

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FIRST "NEW WOMAN" IN MODERN
 HEBREW LITERATURE: FINALIA ADELBERG IN
*LOVE OF THE RIGHTEOUS, OR, THE
 PERSECUTED FAMILIES* BY SARAH FEIGA
 MEINKIN¹

MICHAL FRAM COHEN, PH.D.

The novel *Love of the Righteous, or, the Persecuted Families* by Sarah Feiga Meinkin which was published in Vilnius in 1881² was, as far as is known, the first Hebrew novel written by a woman, and the only Hebrew novel written by a woman in the 19th century.³ *Love of the Righteous* was the first Hebrew novel written from a woman's perspective that would challenge the perspective of the male Hebrew writers of her time.

Meinkin, who is better known by her married name Foner, was born in 1854 in Lithuania, then in the Russian Empire, and died in Pittsburgh in the U.S. in 1937. *Love of the Righteous* was her first publication. It was followed by two historical stories set in the time of the Second Temple, *The Way of Children, or, a Story from Jerusalem*⁴ and *The Treachery of*

¹ This essay is based on my Ph.D. dissertation. See: Michal Fram Cohen, "Sarah Feiga Foner née Meinkin (1854-1937): The First Hebrew Woman Writer" (PhD diss., Bar Ilan University, 2016) (Hebrew).

² Sarah Feiga Meinkin, *Ahavat Yesharim, o, ha-Mishpakhot ha-Murdafot* (Vilnius: A. H. Katzelenboigen, 1881). The English translation used here is: Sarah Foner, *The Love of the Righteous or the Pursued Family*, in *A Woman's Voice: Sarah Foner, Hebrew Author of the Haskalah*, trans. Morris Rosenthal (Wilbraham: Dailey International Publishers, 2001), 143-302.

³ Tova Cohen, "The *Maskilot*: Feminine or Feminist Writing?", *Polin*, 18 (2005): 59-60.

⁴ Sarah Feiga Foner, *Derekh Yeladim, o Sipur mi-Yerushalayim* (Vienna: Moritz Knepfelmacher, 1886).

Traitors: A Story from the Times of Shimon the High Priest,⁵ and then a memoir about her childhood town, *From Memories of My Childhood Days, or, a View of Dvinsk*,⁶ and an autobiographical children's story, "From Memories of My Youth," which was published in a children's magazine.⁷ Foner Meinkin also completed the manuscript of a historical novel about Isaac ben Judah Abarbanel,⁸ but *Love of the Righteous* remained her only published novel.

In *Love of the Righteous*, Foner Meinkin introduced a new type of heroine in 19th century Hebrew literature. The protagonist of the novel, Finalia Adelberg,⁹ is portrayed as an independent-minded young woman who defies the social conventions of her milieu, overcomes the gender boundaries imposed on her, and strives to determine the course of her life by her own effort. Finalia Adelberg may be considered the first "New Woman" in Modern Hebrew Literature—an emancipated heroine who was not depicted before the publication of Foner Meinkin's novel.

In this chapter I would like to compare the portrayal of the protagonist of *Love of the Righteous* with that of major female characters in Hebrew novels written by Foner Meinkin's contemporaries, and to highlight the unique alternative provided by Foner Meinkin to the female characters depicted by her fellow writers. I would also like to draw parallels between Foner Meinkin's own life and the heroine she created.

Like most Hebrew novels of the period, *Love of the Righteous* is an "intrigue novel,"¹⁰ heavily influenced by 19th century French literature

⁵ Sarah Feiga Foner, *Begeg Bogdim: Sipur mi-Yeme Shim'on Cohen Gadol* (Warsaw: Alexander Ginz, 1891).

⁶ Sarah Feiga Foner, *Mi-Zikhronot Yeme Yalduti, o, Mar'eh ha-'Ir Dvinsk* (Warsaw: ha-Tzefira, 1903).

⁷ Sarah Feiga Foner, "Mi-Zikhronot Yeme Ne'urai," *Shakharut* (Sept 1919): 91-93, (Oct 1919): 109-110.

⁸ Sh. Sarkes, "A Fruitful Hebrew Authoress," *Die Wahrheit*, 13, 8266 (May, 12, 1918): 4 (Yiddish). Isaac ben Judah Abarbanel (1437–1508) was a Portuguese Jewish statesman, philosopher, Bible commentator, and financier.

⁹ The pronunciation of the heroine's first name is not clear in the Hebrew transcript. It has been transcribed in English as "Finalia" but can be pronounced as "Pinellia". Since "Finalia" has no meaning in Hebrew, it is possible that the author intended to use the name of a medicinal plant with an exotic flower. See "Pinellia," Institute for Traditional Medicine, accessed June 9, 2017, <http://www.itmonline.org/arts/pinellia.htm>.

¹⁰ The term "intrigue novel" was first used by Dan Miron. See: Dan Miron, *Between Vision and Truth: the Budding Hebrew and Yiddish Novel in the 19th Century* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1979), 263-280 (Hebrew). Four basic

and by the French writer Eugène Sue (1804-1856) in particular.¹¹ Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* was the first European novel translated into Hebrew,¹² was extremely popular by the Hebrew readership, and served as a model for 19th century Hebrew novelists.¹³

The plot of *Love of the Righteous* takes place in Milan in 1861, the year of the declaration of the independent Kingdom of Italy. It tells the story of two Jewish lovers whose families were persecuted in their places of origins: Finalia Adelberg, the daughter of a French-Jewish Baron whose family found refuge in Milan after the military coup of Napoleon III, and Victor Sheinfeld, who arrived in Milan from Rome after the Papal State authorities had arrested his father and seized the family's property. Finalia eschews the traditional arranged marriage that is common in her community and espouses romantic love. She is pursued by Victor as well as three other suitors: Emanuel Marania, Milan's Minister of Justice who attempts to conceal his Jewish origins,¹⁴ a Polish nobleman named Milkauský, and Yachdiel Ben-Delaya, a wealthy *Hassid* from Brody (Ukraine), who attempts to impose on Finalia a traditional arranged marriage through the matchmaker Zavchiel. Finalia prefers the impoverished but virtuous Victor over her three other suitors, and the plot revolves around the conflict between her choice and the desires of the other suitors, as well as the wishes of her parents, who consider Emanuel Marania or even Yachdiel Ben-Delaya to be a better match for her than Victor.

Finalia remains faithful to Victor throughout the novel. By insisting on her preference of Victor, she defies the conventions of her social milieu—both Jewish and gentile—where pedigree, social position and wealth are considered more important than character. Finalia easily rejects Milkauský, refusing to marry a non-Jew, but must maneuver carefully her rejection of Marania, who protects her family from the emissaries of Napoleon III. When Yachdiel realizes that he cannot impose an arranged

elements of the intrigue novel are a love story, a family reunion, a criminal scheme, and a social panorama (*Ibid*, 265).

¹¹ Avraham Sha'anán, *Studies in the Literature of the Jewish Enlightenment: Examination of the Influence of French Literature* (Merhavía: Sifriyat Poalim, 1952). (Hebrew).

¹² Eugène Sue, *Misterey Paris*, trans. Kalman Schulman (Vilnius: Ram, 1857-1860).

¹³ Avraham Sha'anán, *Studies in the Literature of the Jewish Enlightenment*, 135-165.

¹⁴ The name "Marania" derives from the Spanish "Maranos", the pejorative name used to designate Spanish Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity under the Spanish Inquisition and observed their Jewish faith in secret.

marriage on Finalia, he kidnaps her and brings her to his home in Brody. The first part of the novel ends when Finalia enlists the assistance of Yachdiel's manservant and escapes from his house.

Unfortunately, the second part of the novel was not published and the manuscript has been lost. According to Foner Meinkin's introduction to the first part, she intended to end the novel with the perseverance of Finalia's and Victor's love and the resumption of their families' social positions in France and in Rome: "By means of their upright love and the wholeness and truth that was between them, these hunted and smitten families returned to their place from which they had been driven and pursued in hot anger."¹⁵

In his comprehensive study *The Hebrew Novel in Czarist Russia*,¹⁶ David Patterson observes that criticism of arranged marriage, which was traditionally imposed on young men and women in Jewish society, as well as advocacy of romantic love, were common themes in 19th century Hebrew novels.¹⁷ Most Hebrew writers were adherents of the Jewish Enlightenment or *Haskalah* (Hebrew for "Enlightenment"), the movement that sought to modernize Jewish society in Russia in the 19th century.¹⁸ The uniqueness of *Love of the Righteous*, however, lies in the heroine's attitude and conduct in relation to these themes, which differ from those of the archetypal heroine of the 19th century Hebrew novel, as we shall see.

Finalia is introduced to the reader in the opening scene of *Love of the Righteous* when she walks home alone in the evening after visiting a friend:

At this moment as the sun is going down and the stars are yet hiding their power, a woman walks abroad. Her figure is wrapped in black garments and a black veil conceals her face along with netting over her head. But who is she? We cannot know, as she has covered her face, but her bearing and her refined step inform us that she is of the loftiest daughters of the land.¹⁹

By venturing outside by herself, Finalia breaches the conventions of modesty as expressed in the Biblical dictum: "All glorious is the king's daughter within the palace" (*Psalms*, 45, 14). She departs from the

¹⁵ Sarah Foner, *The Love of the Righteous*, 147.

¹⁶ David Patterson, *The Hebrew Novel in Czarist Russia: A Portrait of Jewish Life in the Nineteenth Century* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, [1964] 1999).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 129-156.

¹⁸ Israel Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772-1881*, trans. Chaya Naor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 90-101.

¹⁹ Sarah Foner, *The Love of the Righteous*, 151.

acceptable social norms further when she makes the acquaintance of Victor later in the scene. Realizing that Victor is following her, Finalia attempts to avoid him, but eventually agrees to talk to him and let him escort her home, knowing that "he was a respectable man."²⁰ Victor's conduct throughout the novel reaffirms Finalia's initial judgment of his character.

In choosing Victor, Finalia dismisses the social convention whereby a man's worth is measured by his family's lineage. She inverts this convention when she asserts that Victor's virtues endow his family with honor. When Victor asks her why she never asks about his background, she replies: "Why should I do that? This much I do know, that you aren't born of wood and stone. If you have parents and siblings then I will honor them, because your parents or siblings they are."²¹

Finalia's decisions and actions set the plot in motion and highlight her virtues. Thus she refuses to accept the expensive jewelry Yachdiel attempts to give her in order to win her heart, and tells her father that she would not have him as a husband:

Woe to a fool and idiot such as this who thinks that his money will always gild his stupidity. God forbid that I should transgress his commandments and worship the golden calf. I won't bow down before strange gods and I won't covet the gold that covers them.²²

Finalia's father, the Baron Adelberg, is an enlightened, modern Jew and does not coerce his daughter to marry against her will. He accepts her rejection of Yachdiel, but he barely suppresses his anger and disappointment when he realizes that she is not interested in marrying Marania. Adelberg expects his daughter to share his positive opinion of Marania, who already revealed his Jewish origins to him, and to fulfill his wish to turn Marania to his son-in-law. He praises Marania to Finalia: "He is wise, enlightened, and understanding like no other, and also a very dear soul... Even if I were back in Paris in my former glory, I couldn't have hoped for such happiness as this."²³ Finalia remains silent, unable to reject Marania openly since he has been her family's protector in Milan, but she is determined to avert her betrothal to him.

Thus, when Marania invites Finalia and her parents to a ball in his palace, Finalia attends the ball and dances with him, but maneuvers her

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 184.

²² *Ibid.*, 161.

²³ *Ibid.*, 249-250.

way out of his verbal advances. After the party, when Victor expresses his jealousy over Finalia's apparent acceptance of Marania's courtship, Finalia sets the record straight and convinces Victor of her faithfulness:

What else could I do? The Minister invited us to the ball. Could I have contradicted his will after the life and kindness he did for us and will do for us? Believe me, being in the Minister's palace yesterday was like being in prison for me. All of the honors and majesty are nothing to me. I would choose to live with you in a poor tent rather than to be the lady of his palace.²⁴

When Finalia realizes that Yachdiel found out about her relationship with Victor and intends to kill him, she urges Victor to flee from Milan and to save his life. Finalia's conduct inverts the conventions of romance, where the hero saves the heroine. In a further inversion of the conventions of romance, Victor cannot rescue Finalia when she is abducted by Yachdiel, and she rescues herself.

As noted by Wendy Zierler, Finalia's characterization violates the conventions expected from the heroine of a romance.²⁵ Thus, Finalia refuses to be admired for her beauty alone, scorns the flattery of her suitors, and insists that they should regard her as a human being. The following exchange between Finalia and Marania demonstrates Finalia's intelligent responses to the conventional imagery used by Marania to flatter her:

Marania: Who wouldn't desire to see the lily of the valley at the height of her beauty and glory? As her leaves unfold to receive the morning dew to drink, in order that the purple of her eyes be able to withstand the day, lest the hot wind and sun harm her.

Finalia: Who can stand against the sun?

Marania: But what if a man wished to shelter her, and his hands built a wall for her?

Finalia: Wouldn't the sun forcefully breach it, to burn her and destroy her freshness, until her face grows pale and her leaves wither and she falls to earth?

Marania: Is it not within the power of an enlightened man to build an iron wall and surround her from all sides, to supervise guards protecting her without commanding her?

Finalia: And who will help in the event the wall is penetrated?

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 246.

²⁵ Wendy Zierler, *And Rachel Stole the Idols: The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Women's Writings* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 2004), 217.

Marania: He that guards the guards will also guard the lily, that there be one fate for both of them.²⁶

Finalia not only resists Marania's conventional comparison of her beauty to the lily, but leads Marania to admit that he wants to confine her in order to possess her beauty, and insinuates that a woman cannot rely on a man to protect her. Her insinuation proves true when Yachdiel's emissaries overcome the guard Marania has placed at her home and abduct her. In the end, Finalia has to release herself from her abductor and escape on her own.

Yachdiel also persists in seeing Finalia as a beauty he must possess. Thus after he had abducted her, Yachdiel dismisses Finalia's anger and declares: "A beautiful maiden like yourself will not remain angry forever."²⁷ Finalia, however, proves him wrong, and declares that she can fight him as well as a man:

I am no gentle maiden anymore! Now I stand against you, against he whom my soul hates. Like a skilled champion fighting in his youth, I will fight to the end for my honor and the honor of my father's house against robbers and kidnappers whose blood is cursed.²⁸

Finalia's courage and ingenuity reach their climax when she averts Yachdiel's scheme to keep her captive until she concedes to marry him. She convinces his servant to flee with her, asking: "Why do you remain here? Look, I'm just a maiden, and despite that I won't be afraid as long as the Lord sets me free. Can't you earn your bread any place you go, especially a man skilled in his work as yourself?"²⁹

The first part of the novel ends with Finalia's words when she boards the train from Brody to Vienna: "Now I can breathe the air of freedom and independence and I can go wherever I want."³⁰ The closing scene, then, also shows Finalia venturing outside, in pursuit of her own aims. As Tova Cohen observes: "Meinkin portrays Finalia as active and resourceful, characteristics expressed in her frequent departures from her home. Visits to friends and invitations to parties (where she develops a network of

²⁶ Sarah Foner, *The Love of the Righteous*, 222.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 277.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 296.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 302.

relationships) and the meeting with Victor, her beloved, all take place outside the home."³¹

Finalia's characterization deviates significantly from that of the archetypical heroine of the Hebrew novel of the period. In contrast with Finalia, who contends with unwanted courtship and releases herself from the threat of forced marriage to her abductor, the archetypical heroine of the Hebrew novels written by Foner Meinkin's contemporaries is portrayed as a *damsel in distress*, who depends on another man, or on circumstances, to rescue her. Ben-Ami Feingold notes in his study "Feminism in Hebrew Nineteenth Century Fiction"³² that the heroines of the Hebrew novels "cannot be regarded as authentic and typical advocates of feminist ideology...They indicate the emergence of a new type of woman, but still as yet within the traditional family-life institution."³³ Feingold writes that, though the 19th century Hebrew writer "critically attacked traditional matchmaking, which represented the social and religious hierarchy of Jewish society in Eastern Europe [he] could not disassociate himself from conventional nineteenth century attitudes and from his own native tradition toward love, family and women."³⁴ The Hebrew writers' view of women was also manifested in their attitude toward women writers, including Foner Meinkin, as we shall see below.

Carol Balin elaborates on the Hebrew writers' adherence to tradition, even though they were advocates of the *Haskalah*, or *maskilim* (Hebrew for "enlightened men"):

In effect, [the] *maskilim* were upholding the gender division etched by centuries of Jewish law and custom but rationalizing it anew with ideas and vocabulary culled from the "modern" cult of domesticity...women were seen as connected to the realm of nature, as opposed to culture, and their activities, ideally, were confined to the private sphere of the home, husband and children...[T]he roles of men and women being proposed by the *maskilim* resembled those designed by the Rabbis of old.³⁵

The Hebrew writers, then, adhered to the traditional conventions of womanhood in the portrayal of the heroines in their novels, and portrayed them as homebound and dependent.

³¹ Tova Cohen, "The *Maskilot*," 74.

³² Ben Ami Feingold, "Feminism in Hebrew Nineteenth Century Fiction," *Jewish Social Studies*, 49, 3/4 (Summer-Autumn, 1987): 235-250.

³³ *Ibid*, 239.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 237, 239.

³⁵ Carol Balin, *To Reveal Our Hearts: Jewish Women Writers in Tsarist Russia* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000), 17-18.

For example, in *Learn Well: A Love Story* by Shalom Yaakov Abramovich (1836-1917)³⁶ the heroine Rachel is secretly in love with her brother's friend David, but cannot avert her impending arranged marriage to another man. When David urges her to elope with him, Rachel refuses:

I will not dare to defy my father's honor, to fight with him over my soul and to say that it belongs to me, and I could give it to whoever I want. And if you love me indeed, you should not demand of me to do such a thing that will disgrace me in the eyes of all my people, and will degrade my family's honor.³⁷

In a later version of *Learn Well*, published under the title *Fathers and Sons*, Rachel protests the inferior status of women in her society, but expresses her sense of helplessness as a woman to her brother Shim'on:

You are a *man* and can do everything as you see fit. You want to study – come and learn in this school or that. All the land is open before you. And I am a woman, who has nothing before her except her father's house while she is a girl, or her husband's house. What am I? Where do I go?³⁸

Ultimately, Rachel's groom's parents call off the wedding because the social position of her family has changed to the worse. Her beloved David accumulates wealth as a supplier for the Russian army, and convinces Rachel's father that he is worthy of becoming his son-in-law. Rachel's own actions, however, do not contribute to the happy turn of events.

A heroine who does run away from her parents' home to escape arranged marriage is Hannah in *The Outcast* by Nahum Meir Sheikewitz (1846-1905).³⁹ Hannah becomes a social outcast, ekes out a living as a seamstress, and eventually relents to convert to Christianity in order to marry. She is tormented by remorse, however, and contemplates suicide, when her long-lost lover Jacob arrives and rescues her.

Similar examples can be found in *The Hypocrite* by Avraham Mapu (1808-1867).⁴⁰ The novel's heroine, Elisheva, attempts to defend her right

³⁶ Shalom Yaakov Abramovich, *Limdu Heitev: Hu Sipur Ahavim* (Warsaw: Y. Levinson, 1862). The author is better known by his later pen name Mendele Mokher Sefarim (Mendele the Book Peddler).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 71. Translation mine.

³⁸ Shalom Yaakov Abramovich, *Ha-Avot v'eha-Banim*, in *Kol Kitve Mendele Mokher Sefarim*, vol. 6 (Tel-Aviv: Devir Publishing, [1911] 1935), 9. Translation mine.

³⁹ Nahum Meir Sheikewitz, *Ha-Nidachat* (Vilnius: Ram, 1886-1887).

⁴⁰ Avraham Mapu, *Ayat Tzavua*, vols. 1-2 (Vilnius: Ram, 1857, 1861), vol. 3 (Vilnius: S.I. Fin, 1863), vols. 4-5 (Warsaw: Goldman, 1869).

to choose her husband, but acquiesces to the demands of her grandfather, who is her guardian in her father's absence. Though she is in love with the hero Na'aman, Elisheva is ready to marry the arch-villain Tzadok, whom her grandfather had chosen for her, unaware of Tzadok's hypocrisy and wickedness. She is saved by her father, who returns just in time to expose Tzadok's treachery and calls off the wedding. In the end, Elisheva marries Na'aman with her father's blessing.

Another female character in *The Hypocrite*, Shifra, attempts to release herself from an arranged marriage by committing suicide. Shifra jumps into a lake in order to avoid marrying Eldad, the elderly man her parents had chosen for her. She is saved from drowning by Azriel, a traveler who happens to see her, and the two fall in love. Shifra's parents, though grateful to Azriel for saving their daughter's life, are determined to proceed with her betrothal to Eldad. Shifra is resigned to her fate, but Azriel devises a way to prevent the wedding from going through when the couple is already standing under the canopy. Eventually, Shifra's parents approve of Azriel and the two get married.

Foner Meinkin was undoubtedly familiar with the stereotypical characterization of the heroines in the Hebrew novels of the period. Her portrayal of two secondary characters in *Love of the Righteous*, Finalia's girlfriends Henriette and Emilia, is indicative of her disdain for this characterization. She describes the aftermath of the two young women, in an ingenious inversion of the turn of event characteristic of the Hebrew novel of her time.

Henriette's character appears to imitate Shifra's attempted suicide in *The Hypocrite*. Shortly after her parents had forced her to marry a man she detests, Henriette jumps into a nearby river and is rescued. Her rescuer, however, is not a potential lover like Azriel, but the matchmaker Zavchiel, who apparently is concerned about losing his fee. Henriette's parents, disgraced by their daughter's conduct, send her and her groom to live with his parents, and nothing further is known about her fate. The discord between the aftermath of Henriette's rescue and that of Shifra in *The Hypocrite* is obvious and probably intended.

Emilia is initially determined to resist her arranged marriage to her step-brother Shlumiel⁴¹ whom she despises. She runs off to the house of her beloved Albert, Marania's Jewish clerk, and asks for his help. Albert, however, convinces Emilia to proceed with her engagement to Shlumiel, as her father and step-mother demand of her. He reassures her that he will find a way to rescue her later on. Emilia's fate is not known at the conclusion of the first part of the novel which was published, but it can be

⁴¹ The name means a hopelessly incompetent person ("Schlemiel" in Yiddish).

inferred from Albert's attitude that he is not bent on rescuing her. Having been just promoted to Secretary to the Minister Marania, Albert is more interested in impressing Emilia with his new position than in helping her, although he could ask for her hand with his impressive title and salary.⁴² The discord between Albert's conduct and that of the stereotypical hero of the Hebrew novel who is anxious to rescue the heroine from an arranged marriage, is also apparent and probably intentional.

The characters of Henriette and Emilia, then, serve as contrasting counterparts to Finalia's characterization. Unlike her girlfriends, Finalia does not depend on another man or on circumstances to rescue her from Yachdiel. Her independence and self-reliance set her apart from her girlfriends, and from the archetypical heroines in the Hebrew novels of the period.

Finalia's characterization was unique not only in comparison with the heroines of the 19th century Hebrew novels, as I have demonstrated, but also in comparison with the villainesses. Shmuel Feiner observes that there is a polarization in 19th century Hebrew literature between passive and moral heroines, and active but immoral villainesses. Feiner describes the polarized portrayal of women as follows: "Either submission to the social conventions and the authority of the parents and pious religious observance, or total rebellion against the parents, sexual deterioration and in the end, alienation from Judaism as well."⁴³

For example, in *The Hypocrite*, the villainess Tzofnat is portrayed as the polarized opposite of the heroine Elisheva. Tzofnat rebels against her forced marriage to the devout scholar Yerachmiel. She conspires with the villain Tzadok to frame her husband for perjury, and has an extra marital affair with Tzadok's manservant Levi. In the end, Tzofnat is punished by divine intervention when she drowns during an attempt to flee with her lover. Similarly, in *The Joy of the Godless* by Peretz Smolenskin (1842-1885)⁴⁴ the character of Chava serves to demonstrate the moral deterioration and ultimate punishment of a rebellious young woman. Chava elopes with her gentile lover who deserts her when she gets pregnant. Unable to cope with her situation, Chava kills her newborn baby and is executed for murder.

⁴² Sarah Foner, *The Love of the Righteous*, 283-284.

⁴³ Shmuel Feiner, "On Gender and the Beginning of Secularization in European Jewry," *Secular Jewish Culture* (December 20, 2011): 19 (Hebrew). Translation mine.

⁴⁴ Peretz Smolenskin, *Simchat Hanef, o, Ahava ha-Teluya ba-Davar* (Vilnius: Ram, 1873).

Submission to the authority of the parents, however, does not necessarily end well for the virtuous heroine of the 19th century Hebrew novel. For example, in *The Parents' Sin* by Mordechai Manassewitz (1858-1928)⁴⁵ the heroine Miriam yields to her parents' demands and marries the scholar Gershon, although she is in love with the jeweler Binyamin. Gershon, however, disappears once he realizes that Miriam's parents had deceived him about the worth of her dowry. Miriam is left pregnant and destitute, unable to get a divorce and remarry, and her life is ruined. As the novel's title indicates, the narrator criticizes Miriam's parents for their conduct, but not Miriam herself for surrendering to their will.

With the heroine of *Love of the Righteous*, then, Foner Meinkin provides a third alternative to the portrayal of women in the Hebrew novels of her time: that of an active and moral woman. Finalia does not have to choose between submitting to the will of her parents and marrying someone other than Victor, and eloping with Victor and deteriorating morally. Her enlightened parents respect her wishes and do not force her to marry against her will, and the honorable Victor does not entice her to elope with him. Having chosen a virtuous man, Finalia can follow her heart without disgracing herself. When she escapes from Yachdiel's house, Finalia initiates an act that protects her and her parents' honor, and demonstrates that a third alternative is possible for a woman of her time. As noted by Zierler, "Finalia's intelligence, eloquence, and strength of character offer a redemptive model of the enlightened Jewish woman."⁴⁶

Love of the Righteous was written in Hebrew, and has been studied within the field of Hebrew women's writing.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, as a woman writer, Foner Meinkin shared certain writing strategies and features with women writers of her time who wrote in other languages. In her groundbreaking formulation of women's writing criticism or "Gynocritics," Elaine Showalter recognizes the commonality of all women writers, beyond their time period and geographic location. According to Showalter "women's culture forms a collective experience within the

⁴⁵ Mordechai Manassewitz, *Hat'at Horim, o, Sipur Miriam ha-Zkena* (Warsaw: Alexander Ginz, 1884).

⁴⁶ Wendy Zierler, *And Rachel Stole the Idols*, 218.

⁴⁷ See: Tova Cohen, "The *Maskilot*," 73-78; Wendy Zierler, *And Rachel Stole the Idols*, 214-220; Michal Fram Cohen, "Sarah Feiga Foner née Meinkin (1854-1937): The First Hebrew Woman Writer," 65-178.

cultural whole, an experience that binds women writers to each other over time and space."⁴⁸ Showalter defines Gynocritics as follows:

[T]he program of Gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture.⁴⁹

Showalter's insights about the distinct characteristics of fiction written by women were applied by Marianne Hirsch in her study of English and American women writers of the 19th century. According to Hirsch,

these women write within literary conventions that define the feminine only in relation to the masculine, as object or obstacle. Female plots, as many feminist critics have demonstrated, act out the frustration engendered by these limited possibilities and attempt to subvert the constraint of dominant patterns by means of various 'emancipatory strategies' [...] This process of resistance, revision, and emancipation in the work of women writers is [...] a *feminist* act defining a *feminist* poetics and it needs to be identified as such.⁵⁰

While Hirsch and other scholars of women's literature did not study Foner Meinkin's writings, Hirsch's concept of "emancipatory strategy" may be applied to the portrayal of Finalia in *Love of the Righteous*. Furthermore, in her analysis of the heroines of 19th century novels written by women, Hirsch points out essential features that are shared by the character of Finalia as well. Predominant among these features are "the heroines' singularity based on a dis-identification from the fate of other women," and their "refusal of conventional heterosexual romance and marriage plots" and "dis-identification from conventional constructions of femininity."⁵¹ Hirsch concentrates on the heroine's dis-identification from her mother, her need to separate and break away from her mother's

⁴⁸ Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," *Critical Inquiry*, 8, 2 (Winter, 1981): 197.

⁴⁹ Elaine Showalter, "Towards a Feminist Poetics," *Women Writing and Writing about Women*, ed. Mary Jacobus (London: Routledge, 1979), 28.

⁵⁰ Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1989), 8. Emphasis is in the original.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

passivity and silence.⁵² In a similar way, Foner Meinkin's heroine breaks away from the passivity and helplessness of the archetypal heroines of the Hebrew novels of the period.

The feminist reading of *Love of the Righteous* is reinforced by Nancy K. Miller's analysis of the deviation from the hegemonic literary conventions in fiction written by women. Miller observes that feminist writing "contests the available plots of female developments or *Bildung* and embodies dissent from the dominant tradition in a certain number of recurrent narrative gestures, especially in the modalities of closure."⁵³ The closure of the first part of *Love of the Righteous* – Finalia's self-liberation from an imposed betrothal to Yachdiel – manifests a conclusive dissent from the hegemonic literary conventions.

Cohen's observation about Finalia's innovative characterization confirms Miller's remarks about female character development:

As a rule, the female heroine in the male *Haskalah* novel is a stereotypical character, one-sided and simple. If a *Haskalah* writer succeeded in developing complexity in a character, it was always in the male hero. In Meinkin's novel, however, while the male characters, and even the enlightened hero Victor, are cast in a hackneyed and simple mold, the heroine Finalia is a complex and rounded character. She is a developing character too, thrust into complicated circumstances that force her to change, maneuvering between different relationships.⁵⁴

The parallels in the life experiences of Foner Meinkin and those of the heroine she created in the character of Finalia Adelberg are evident and intriguing. Like the protagonist of her novel, Foner Meinkin broke away from the path of other Jewish women of her society, and from the conventions of femininity. She did so in the very act of writing in Hebrew in the 19th century, when few Jewish women were proficient in Hebrew and even fewer published Hebrew writings. It is possible to regard Foner Meinkin herself as a "New Woman" in the realm of Modern Hebrew Literature.

Until the mid-19th century, Hebrew was a liturgical language, reserved for study and worship by men alone, hence Jewish women had been excluded from studying the language and its canonic religious texts.⁵⁵ The

⁵² *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵³ Nancy K. Miller, *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press), 8.

⁵⁴ Tova Cohen, "The *Maskilot*," 75.

⁵⁵ Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women: Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth-Century Eastern European Jewish Society*, trans. Saadya Strenberg

exclusion was summed up in the dictum of the *Talmud*: "He who teaches his daughter the *Torah* teaches her vanity" (*Mishna Sotah*, 3, 4). As observed by Iris Parush,

Hebrew's status as a holy language, which marked it in advance as a language of men, and the identification of Hebrew literature as one written by and for men – these kept women excluded almost completely from the field of Hebrew prose composition.⁵⁶

In mid-19th century Russia, Jewish girls could be tutored at home or attend Jewish schools, which were established by the *maskilim* as part of their effort to modernize Jewish society. However, as noted by Parush,⁵⁷ Adler,⁵⁸ and Stampfer,⁵⁹ the Jewish schools for girls did not teach Hebrew beyond rudimentary reading skills, and used Yiddish or Russian translations of the canonic Hebrew texts (the *Bible* and the *Talmud*) to teach Jewish subjects. The girls were expected to learn Hebrew in order to recite the prayers, not in order to understand the meaning of the words. Hence, the unique achievement of a handful of 19th century Jewish women who acquired sufficient proficiency in Hebrew in order to write in the language.⁶⁰

In her essay about 19th century Hebrew women writers, Cohen notes their "shared female experience" with other women writers of the period, in accordance with Showalter's definition of Gynocritics.⁶¹ Cohen writes that they all shared a middle-class European social and cultural milieu, and "a level of education unusual for women of the period."⁶² They similarly "attempted to become part of a male culture" and "experienced the difficulties involved in trying to be accepted by an androcentric culture that perceived literary writing as an act appropriate only to men."⁶³ Cohen

(Waltham: Brandeis University Press), 2004, 57-70. See also: Sheila E. Jelen, *Intimations of Difference: Dvora Baron in the Modern Hebrew Renaissance* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 1-24.

⁵⁶ Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women*, 247.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 71-96.

⁵⁸ Eliyana Adler, *In Her Hands: The Education of Jewish Girls in Tsarist Russia* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), 88.

⁵⁹ Shaul Stampfer, "Gender Differentiation and Education of the Jewish Woman in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Europe," *Polin*, 7 (1992): 63-87.

⁶⁰ Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women*, 207-226.

⁶¹ Tova Cohen, "The *Maskilot*," 60-62.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 61.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

points out, however, that the Hebrew women writers, who were called *maskilot* (Hebrew for "enlightened women") were unique and

differed from their female contemporaries who wrote in English, French, German, or Russian: these women wrote in their everyday language (Yiddish being the equivalent for Jewish women), whereas the *maskilot* wrote in a language of canonical culture from which they had been excluded. By their use of the 'masculine' Hebrew, they had already penetrated the sphere of the male Hebrew Enlightenment.⁶⁴

The *maskilot* published poetry, letters, or essays in the Hebrew press. One of them, Miriam Markel-Mosessohn (1837-1920), translated into Hebrew the German novel *Die Juden und die Kreuzfahrer in England unter Richard Löwenherz* (*The Jews in England, or: The Jews and the Crusaders under the Reign of Richard the Lionheart*).⁶⁵ However, Foner Meinkin was the only *maskilah* (Hebrew for "enlightened woman") who published an original Hebrew novel.⁶⁶ The course of her life was also uncommon, as we shall see.

Sarah Feiga Meinkin was born in Zager (Lithuania) into a family of Rabbis who descended from Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilnius, the spiritual leader of the opposition to the *Hassidic* movement in the 18th century.⁶⁷ Her father, Yosef Meinkin, studied to become a Rabbi but was influenced by the *Haskalah*,⁶⁸ and became a wine distiller for the Russian army.⁶⁹ When she was seven years old her family moved to Dvinsk (Latvia, then in the Russian Empire), and a decade later to Riga.⁷⁰ Apparently the family could settle in Riga, outside the Pale of Settlement where Russian Jews were allowed to reside, due to the father's occupation.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Tova Cohen, "The *Maskilot*," 67.

⁶⁵ Isaac Asher Frankolm, *Ha-Yehudim be-Angliya: o, Ha-Yehudim ye-Nos'e-ha-Tselav bi-Melokh Rikhard Lev-ha-Ari*, part I, trans. Miriam Markel-Mosessohn (Warsaw: Goldman, 1869). Part II of the translation was published in Warsaw in 1895.

⁶⁶ Tova Cohen, "The *Maskilot*," 59-60.

⁶⁷ Chaim Freedman, *Eliyahu's Branches: The Descendants of the Vilna Gaon and His Family* (Teaneck: Avotaynu, 1997), 50-53.

⁶⁸ Sh. Sarkes, "A Fruitful Hebrew Authoress."

⁶⁹ According to the information provided by the Latvian State Archives. See: Michal Fram Cohen, "Sarah Feiga Foner née Meinkin (1854-1937)," 325.

⁷⁰ Sarah Foner, *From Memories of My Childhood Days*, in *A Woman's Voice*, 3, 55.

⁷¹ Mendel Bobe, *Chapters in the History of Latvian Jewry, 1651-1981* (Tel-Aviv, Reshafim, 1965), 137 (Hebrew).

In her autobiographical children's story "From Memories of My Youth" Foner Meinkin relates how she could learn Hebrew despite the prohibition against teaching the *Torah* to girls. In the story, she describes how she begged her father to teach her to read Hebrew when she was five years old. The father taught little Sarah Feiga the Hebrew alphabet, and was amazed when within a day she started reading aloud from a prayer book. Sarah Feiga's uncle expressed regret about her achievement: "I'm sorry that she is a girl. If she was a boy, she probably would have been a *Gaon* in Israel."⁷² Sarah Feiga challenged her uncle's remark and asked: "A girl can't become a *Gaon*?"⁷³ Her uncle and father laughed at her question and Sarah Feiga felt ashamed and embarrassed. Nevertheless, shortly afterwards the father brought his daughter to the *Heder*, the school for Jewish children that only boys were allowed to attend. There were exceptional cases where young girls were allowed to study in the *Heder* alongside the boys,⁷⁴ and Sarah Feiga was one of them.

Yosef Meinkin was representative of the fathers of the *maskilot*, who fostered the Hebrew education of their daughters and encouraged them to write in Hebrew.⁷⁵ He was an adherent of the *Haskalah*, or *maskil* (Hebrew for "enlightened men") but had a traditional Jewish education which he combined with general secular knowledge.⁷⁶ Meinkin's support for his daughter's writing can be discerned from a newspaper advertisement about the publication of *Love of the Righteous*, which indicated that those who wished to buy the book should contact the author's father, and specified his name and address.⁷⁷

It is possible to draw a parallel between the conduct of Foner Meinkin's father and that of the father of her heroine in *Love of the Righteous*. Like Yosef Meinkin, who went against tradition in allowing his daughter to study Hebrew and canonic Jewish texts, so does Finalia's

⁷² Sarah Foner, "A Girl Can't Become a *Gaon*?", in *A Woman's Voice*, 79. A *Gaon* (Hebrew for "genius") is a prominent scholar in Jewish law.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Avraham Greenbaum, "The Girl's *Heder* and the Girls in the Boys' *Heder* in Eastern Europe before World War I," *East/West Education*, 18, 1 (1997): 55-62.

⁷⁵ Tova Cohen, "Portrait of the *Maskilah* as a Young Woman," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues*, 15 (2008): 13-16.

⁷⁶ On the traditional background of the *maskilim* see: Shmuel Werses, "The *Maskil* as a Young Man," in his *Awake, My People: Hebrew Literature in the Age of Modernization* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2001), 67-114 (Hebrew). Tova Cohen, "The *Maskil* as *Lamdan*: The Influence of Jewish Education on *Haskalah* Writing Techniques," in *Jewish Education and Learning*, ed. Glenda Abramson and Tudor Parfitt (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994), 61-74.

⁷⁷ *Ha-Melitz*, 17, 4 (4.26.1881): 291.

father, the Baron Adelberg, go against tradition when he enquires about his daughter's wishes regarding marriage. As Adelberg explains to the matchmaker Zavchiel, traditional fathers "trade in their daughters like horses or asses," whereas he is concerned with his daughter's happiness.⁷⁸ Foner Meinkin's father was also concerned with his daughter's wishes.

According to Foner Meinkin's autobiographical children's story, she left the *Heder* after several years. Her education continued at home, where she was tutored in Jewish and general subjects along with her two brothers, and concluded in the Russian High School for girls in Riga, where she joined a group of students, male and female, who practiced Hebrew together.⁷⁹ Foner Meinkin's Hebrew education was not structured beyond her early years, then, though she continued her Hebrew studies on her own throughout her life.⁸⁰

The exclusion of girls from comprehensive, structured learning of Hebrew and its canonic texts was decried by the *maskilot*. Their letters, which were published in the Hebrew press, highlight their concerns about the deficiencies of the girls' education.⁸¹

The first known letter was published in 1863 by Miriam Markel-Mozessohn (under her maiden name) who called for the establishment of a new school for Jewish girls where they would be educated in Hebrew: "How good and appropriate it would be if we take courage to reclaim anew the lovely treasure, the holy tongue that was bestowed on us from our holy ancestors."⁸² Similar sentiments were expressed in letters which were published over three decades. The justification for teaching Hebrew to the girls was typically their future role as mothers and their influence on the next generation. Thus Hannah Burstein wrote in 1872:

Give value to the education of the girls and let them too climb the ladder rising at the House of God... So that the daughters of Jacob may hear and respect our religion and holy tongue... the love of God will take root in the hearts of our sons and daughters, our sons will be teachers and lovers of

⁷⁸ Sarah Foner, *The Love of the Righteous*, 168-169.

⁷⁹ Sh. Sarkes, "A Fruitful Hebrew Authoress."

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ For a collection of letters published in the Hebrew press, including some of the letters cited below, see: Tova Cohen and Shmuel Feiner, *Voice of a Hebrew Maiden: Women's Writings of the 19th Century Haskalah Movement* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2006), 201-255 (Hebrew).

⁸² Miriam Wierzbolowska, Letter, *Ha-Magid*, 7, 20 (5.20.1863): 156 (Hebrew). Translation mine.

studying, our daughters will be adorned with the sapphires of faith and knowledge, to benefit and enlighten their sons after them.⁸³

Nechama Feinstein wrote in 1889:

Therefore those concerned about the education of boys will not benefit as long as they do not pay attention to reform the education of girls, to teach them our holy tongue, our history and literature, to instill in their hearts the love of their people and their brothers, so they can endow their sacred spirit unto the generation raised on their knees to turn them into loyal sons of their people.⁸⁴

And in 1896 Miriam Lichtman advocated

to instruct the daughters of Israel with our ancient language and the knowledge of the history of our nation and its origins, the revelations of our prophets and the graceful charm of the phrases of the sages, so that the woman may educate her sons in her ways in their childhood, and may implant in their hearts while they are still young our bequeathed religion, and the obligation to our people.⁸⁵

Toybe Segal, in contrast, claimed that Jewish girls should receive the same Hebrew education as boys for their own sake rather than for the sake of their future sons. In her letter, published in 1879, she asked rhetorically:

Where is the reliable source from which men derived the knowledge that women were bereft of their aptitude and deprived of their intellect? And who would guarantee to me that women would not do as well as men if given the right to do anything necessary and required for the benefit of all and for their own benefit as well?⁸⁶

The deficiencies of the education of Jewish girls were not resolved, however. As late as 1900, Foner Meinkin protested the exclusion of girls

⁸³ Hannah Burstein, "The Mother of Sons," *Ha-Levanon*, 9, 6 (10.2.1872): 46 (Hebrew). Translation mine.

⁸⁴ Nechama Feinstein, "More on the Questions of Girls," *Ha-Melitz*, 29, 23 (2.8.1889): 3 (Hebrew). Translation mine.

⁸⁵ Miriam Lichtman, "On the Question of Women's Education," *Ha-Tzefirah*, 23, 269 (12.18.1896): 1307 (Hebrew). Translation mine.

⁸⁶ Toybe Segal, "The Women's Question," *Ha-Ivri*, 16, 12 (12.12.1879): 94 (Hebrew). Translation mine. For an analysis of the complete letter see: Tova Cohen, "The *Maskilot*," 83-85.

from the study of Hebrew in a letter addressed to fathers, under the title "For the Benefit of the Fathers."⁸⁷ In her letter, Foner Meinkin urges the fathers to provide their daughters with Hebrew and Jewish education, but does not resort to the common justification – the girls' impact on the next generation as mothers. Instead she advocates equality along gender lines by virtue of being Jewish:

Is it possible that the Sages intended to teach the daughters of Israel all the languages while our own language, which is the relish to delight our sons, is prohibited to us?...For Moses commanded the *Torah* to us in Hebrew. Not only for men it was commanded, but for all of us. We all stood by Mount Sinai. We all listened and we all answered: "We shall do and we shall listen!" (*Exodus*, 24, 7).⁸⁸

Foner Meinkin, then, stood out among the *maskilot* not only in writing and publishing Hebrew fiction, but in voicing, along with Toybe Segal, a feminist opinion on the equality of the sexes. It was not a coincidence that Foner Meinkin and Segal were the two women whose writings were included in a collection of letters and stories published in 1882, along with those of prominent Hebrew writers.⁸⁹ Foner Meinkin published the short essay "The Spring" and Segal, a letter.⁹⁰ The character of the heroine of *Love of the Righteous*, which was published two decades before "For the Benefit of the Fathers," manifested Foner Meinkin's initial belief in the equality of women, intellectually and morally.

The continuous exclusion of girls from the study of Hebrew and Judaic texts reflected the persistence of the traditional view of women in Jewish society in turn of the century Russia. Even among the followers of the *Haskalah*, there was resistance to women's entering the realm of Hebrew writing.⁹¹ The fathers of the *maskilot* were a small minority, since not any *maskil* who had a daughter encouraged her to study Hebrew and to write. According to Parush:

The founders and formative figures of the movement for Jewish cultural revival were not quick to share the "male cultural capital" or the Hebrew language with women. Their attitudes toward women who spoke and wrote

⁸⁷ Sarah Feiga Foner, "For the Benefit of the Fathers," *Ha-Melitz*, 49, 198 (1900): 1 (Hebrew).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* Translation mine.

⁸⁹ Yehuda Rozenberg, ed., *Otsar Mikhtavim ve-Sipurim* (St. Petersburg: A. Tserderboym Printing, 1882).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 105-107, 107-108.

⁹¹ Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women*, 227-240.

Hebrew were marked by a deep ambivalence. Only when circumstances forced them to the realization that the Hebrew-reading women were absolutely essential to the existence of a reading public for Hebrew Literature did they display any readiness to allow women to enter their domain. Moreover, this readiness to share the capital of Hebrew with women was mainly a readiness to have women be passive consumers of the literature, not active producers of it.⁹²

A unique figure among the *maskilim* was the poet Yehuda Leib Gordon (1839-1892), who encouraged the *maskilot* to write in Hebrew and to publish their writings.⁹³ His extensive correspondence with the *maskilot* testifies to their trust in his support and to his confidence in their aptitude.⁹⁴ Gordon also wrote an introduction to Markel-Mozessohn's translation where he praised her achievement. Along with the *maskilot*, Foner Meinkin sent her manuscript of *Love of the Righteous* to Gordon, who responded to her kindly, and wrote a positive review of her novel when it was published.⁹⁵

Gordon's review of *Love of the Righteous* was published in the Russian-language Jewish newspaper *Voskhod*.⁹⁶ Gordon used the publication of Foner Meinkin's novel as an occasion to advocate the teaching of Hebrew to women and to promote their venture into writing, as follows:

A new spirit has revolutionized the education of the Jewish woman and removed from her the ban imposed in the *Talmud*. Here and there the daughters of Israel have started to study the genuine Hebrew language, the language of the *Bible* and literature. We know several such women, who understand Hebrew very well, read it, and even begin to write in Hebrew.⁹⁷

Thus Gordon applauds Foner Meinkin for being the first women to publish a Hebrew novel:

⁹² *Ibid*, 247.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 194-195, 239; Carole B. Balin, *To Reveal Our Hearts*, 14-35.

⁹⁴ For a collection of letters written by the *Maskilot* to Y.L. Gordon see: Tova Cohen and Shmuel Feiner, *Voice of a Hebrew Maiden*, 129-140.

⁹⁵ The correspondence between Foner Meinkin and Gordon prior to the publication of *Love of the Righteous* has not been found, but it is mentioned in Gordon's letter to a colleague and in Foner Meinkin's letter to Gordon several years later.

⁹⁶ *Voskhod*, (April, 1881): 40-43. The citations are translated from the Hebrew translation. See: Yehuda Leib Gordon, *To Learn the Homeland's Language: Y. L. Gordon's Articles in Voskhod in the Years 1881-1882*, trans. from Russian Rina Lapidus (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2012), 150-154 (Hebrew).

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 150. Translation mine.

But even today, when an article or letter composed by a Jewish woman appears in the press, it is noted as an uncommon occurrence. One Jewish woman, Miss Markel [Mosessohn], translated into Hebrew Frankolm's novel "The Jews and the Crusaders"...but all the aforementioned refer to simple articles and translations. Miss Meinkin is the first whose independent work has been published, and this is definitely an original phenomenon, since the subject matter of her story does not deal with the life of the local Jews among whom she lives, but with the life of the Jews in France, in Austria, and in the eternal city of Rome.⁹⁸

Toward the end of the review, Gordon expresses some reservations about the improbability of the plot and the lack of psychological depth in the portrayal of the characters, and notes the imperfect grammar. One of the flaws he emphasizes is in the portrayal of the heroine:

Several events...are puzzling and arouse many question marks. For example, the first meeting and introduction of such an ideal personality like Finalia with her future beloved Victor takes place literally in the street.⁹⁹

Gordon was troubled, then, by Finalia's violation of the conventions of modesty, but still regarded her character as "an ideal personality." Notwithstanding his reservations, Gordon emphasized that Foner Meinkin had the aptitude to become a good writer, and expressed his hope to see more of her work in print:

Still we are of the opinion that Miss Meinkin's first attempt is successful and arouses the hope for better works in the future...[T]here is no doubt, that she has the talent, and after proper training may produce good and abundant works.¹⁰⁰

However, Gordon's endorsement of Foner Meinkin's novel was contested. Two months after Gordon's review, another review of *Love of the Righteous* appeared in the Hebrew newspaper *Ha-Boker Or*.¹⁰¹ The reviewer was the writer David Frishman (1859-1922), who was opposed

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 150-151. Translation mine. Apparently Gordon referred to Austria rather than to Italy because Italy was partially under Austrian rule until 1866, while the novel takes place in 1861.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 154. Translation mine.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*. Translation mine.

¹⁰¹ David Frishman, "Judgment of New Books: *Love of the Righteous or the Persecuted Families*," *Ha-Boker Or*, 6 (May-June 1881): 387-391 (Hebrew).

to the use of Hebrew by women in any form.¹⁰² Frishman advocated the preservation of Hebrew as a written literary language reserved for a select few¹⁰³ and was opposed to the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language, which would make it the everyday language of women as well.¹⁰⁴ Thus, in a letter in the Hebrew press in 1887 Frishman wrote:

I was *always* opposed to our sisters who study the Hebrew language, and I *never* believed that a woman could learn this language innocently and wholeheartedly, and that the thoughts that would lead her to this learning would be pure.¹⁰⁵

Frishman claimed further that Hebrew was "a man's apparatus" and equated women's use of Hebrew with crossdressing.¹⁰⁶

Frishman, therefore, used his review of *Love of the Righteous* to advance his belief that a woman can only corrupt the Hebrew language by using it. Thus he writes in his review that the novel's language is "thoroughly corrupt from beginning to end," and advises that the author should refrain from further writing.¹⁰⁷ Like Gordon, Frishman is critical of the heroine's first encounter with the hero, but infers from it a negative assessment of the heroine's character, and of the author's morals:

The authoress calls her heroes "righteous" and their love "love of the righteous", and how we are surprised, reading the first chapter "The First Acquaintance" and seeing, how an innocent girl walks alone at night, and a strange man encounters her and tells her things that tend to be deemed private, and she stands and answers him calmly...Wouldn't we spit inadvertently in the face of an "innocent" girl like her and decide that, in her modesty and righteousness she is not much better than the daughters of Lot?¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women*, 227-240.

¹⁰³ Iris Parush, *National Ideology and Literary Cannon* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1992), 60-67 (Hebrew).

¹⁰⁴ Frishman was opposed to the enterprise of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858-1922), the driving spirit behind the revival of Hebrew as a spoken everyday language. See: David Frishman, "Ben Yehuda," *David Frishman's Collected Writings*, III (Warsaw: Merkaz, 1914), 60-65 (Hebrew).

¹⁰⁵ David Frishman, "Letters on the Subject of Literature," I, *Hayom*, 189 (6.8.1887): 2 (Hebrew). Translation mine. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* See also: Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women*, 233.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 390-391.

¹⁰⁸ David Frishman, "Judgment of New Books: *Love of the Righteous or the Persecuted Families*," 390-391. Translation mine. On the Biblical story of Lot's daughters see: *Genesis*, 19, 30-38.

Frishman's pejorative assessment of Finalia's independence and resolve is also apparent in his claim that, when escaping from Yachdiel's house, Finalia is "wearing a man's apparatus."¹⁰⁹ In this manner, Frishman associated Finalia's deviation from the proper conduct expected of a heroine with Foner Meinkin's inappropriate venture into the realm of Hebrew writing.

Foner Meinkin was not deterred by Frishman's negative review and proceeded to complete the second part of her novel. In 1883, two years after the publication of the first part of *Love of the Righteous*, she was ready to publish the second part. She published an advertisement in the Hebrew press asking for pre-paid orders of her book,¹¹⁰ a common practice among Jewish writers at the time.¹¹¹ Apparently she could not raise sufficient funds, and the second part of *Love of the Righteous* was never published. It is unlikely that Frishman's review prevented the publication of the novel's second part, since Gordon's review was also available to the readers. Nevertheless, Frishman's view of Hebrew as "a man's apparatus" was shared by many readers, and probably contributed to the rejection of Foner Meinkin's novel.

Foner Meinkin later published two historical stories and a memoir about her childhood town, but with the exception of Frishman's brief scathing review of *The Way of Children*,¹¹² no further mention of her publications has been found in the Hebrew press.

The circumstances of Foner Meinkin's personal life were uncommon as well. She married the Hebrew author Yehoshua Mezach (1834-1917) and had a son, Noah. Mezach, however, deserted Foner Meinkin when she was pregnant and denied having married her and his paternity of her son.¹¹³ She sued Mezach for divorce, and several years later married the Hebrew dramatist Meir Foner (1854-1936), with whom she did not have children.¹¹⁴ When her grown son immigrated to the United States she joined him, leaving Meir Foner behind.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 389,

¹¹⁰ *Ha-Tzefirah*, 10, 7 (27.2.1883): 56.

¹¹¹ Chaim Freedman, *Eliyahu's Branches*, 11.

¹¹² David Frishman, "Critique of Books: *The Way of Children, or, a Story from Jerusalem*," *Ben Ami* (March 1887): 31-32 (Hebrew).

¹¹³ See Foner Meinkin's letter to Gordon (Tova Cohen and Shmuel Feiner, *Voice of a Hebrew Maiden*, 135-137).

¹¹⁴ Yehoshua Shmuel Weiss, *A Man's Wanderings: Passing Shadows* (Tel-Aviv: Mitzpeh Publishing, 1931), 50 (Hebrew).

¹¹⁵ Sh. Sarkes, "A Fruitful Hebrew Authoress."

In an interview in 1918 in the Yiddish newspaper *Di Varhayt*, Foner Meinkin expressed her frustration with her traditional role as wife and mother:

I was always angry with Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus who answered his wife when she asked him questions on liturgical subjects: "There is no wisdom in women except with the spindle" (*Yoma Tractate*, 66, b). A woman is only good for spinning. Surely I could study just like a man. But as soon as I sat down to study the *Talmud* the kid started crying. I began to write but realized that soon my husband would come home and I had to start cooking. Right! The kitchen is the best place for a woman. For this reason I hardly published anything after I got married.¹¹⁶

Nevertheless, as the published author of four books, Foner Meinkin regarded herself as an author. When she arrived in the United States in 1909, she indicated on the manifest of her ship under the column "Occupation or calling" that she was an "Authoress."¹¹⁷ Unfortunately, though she had completed nine additional manuscripts,¹¹⁸ Foner Meinkin did not publish anything in the U.S. except her autobiographical children's story.¹¹⁹ In Pittsburgh, where she lived with her son and his family, Foner Meinkin was known as a dedicated advocate of Jewish education rather than as an author.¹²⁰ A single review of *From Memories of My Childhood Days* appeared in a collection of essays by the Pittsburgh journalist Yosef Zelig Glick in 1912, nine years after the memoir was published.¹²¹ Glick held up Foner Meinkin's proficiency in Hebrew as a model against assimilation, but did not consider her an author and did not mention her previous publications.

Until recently, *Love of the Righteous* was not included in the historiography of Modern Hebrew Literature, with the exception of David Patterson's study of the 19th century Hebrew novel.¹²² Foner Meinkin's

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* Translation mine from the Hebrew translation by Dr. Lea Garfinkel.

¹¹⁷ "Passenger Record, Fonor, Sarah," The Statue of Liberty - Ellis Island Foundation, Inc., accessed June 9, 2017,

<http://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/passenger-details/czoxMjoiMTAxNzAzMDEwNTI4Ijs=cz05OjJwYXNzZW5nZXIiOw==>

¹¹⁸ Sh. Sarkes, "A Fruitful Hebrew Authoress."

¹¹⁹ Akiva Ben-Ezra, "Hebrew Women Writers in America," *Ha-Do'ar* (May 23, 1947), 848 (Hebrew).

¹²⁰ See ads about her activities in Pittsburgh: *The Jewish Criterion*, (5.9.1913), 7; *The Jewish Criterion*, (3.28. 1924), 15.

¹²¹ Yosef Zelig Glick, *Avne Gazit* (Pittsburgh: Yosef Zelig Glick, 1912), 5-8.

¹²² David Patterosn, *The Hebrew Novel in Czarist Russia*, various pages.

Hebrew writings were rediscovered at the turn of the 21st century, after the emergence of the study of Hebrew women's writing.¹²³

The English writer Sarah Grand (1854-1973) who was the first to use the term "New Woman," writes in her article "The New Aspects of the Woman Question" that "if a woman ventured to be at all unconventional, man was allowed to slander her with the imputation that she must be abandoned."¹²⁴ Perhaps this can be a possible explanation for the disappearance of Foner Meinkin and of the heroine of *Love of the Righteous*, from the historiography of Modern Hebrew Literature.

¹²³ The study of early Hebrew women writers began in the 1980's. See: Yaffah Berlovitz, ed., *Women's Stories from the First 'Aliya'*, Tel-Aviv: Ministry of Defense Publishing, 1984 (Hebrew).

¹²⁴ Sarah Grand, "The New Aspects of the Woman Question," *The North America Review*, 148, 448 (March 1894): 273.

Bibliography

- Abramovich, Shalom Yaakov. *Ha-Avot ve'ha-Banim*, in *Kol Kitve Mendele Mokher Sefarim*, vol. 6. Tel-Aviv: Devir Publishing, [1911] 1935.
- . *Limdu Heitev: Hu Sipur Ahavim*. Warsaw: Y. Levinson, 1862.
- Adler, Eliyana. *In Her Hands: The Education of Jewish Girls in Tsarist Russia*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Balin, Carol. *To Reveal Our Hearts: Jewish Women Writers in Tsarist Russia*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000.
- Bartal, Israel. *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772-1881*. Translated by Chaya Naor. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.
- Ben-Ezra, Akiva. "Hebrew Women Writers in America." *Ha-Do'ar* (May 23, 1947), 846-848. (Hebrew).
- Berlovitz, Yaffah, ed. *Women's Stories from the First 'Aliya'*. Tel-Aviv: Ministry of Defense Publishing, 1984. (Hebrew).
- Bobe, Mendel. *Chapters in the History of Latvian Jewry, 1651-1981*. Tel-Aviv, Reshafim, 1965. (Hebrew).
- Burstein, Hannah. "The Mother of Sons," *Ha-Levanon*, 9, 6 (10.2.1872): 44-46. (Hebrew).
- Cohen. "Portrait of the *Maskilah* as a Young Woman." *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues*, 15 (2008): 13-16.
- . "The *Maskil* as *Lamdan*: The Influence of Jewish Education on *Haskalah* Writing Techniques." In *Jewish Education and Learning*, edited by Glenda Abramson and Tudor Parfitt, 61-74. Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994.
- . "The *Maskil*: Feminine or Feminist Writing?" *Polin*, 18 (2005): 57-86.
- Cohen, Tova and Feiner, Shmuel. *Voice of a Hebrew Maiden: Women's Writings of the 19th Century Haskalah Movement*. Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2006. (Hebrew).
- Feiner, Shmuel. "On Gender and the Beginning of Secularization in European Jewry." *Secular Jewish Culture* (December 20, 2011): 19. (Hebrew).
- Feingold, Ben Ami. "Feminism in Hebrew Nineteenth Century Fiction." *Jewish Social Studies*, 49, 3/4 (Summer-Autumn, 1987): 235-250.

- Feinstein, Nechama. "More on the Questions of Girls," *Ha-Melitz*, 29, 23 (2.8.1889): 2-3. (Hebrew).
- Foner, Sarah. *A Woman's Voice: Sarah Foner, Hebrew Author of the Haskalah*. Translated by Morris Rosenthal (Wilbraham: Dailey International Publishers, 2001).
- . *Begeed Bogdim: Sipur mi-Yeme Shim'on Cohen Gadol*. Warsaw: Alexander Ginz, 1891.
- . *Derekh Yeladim, o Sipur mi-Yerushalayim*. Vienna: Moritz Knepfelmacher, 1886.
- . "For the Benefit of the Fathers." *Ha-Melitz*, 49, 198 (1900): 1. (Hebrew).
- . "Mi-Zikhronot Yeme Ne'urai." *Shakharut* (Sept 1919): 91-93, (Oct 1919): 109-110.
- . *Mi-Zikhronot Yeme Yalduti, o, Mar'eh ha-'Ir Dvinsk*. Warsaw: ha-Tzefira, 1903.
- Fram Cohen, Michal. "Sarah Feiga Foner née Meinkin (1854-1937): The First Hebrew Woman Writer." PhD diss., Bar Ilan University, 2016. (Hebrew).
- Frankolm, Isaac Asher. *Ha-Yehudim be-Angliya: o, Ha-Yehudim ye-Nos'e-ha-Tselav bi-Melokh Rikhard Lev-ha-Ari*. Part I. Translated by Miriam Markel-Mosessohn. Warsaw: Goldman, 1869.
- Freedman, Chaim. *Eliyahu's Branches: The Descendants of the Vilna Gaon and His Family*. Teaneck: Avotaynu, 1997.
- Frishman, David. "Critique of Books: *The Way of Children, or, a Story from Jerusalem*," *Ben Ami* (March 1887): 31-32. (Hebrew).
- . *David Frishman's Collected Writings*. Warsaw: Merkaz, 1914. (Hebrew).
- . "Judgment of New Books: *Love of the Righteous or the Persecuted Families*." *Ha-Boker Or*, 6 (May-June 1881): 387-391. (Hebrew).
- . "Letters on the Subject of Literature," I. *Hayom*, 189 (6.8.1887): 2. (Hebrew).
- Glick, Yosef Zelig. *Avne Gazit*. Pittsburgh: Yosef Zelig Glick, 1912.

- Gordon, Yehuda Leib. *To Learn the Homeland's Language: Y. L. Gordon's Articles in Voskhod in the Years 1881-1882*. Translated from the Russian by Rina Lapidus. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2012. (Hebrew).
- Grand, Sarah. "The New Aspects of the Woman Question." *The North America Review*, 148, 448 (March 1894): 270-276.
- Greenbaum, Avraham "The Girl's *Heder* and the Girls in the Boys' *Heder* in Eastern Europe before World War I." *East/West Education*, 18, 1 (1997): 55-62.
- Hirsch, Marianne. *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University, 1989.
- Jelen, Sheila E. *Intimations of Difference: Dvora Baron in the Modern Hebrew Renaissance*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007.
- Lichtman, Miriam. "On the Question of Women's Education," *Ha-Tzefirah*, 23, 269 (12.18.1896): 1307. (Hebrew).
- Manassewitz, Mordechai. *Hat'at Horim, o, Sipur Miriam ha-Zkena*. Warsaw: Alexander Ginz, 1884.
- Mapu, Avraham. *Ayit Tzavua*. Vols. 1-2, Vilnius: Ram, 1857, 1861; Vol. 3, Vilnius: S.I. Fin, 1863; Vols. 4-5, Warsaw: Goldman, 1869.
- Meinkin, Sarah Feiga Meinkin. *Ahavat Yesharim, o, ha-Mishpakhot ha-Murdafot*. Vilnius: A. H. Katzelenboigen, 1881.
- Miller, Nancy K. *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Miron, Dan. *Between Vision and Truth: the Budding Hebrew and Yiddish Novel in the 19th Century*. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1979. (Hebrew).
- Parush, Iris. *National Ideology and Literary Cannon*. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1992. (Hebrew).
- . *Reading Jewish Women: Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth-Century Eastern European Jewish Society*. Translated by Saadya Strenberg. Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2004.
- Patterson, David. *The Hebrew Novel in Czarist Russia: A Portrait of Jewish Life in the Nineteenth Century*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, [1964] 1999.

- Rozenberg, Yehuda, ed. *Otsar Mikhtavim ve-Sipurim*, St. Petersburg: A. Tsederboym Printing, 1882.
- Sarkes, Sh. "A Fruitful Hebrew Authoress." *Die Varheit*, 13, 8266 (May, 12, 1918): 4. (Yiddish).
- Segal, Toybe. "The Women's Question," *Ha-Ivri*, 16, 9 (11.21.1879): 69; 10 (11.28.1879): 77-78; 11 (12.5.1879): 85; 12 (12.12.1879): 69; 13 (12.19.1879): 101-102. (Hebrew).
- Sha'anani, Avraham. *Studies in the Literature of the Jewish Enlightenment: Examination of the Influence of French Literature*. Merhaviva: Sifriyat Poalim, 1952. (Hebrew).
- Sheikewitz, Nahum Meir. *Ha-Nidachat*. Vilnius: Ram, 1886-1887.
- Showalter, Elaine. "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness." *Critical Inquiry*, 8, 2 (Winter, 1981): 179-205.
- , "Towards a feminist poetics." In *Women Writing and Writing about Women*, edited by Mary Jacobus, 22-41. London: Routledge, 1979.
- Smolenskin, Peretz. *Simchat Hanef, o, Ahava ha-Teluya ba-Davar*. Vilnius: Ram, 1873.
- Stampfer, Shaul. "Gender Differentiation and Education of the Jewish Woman in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Europe." *Polin*, 7 (1992): 63-87.
- Sue, Eugène. *Mistery Paris*. Translated by Kalman Schulman. Vilnius: Ram, 1857-1860.
- Weiss, Yehoshua Shmuel. *A Man's Wanderings: Passing Shadows*. Tel-Aviv: Mitzpeh Publishing, 1931. (Hebrew).
- Werses, Shmuel. "The *Maskil* as a Young Man." In his *Awake, My People: Hebrew Literature in the Age of Modernization*. Jerusalem: Magnes, 2001, 67-114. (Hebrew).
- Wierzbolowska, Miriam. Letter. *Ha-Magid*, 7, 20 (5.20.1863): 155-156. (Hebrew).
- Zierler, Wendy. *And Rachel Stole the Idols: The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Women's Writings*. Detroit: Wayne State University, 2004.