעות (2001) (III.b)
 איני, לאה
 ורד הלבנון (2009) (III.c)
 איתן, רחל
 ברקיע התמישי (1962) (III.a)
 אלתרמן, נתן
 "החייל אלבז" (1954) (III.c)
 חגיגת קיץ (1965) (III.c)
 "ריצתו של העולה דנינו" (1955) (III.c)
 בארון, דבורה
 "כריתות" (II)
 בהר, אלמוג
 "אנא מן אליהוד" (2005) (III.c)
 ביאליק, חיים נחמן
 "בעיר ההרגה" (1904) (I)
 "יתמות" (1932) (I)
 "מאחורי הגדר" (1909) (I)
 "ספיה" (1908-1923) (I)
 בורלא, יהודה
 אישתו השנואה (1923) (III.c)
 עלילות עקביא (1939) (III.c)
 ביטאולין-שרמן, דליה
 איך שהעולם נהיה לבן (2013) (III.c)
 ביכובסקי, אלישבע
 סמטאות (1929) (III.b)
 בלס, שמעון
 המעברה (1964) (III.c)
 בן-עזר, אהוד
 המחצבה (1963) (III.c)
 ברדוגו, סמי
 ילדה שחורה (1999) (III.c)

- ברדיצ'בסקי, מיכה יוסף
"בית תבנה" (I) (1919)
"בסתר רעם" (I) (1919)
"גרי רחוב" (I) (1919)
"מרים" (I) (1920)
ברנשטיין, אילנה
שארה כסותה עונתה (III.b) (1991)
גולדברג, לאה
והוא האור (III.b) (1946)
גולן, אבירמה
העורבים (III.b) (2004)
גורי, חיים
עיבל (III.d) (2009)
גורמזנו-גורן, יצחק
קיץ אלכסנדרוני (III.c) (1978)
גרוסמן, דויד
אישה בורחת מבשורה (III.d) (2008)
הזמן הצהוב (III.d) (1987)
חירך הגדי (III.d) (1983)
נוכחים נפקדים (III.d) (1992)
עיין ערך: אהבה (II) (1986)
גרינברג, אורי צבי
"נאם בן הדם" (III.d) (1929)
הזן, חיים
אופק נטוי (III.c) (1958)
היושבת בגנים (III.c) (1944)
יעיש (III.c) (1947-1952)
"רחמים" (III.c) (1933)
הנדל, יהודית
החצר של מומו הגדולה (III.c) (1969)
רחוב המדרגות (III.c) (1955)
הראבן, שולמית
עיר ימים רבים (III.d, III.c, III.b) (1972)
זרחי, ישראל
כפר השילוח (III.c) (1948)
חורגין, יעקב

- "בין הרי אפרים" (III.d)
טביב, מרדכי
- כערער בערבה (1957) (III.c)
כעשעב השדה (1948) (III.c)
יהושע, א. ב.
- המאהב (1977) (III.c)
חסד ספרדי (2011) (III.c)
"מול היערות" (1963) (III.d)
מסע אל תום האלה (1997) (III.c)
מר מאני (1990) (III.c)
שליחתי של הממונה על משאבי אנרש (2004) (III.e)
יזהר, ס. (יזהר סמילנסקי)
- "השבוי" (1949) (III.d)
"חרבת חזעה" (1949) (III.d)
מקדמות (1992) (III.d)
ישורון, אבות (יחיאל פרלמוטר)
"צום וצימאון" (1934) (III.d)
כהנא-כרמון, עמליה
- וירח בעמק אילוך (1971) (III.b)
"נעימה ששון כותבת שירים" (1963) (III.c)
לב, אלאונורה
- סוג מסויים של יתמות (1989; 1999) (III.a)
לזר, הדרה
- המנדטורים (1990, 2003) (III.d)
מקומיים (2007) (III.d)
שישה יחידים: דמויות חריגות בארץ בשנות השלושים (2012) (III.d)
ליברכט, סביון
- "סועד" (2000) (III.a)
"תפוחים מן המדבר" (1986) (III.c)
מאפו, אברהם
- אהבת ציון (1853)
מוסנזון, יגאל
- קזבלן (1954) (III.c)
מטלון, רונית
- זה עם הפנים אלינו (1995) (III.c)
מיכאל, סמי

- (III.c) (1979) **חיפון של ערפל**
(III.d) (1977) **חסרת**
(III.d) (1987) **הצוצרה בואדי**
(III.c) (1974) **שזים ושזים יותר**
מנדלי מוכר ספרים (שלום יעקב אברמוביץ')
(I) (1897) **בעמק הבכא**
(I) (1901) **ספר הקבצנים**
מצאלחה, סלמאן
(III.d) (2004) **אחד מכאן**
ניצן, טל (עורכת)
(III.d) (2005) **1984-2004 עברית מחאה עברית**
סויה, אלברט
(III.c) (1990) **עקוד**
סמילנסקי, משה
(III.d) (1906) **"לטיפה"**
עגנון, שמואל יוסף
(II) (1935) **סיפור פשוט**
(II) (1922) **"בדמי ימיה"**
(II) (1921) **"עובדיה בעל מום"**
שירה (II)
(II) (1950) **"תהילה"**
(II) (1945) **תמול שלשום**
עוז, עמוס
(III.c) (1999) **אותו הים**
(III.c) (1976) **"הר העצה הרעה"**
(III.d, III.c, III.b) (1968) **מיכאל שלי**
(III.d) (1965) **"נוודים וצפע"**
(III.a, II) (2002) **סיפור של אהבה וחושך**
(II) (1971) **"עד מוות"**
(III.d) (1967) **"עיר זרה"**
(III.c) (1983) **פה ושם בארץ ישראל**
(III.c) (1987) **קופסה שחורה**
(III.d) (2009) **תמונות מחיי הכפר**
עמיחי, יהודה
(III.d) (1963) **"אלגיה על כפר נטוש"**
(III.d) (1962) **"המקום שבו אנו צודקים"**

עמיר, אלי

יסמין (2005) (III.d)

תרנגול כפרות (1983) (III.c)

ערידי, נעים

טבילה קטלנית (1992) (III.d)

פרץ, יצחק לייב

"האישה מרת חנה" (I)

"דם חוטא" (I)

קאלו, שלמה

הערימה (1962) (III.c)

קנו, יהושע

בדרך אל התתולים (1991) (III.a)

מחזיר אהבות קודמות (1997) (III.e, III.a)

קניוק, יורם

אדם בן כלב (1968) (II)

הברלינאי האחרון (2004) (II)

קציר, יהודית

ערבי טוב (1984) (III.d)

סוגרים את הים (1990) (III.b)

צילה (2013) (III.b)

קשוע, סייד

גוף שני יחיד (2010) (III.d)

רביניאן, דורית

סמטאת השקדיות בעומריג'אן (1995) (II)

רביקוביץ, דליה

"הסיפור על הערבי שמת בשריפה" (1992) (III.d)

שבתאי, אהרן

"חיילי עופרת" (2002) (III.d)

שטיינברג, יעקב

"בת הרב" (II)

"בת ישראל" (II)

"העירות" (II)

שיזף, צור

נמר בהרים (1988) (III.d)

שילה, שרה

שום גמדים לא יבואו (2005) (III.c)

שלו, צרויה

(III.b) (1993) **רקדתי, עמדתי**

שלום עליכם (שלום רבינוביץ')

(I) (1907) **מוטיל בן פייסי החזן**

שמאס, אנטון

(III.d) (1986) **ערבסקות**

שמוש, אמנון

(III.c) (1978) **מישל עזרא ספרא ובניו**

שמי, יצחק

(III.d) (1927) **נקמת האבות**