

Women as Anti-Zionist Figures in Yigal Mossinsohn's Palmah Fiction¹

Esther Fuchs

University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

Abstract

The generation of authors who grew up in the 1920s and began to publish in the mid and late 1940s gives expression to the socialist Zionist ideology that predominated in pre-state Israel. Social Zionism and the ethos of national Jewish revival were intertwined with notions of male and female sexuality. The most explicit association between female sexuality and her innate difference from the national struggle for survival and independence is expressed in the works of Yigal Mossinsohn. This article analyzes the ways in which Mossinsohn constructs women as an aggregate Other.

Reading major Palmah texts for their representations of women is important for several reasons. For one thing, the Palmah era is regarded often nostalgically as the cultural and intellectual expression of true socialist Zionism, unadulterated by bourgeois anti-egalitarian prejudices that allegedly infiltrated the Israeli value system in the 1950s in the wake of the mass migrations from Eastern Europe and Arab countries. The Palmah Generation was touted as the first Sabra or native literary generation unencumbered by stereotypes of sexism, ethno-centrism and racism. Devotion to nationalist and socialist ideals could not accommodate racism or sexism, and the authors of the Palmah generation were devoted to these ideals even as they probed the extent to which the actual realities of the emerging state measured up to these ideals. That the very authors who indicted their generation for abandoning the original labor Zionist ideals should betray in their own work misogynous prejudices is the possibility that interests me here.

The generation of authors who grew up in the 1920s and began to publish in the mid and late 1940s give expression to the socialist Zionist ideology that predominated in the Yishuv (the pre-state Jewish settlement). Socialist Zionism was dedicated to the ethos of national Jewish revival as well as social equality and justice. The Halutz (pioneer) who turned his back on the Diaspora, a life of political constriction and economic dependence, the strong, muscular and confident Jew who chose to build a new Jewish society in Palestine was the anti-thesis of the intellectual, vulnerable and effeminate Diaspora Jew. Though socialist Zionism was devoted to the concept of gender equality, the fundamental ethos was fed by a male centered and male dominated culture, which in spite of its objection to traditional patriarchalism continued to be focused on Man as the Subject of culture and civilization. Not only did socialist Zionism reject the romantic European ethos, but the attachment to family and marriage was also frowned upon. Woman represented family and marriage. Man was the apotheosis of the new dream. As Gershon Shaked pointed out, this generation of authors sought to create a hero who was unencumbered by family or tradition.² This hero is free, born as it were out of the sea, with no roots in history, no obligations to a wife, and no emotional attachments to a lover. Above all this hero is male. Male characters dominate all of S. Yizhar's stories and novels. Women appear as secondary characters

both in his magnum opus *The Days of Ziklag* (1958) as well as in his earlier collections of short stories, including the stories that made him famous, such as *The Prisoner* and *Hirbat Hiz'ah* published in the late 1940s. To the extent that women appear in this literature they symbolize the home, tradition, history, Judaism and obligations that the new authors sought to transcend. In Moshe Shamir, another leading author of the Palmah Generation, woman is the symbol of the private sphere. She is in opposition with the public sphere of men, the world that requires self-sacrifice and true loyalty. In Shamir's celebrated novel *He Went Through the Fields* (1948) the hero, Uri, struggles with Mika, his girlfriend who criticizes him for abandoning her on behalf of the national cause. In Shamir's historical novel, *King of Flesh and Blood* (1954), King Alexander Yannai begins to deteriorate as soon as Salome, his wife, encroaches into the public domain. Moshe Shamir develops the image of the seductive woman who jeopardizes the hero's commitment to the group. Yet, he stops short of suggesting that the root of all-evil is female sexuality.³ The most explicit association between female sexuality and her innate difference from the national struggle for survival and independence is suggested by Yigal Mossinsohn. In what follows I analyze the ways in which Mossinsohn constructs women as an aggregate Other. Woman emerges from his work as an outsider to the national and social struggle. She is concerned with petty, physical, emotional issues, rather than with ideological, intellectual, political matters. She is instinct, the opposite of the idealistic hero. When the latter succumbs to her charms, he betrays the Zionist dream.⁴

Yigal Mossinsohn was born in 1917 in Eyn Ganim. In 1938 he joined kibbutz Na'an and the Palmah. During the War of Independence in 1948 he served as a cultural officer and in the early 1950s he served as a spokesman of the Israeli Police authorities. He went on to found the "Sadat" theater where he produced some of his own plays. When he encountered financial difficulties he left for New York where he worked in construction and education. In 1966 he returned to Israel. Mossinsohn's first collection of stories *Gray as Sack (Aforim kasak)* was published in 1946. The novel *Who Dare Say His Skin is Black (Mi amar shehu shahor)* was published in 1948, followed by a collection of stories entitled *The Road to Jericho (Haderekh leyeriho)* (1950). The novel *A Man's Way with a Maiden (Derekh gever be-alma)* was published in 1953.⁵

Much of Mossinsohn's early work revolves around the struggle of the Yishuv, or Jewish settlements in Pre-state Israel, for liberation. The struggle against the British Mandate, the Kibbutz experience, the military struggle against the Arabs and conflicts between the individual and society are among the focal subjects of his Palmah work. Women are peripheral characters in the national drama, but they are not altogether absent. As supporting characters, they also fulfill some necessary duties in the public realm. In one of his early stories in *Gray as Sack*, "The Appointed Hour," (*Hasha'a hayeuda*)⁶ Mossinsohn describes a Haganah commander, Moti Dror, who coordinates efforts to smuggle in Jewish immigrants and directs sabotage activities against the British authorities. Moti Dror has the courage to clear away the corpse of a Haganah member under the vindictive and merciless searchlights of the British. But before he undertakes this mission, he asks for Ronya, his girlfriend to join him. Ronya saves Moti's life by moving to the back of the car and pretending to make love to the dead man just as the British intercept the

car. The half drunk Shimoni narrates this valiant act: "A beautiful woman was in the car. A beautiful woman. She was embracing with a man. The policemen wanted to flash on their lights but they were embracing. The policemen apologized. The policemen are a polite people." (p. 75) Amikam, who listens to this tale, finds it confusing and incoherent. Amikam, a Haganah man, dismisses the story and it is up to the reader to sort out what really happened on the fateful night that almost cost Moti Dror his life. Amikam is the man who carried Ronya, a refugee, from the boat to the safe shore of Palestine. Ronya then is subservient to Moti in her role as his assistant as well as girlfriend. She is portrayed as waiting for him, obeying his orders and doing everything so as not to ruffle his feathers. In relation to Amikam, Ronya is a victim, whereas he is her savior, the one who carried her from a threatening (physical and metaphorical) dark sea to the safe haven of the homeland. But for Amikam, Ronya is also a desirable woman. As he approaches his kibbutz he notices her figure in the window. First he mistakes her for his wife, Shoshana. But later he realizes "This is a strange woman, and the gown is also unknown to him." (p. 83) What follows is a lengthy erotic description of Ronya's attractive body as seen through her half open gown. When the two meet Amikam realizes how smitten he is by Ronya. He does not feel the same attraction for Shoshana who finally arrives at the kibbutz having participated in a dangerous mission: "And Amikam turned his head and his eyes crossed Shoshana's eyes who came through the door. The machine gun slung over her shoulder was dangling on her side." (p.90) Shoshana, whose blue men's pants are soiled and wrinkled, is not half as attractive as Ronya in her enticing gown. She reports to Moti, the commander, that one of the men, Yehonatan, died in action. When Moti offers a toast to the dead, Amikam asks him if he could invite Ronya. Moti Dror is too pre-occupied to notice that Ronya is absent. He is too involved in the national struggle to pay heed to his personal life. As the first rank leader, he cannot indulge in the romantic world of women and love as does Amikam, a mere soldier. Shoshana realizes that she has lost Amikam, even as Ronya realizes that she has lost Moti Dror.

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

Other stories by Mossinsohn portray women as passive by-standers incapable of understanding the political urgencies of the time. In "One Small Boat" (Sira ahah ktana) Hana Meirson refuses to accept her husband David's decision to undertake a dangerous mission. She becomes silent and unresponsive as he tries to defend his duty to join the national struggle: "Is it up to me to go or not to go? Don't you know that I would rather stay at home and not set sail? Is it up to me to

stay or not? Do I actually want to get killed?" (p. 93) Hana refuses to say goodbye. Not only does the husband face a dangerous mission that might cost him his life, he must face the challenge without his wife's support. Hana's point of view is presented through a third person indirect monologue: "No, she will remain silent. Let him go. Let him go away. What is the point of the loneliness he inflicts on her? He does. He puts himself at risk, he wanders on the roads, he stays wherever he stays, he is always busy, and never has time, and he is always preoccupied. Why should she for years and years be alone?" (p. 95) Hana's egocentric preoccupations explain her vindictive silence. Even as the reader understands her point of view, however, she is hard pressed to sympathize with it. Surely in the extraordinary circumstances of a raging national war, Hana could have been a bit more sympathetic to the constraints on her husband's time. The juxtaposition between David's supreme self sacrifice and Hana's self-indulgence is extreme. As the story continues the reader begins to wonder whether David's mysterious disappearance may be linked to Hana's hostile refusal to bid him goodbye shortly before his last departure. Hana fails to fulfill her mission at the home front. She does not come through as the supportive counterweight that loyal wives are expected to be in time of war and national struggle.

But there is more. As the months go on, and no news arrives from David, his colleague who stayed behind, Dov Kurtz is beginning to show interest in Hana. His internal monologue exposes him as a weakling who lacks moral integrity as well as solidarity with a comrade missing in action: "Well, now, had you come to me, to my tent. For many months we have been sitting here night after night. You surely know what loneliness is like?" (p. 97) Dov Kurtz is engrossed by his own needs. His thoughts do not turn to David Meirson and his bitter fate. He wonders if Hana Meirson pushes up her body against others as well as she listens to the news. As time goes on, Hana becomes drawn to Dov Kurtz. She realizes abruptly to what extent the man who shared her lonely nights listening to news reports, to what extent this man suffered. The ironic omission of any reference to David, her husband, to his whereabouts and to their relationship as well as to the more general political state of affairs hovers over each reported detail of interaction. The story ends with Dov Kurtz's self-justification: "Forgive me, Hana, you must forgive. I understand: those who lost something precious in their lives had something to lose; but I, did not even have the chance to lose anything. There are people who are an isolated island and even one small boat, a simple one, would not reach them. I understand. Forgive me." (p. 99) Dov Kurtz, who does not risk his life for the collective, is eloquent. David Meirson eventually loses not only his life, but his dignity as well, for his wife eventually follows another man. Not only is Hana incapable of appreciating the national emergency and the moral requirements it places on individuals, she succumbs to private desires, both emotional and physical.

If "The Appointed Hour" admits that women were part of the political and military struggle, "One Small Boat" denies it altogether. Both stories end with an allusion to an illicit or questionable sexual liaison between a man and a woman. In "The Appointed Hour" the affair is between a married man, Amikam, and Ronya, Moti's girlfriend. In "One Small Boat" the liaison is between Dov Kurtz and Hana Meirson. Yet in both cases the sexual interaction is suggested rather than described in direct terms.

In Mossinsohn's second collection of stories [also in *Gray as Sack*] a stronger correlation emerges between female sexuality, their disloyalty and men's tragic fate. The title story of "The Road to Jericho" describes an encounter between Bick, a Palmah fighter, and a Jewish prostitute in Greece. The Jewish prostitute confesses that she has not heard from her husband for two years since he left on a refugee ship to Palestine. Why the woman degenerates into prostitution is not clear. Not much is offered by way of background information that might help us decipher the apparently inevitable connection between this abandoned woman and her profession. The protagonist, who seeks solace in illicit sex, seems to be unable to escape his national fate. Wherever he goes, the tragic fate of his people haunts and pursues him. Mossinsohn seems especially interested in detailing the sexual encounter between the partners. When a bombardment begins Bick ever the loyal fighter does not hesitate to bind out of the whorehouse into the street in search of his platoon, refusing to follow the woman who tries to take him to a safe refuge. If Bick's mission was to help ship refugees from Europe via Greece and Cyprus to Palestine, why did he not offer to help the nameless prostitute? In "Autumn Night" the nameless protagonist, a former prisoner of war, returns from Crete only to find his wife seducing a new client. After beating up his wife, the dejected husband roams the streets - the specific geographic location is unclear - as he asks at random: "Women, are they whores or not?" (p. 179)

Less forgivable are the wives who seek out other men while their husbands are still alive, usually, fighting for the national cause. In the short story "Polka" Ruth regrets her love affair with Orbin, the theater director. To signal her return to her husband, Ruth dances a Polka with him. In "Sergeant Green," Miriam leaves her husband Shimon who is busy fighting the Arabs and offers herself up to Sergeant Green. But Green nobly refuses to take advantage of this convenient opportunity and sends Miriam back to her husband, after which he is tragically killed by a British ambush.

The theme of male loyalty versus female fickleness is further developed in the story, "Matityahu Schatz." The first part of the story, entitled "Suicide," is dominated by two analogous thematic lines: the suicide of Matityahu Schatz, the eponymous hero, a Palmah commander, and the emerging triangular involvement of his widow, Friedel, Aryeh Fuchs, the self proclaimed philosopher, and the focalizer, Hillel Dongy, who dotes on Friedel. Hillel who watches with growing anxiety Friedel's responses to Fuchs' perorations is only marginally concerned with the causes and circumstances leading to Matityahu's suicide, which antedates the story by a whole year. The subject of Matityahu's suicide becomes a topic of conversation at dinnertime, as well as the fate of Friedel who may or may not be the mother of their child. One of the kibbutz members, Zvi Arzi suggests as he chews his meal that there was some connection between Matityahu and Dolek. He tells the listeners in the dining hall that shortly before the suicide he noticed Dolek running toward a burning field. He also noticed that Matityahu raised his shotgun aiming it at Dolek. We learn also that Matityahu separated from Friedel and lived by himself before he shot himself and later hung himself in the stable. Hillel learns that Dolek was not shot by Matityahu but rather by the enemy. There was therefore no reason for Matityahu to kill himself. Shortly before his death, Dolek calls out to Matityahu to save his life. Much as Hillel Dongy is intrigued by Matityahu's suicide, his mind wanders to Friedel and what he perceives as

the indefatigable efforts of Aryeh Fuchs to impress her: "The voice is Aryeh Fuchs' voice... and this laughter that is rising and gushing and flowing out of the lit up windows is Friedel's laughter." (p. 268) Overcome by sorrow, Hillel grieves for the potential loss of Friedel, not for his commander's mysterious suicide. Aryeh Fuchs' intellectual critique of collective responsibility and the primacy of the individual is framed within the increasingly intimate relationship between him and Friedel and exposed as a seductive ploy if not sheer drivel. The implied irony of the story is directed then both at Aryeh's intellectual rationalization and at Hillel's emotional involvement. For both have erased their moral obligation to the memory of the dead commander, Matityahu Schatz. Within this setting, how does Friedel emerge? What is her point of view and does she have one?

Having introduced Friedel first through her responses to Aryeh Fuchs and Hillel Dongy, the author goes on to introduce Friedel toward the end of part one through her body. This time, it is not a female body glimpsed by a male gaze, but a woman's sensual responses to her own body, as it were. "Friedel takes off her clothes. Her naked toes burrow into the woolen cover. Her naked body and the whitish down cover she is treading arouse in her a pleasant sensation of softness and delight." (p.279) Friedel lies in her bed and wonders if Aryeh Fuchs will ask her permission to come in. Eventually she crosses over to his room. This is the context in which the rest of Matityahu's story is revealed to us. Friedel recalls the repugnance she felt when her husband would return from guard duty and crave her body. Obsessed with jealousy, he would investigate her about her whereabouts. Matityahu suspects that Dolek who shares their apartment is having an affair with his wife. Friedel becomes increasingly estranged from her husband until she finally suggests that they separate. At this point the intradiegetic tale, refracted through Friedel's point of view, returns to the present. Friedel gets up and walks out to meet Hillel Dongy who is walking outside the dining hall. Shortly thereafter Friedel repeats - in response to Hillel's request - what he apparently already knows: how Dolek's corpse was brought in and how Matityahu blamed himself for his death. This time, however, Hillel responds with a confession: "I have loved you for years, Friedel. From afar I would watch you. I saw you walk; work, live - and I loved you. But, you see, Friedel, but, you see: Matityahu." (p.288) After they make love, Friedel tells Hillel that she wishes to live out her life with him as if her husband never existed: "You know, Hillel, it is better not to talk. We will live out our lives as if Matityahu Schatz never existed. Yes, Hillel." (p. 290)

Part two, "A Cross on One's Shoulder," uses the hero, Matityahu Schatz as the focalizer. We now have access to the psyche that the characters in part one only speculate about. Part two begins with a description of a training session, which takes place on the very day Friedel tells him she wants a separation. Dolek, whom Schatz blames for his wife's estrangement, is the only trainee privy to the commander's feelings. Schatz's self-possession and proficiency as a Palmah commander is juxtaposed with his weakness for the woman in his life. His military prowess as he orders Dolek to represent the victim of an attack emerges as a brittle veneer, for his thoughts focus on Friedel whom he glimpses beneath the trees: "No one has to know that that woman was Friedel. She waited a while and then moved herself away from the shadow and went away." (p. 295) The training session breaks up as word arrives about the kibbutz field that was set ablaze.

Schatz takes charge of the situation as others panic. The woman who moments earlier controlled the commander's psyche, emerges yet again, this time, however, she is lost, scared and vulnerable. She follows her husband's speeding car, waving her hand by the laundry line. As her husband leaves on his retaliatory mission against the Arabs, Friedel regrets what she has done that morning: "She was astonished at herself that now after so many years of marriage she said what she said in the dark - and Matityahu turned his back to her and did not want to look at her. Friedel stood on the concrete roof and shaded her eyes as she watched the small car slowly making its way through fields and orchards. It seemed to her that she acted inappropriately and that there was no need to pursue the path of destroying a family, she must rather find other ways to build her life and Matityahu Schatz's life." (p. 307) As she is left behind in the kibbutz, Friedel runs into Hillel Dongy. She marvels at the latter's calm and pleasant demeanor. What Friedel lacks, obviously, is a sense of appreciation for the heavy load her husband is carrying, the responsibility for the safety of the entire community, including that of his own family. Gitka and Tamar represent what Friedel lacks. Gitka is the masculine woman soldier, who directs a group of women teaching them about the ins and outs of re-armament. Tamar is the model feminine woman, the loyal pregnant wife, who understands the political meaning of pregnancy: "I for example wanted to be pregnant and especially, especially now. Pregnancy belongs to us - just as death and birth belong to us." (p. 314) Gitka and Tamar are the foils that adumbrate the possibilities Friedel does not fulfill. It is from Gitka that the reader learns that Dolek and Friedel did have a previous relationship, one that preceded her marriage to Matityahu. At this point the reader wonders if Matityahu's suspicion and jealousy have indeed been entirely unfounded. As the narrative focus returns to the battle, Schatz orders Dolek to check if the company can advance safely. Ignoring Matityahu's orders and warnings, Dolek runs up hill exposing himself to enemy fire. As Matityahu tries desperately to launch a counter attack he once again is overcome by jealousy: "His back wet, sweaty, a sliver of a rock hits and strikes his leg. For some reason the image of Friedel embraced in Dolek's arms is clouding up in his mind". (p. 324) At this point it would have been convenient for Matityahu to shoot his nemesis, but Dolek, it turns out, is hit by enemy fire. The commander runs up to Dolek after the successful counter attack, the first to pick the fatally wounded man. During Dolek's funeral Matityahu is disconsolate. He recalls the scene of Dolek's death: "I was crazed when I saw him dying in my arms without uttering a sound. I kissed him on his brow, on his chest. Perhaps this is why my lips were stained with blood. I lowered my head to his chest to hear his heartbeats. He was dead. Dead." (p. 329) But Matityahu is also beset by a crushing sense of guilt. For a split second he did direct his gun at Dolek who was running up the hill. Matityahu is determined to return to Friedel: "I will return to my room and talk to her. We will start anew. A new period. What is the use of all this nonsense over against death?" (p. 330) But Matityahu is overcome by a crushing wave of guilt over an affair with another woman. A rope that falls into his hands at Dolek's burial site alludes to the connection between the latter's death and Matityahu's decision to commit suicide. Yet part two ends with the hero walking back up to his room. It must have been the space between his optimistic resolution and his death, a space dominated by Friedel that pushed him toward the fatal decision. Yet precisely what transpired between Friedel and Matityahu is not revealed to us. What undermines the military and national hero is unresolved guilt over a retaliatory action against an Arab infiltrator, unresolved guilt about the death of Dolek, unresolved guilt about a

brief extra-marital affair, and, above all, unrequited love for his wife Friedel. Sensitivity in the military and national hero is a luxury he cannot afford. Vulnerability to women under political and military pressure is fatal. Attractive women like Friedel are fickle and unresponsive to the needs of noble heroes like Matityahu Schatz. As part one shows us, Friedel does not take very long to mourn her husband's death. She moves on to the arms of Hillel Dongy.

Friedel is insensitive to Matityahu's needs as she is obtuse to the political urgency. She is locked in a feminine consciousness of sexual desire and emotional need. She is neither a good wife nor a good mother. Matityahu Schatz ends his life because he is too much of a devoted husband and too much of a loyal commander. As his longing for her torments him, she thinks of Hillel, Aryeh and Dolek, and when he needs her support she announces her intention to be separated from him. Schatz's suicide indicates that without a woman's support, the enemy may very well win the war. The danger lurks within, he seems to imply. And the key lies not in one's martial prowess but in one's moral integrity.

Much more critical in its assessment of women's moral fiber is the novel, *A Man's Way with a Maiden* (*Derekh gever be'alma*, 1953), whose title is based on Proverbs 30:18-19.⁷ (I will treat this novel in broad outlines because I do not wish to belabor the point of this essay.) The ancient mystery of a man's way with a young woman unfolds in Kibbutz Telamim in the eventful year of 1946 as the resistance of the Yishuv against the British Mandate intensifies. Once again the main characters are male. This time, their main preoccupation is not the fight against the Arabs but rather productive manual labor, a requirement of the emerging economic infrastructure and a clear priority of the implied socialist Zionist value system of the novel. Yosef Alon and Rephael Huber are laboring at the kibbutz quarry - the quintessential male dominated highly prestigious job of the late 1930s and 1940s. Their wives, Raya and Shoshana, are assigned indistinct service jobs affording them ample time to pursue their carnal passion for the handsome Reuven Bloch. Yosef Alon, Rephael Huber and Reuven Bloch find themselves at one point in British custody, sharing a common goal and a common fate as men struggling against the British enemy. The nationalistic loyalty the men share may explain their reluctance to confront Reuven Bloch. Sensing that they shirked their responsibility to their wives by spending most of their time at the quarry, Alon and Huber fail to confront their adulterous wives. The result is tragic. In contradistinction to the domestic turmoil in Alon's and Huber's household, Nahum and Ruth Genkin's marriage is thriving. But then Nahum Genkin is a writer who has the luxury to spend time with his wife. One of the most romantic scenes in the novel portrays the husband watching his beautiful wife sleep. Rest and sleep are luxuries that Huber and Alon do not have, because they have determined to answer a higher calling. The minor character of Ruth Genkin is a foil that highlights by contrast the many disgruntled wives in the novel, one of whom is Ada Galin, the wife of Avraham Galin, the kibbutz secretary. Despite her husband's relatively convenient job, Ada Galin complains about the many hours he spends away from her, catering to the good of the public. Again, women are shown to be lacking the least bit of understanding for the serious requirements of the national and social priorities for which their male counterparts willingly sacrifice their lives. Ephraim dies fighting the British police, resisting a search for arms on the kibbutz. Ehud Rimmon, an underground fighter, is captured by the British and thrown into the

dreaded jail of Latrun. Not only are the male characters valiant fighters and hardworking laborers, they are loyal husbands. Athalia, Plato's paraplegic daughter, shamelessly seduces Rephael Huber, who finds refuge at the home of "Plato," his philosophy teacher, during a British curfew.

The ironic tragedy is that the community they sacrifice both their happiness and lives for punishes heroes like Yosef Alon and Rephael Huber. Yosef Alon, who finds out about his wife's adultery, opts for suicide, whereas Rephael Huber shoots Reuven Bloch, apparently by accident, in the wake of which he is expelled from the kibbutz. Idealism in Mossinsohn's world goes unrewarded, and sometimes even punished.

The point of this article is that more often than not women represent the enemy within, the apparently vulnerable but in reality potentially lethal factor, that has the potential to undermine not just single male individuals, but the socialist Zionist dream in its entirety. The petty concerns and innate sensuality of women portray the undesirable underside of the Zionism dream. Mossinsohn does not differ in essence from Moshe Shamir or S. Yizhar, who also presented women in the margins of the national and social revival they portray. He differs from them in the degree of explicitness. He is the most outspoken among Palmah writers in his condemnation of the female Other. To some extent, the Palmah authors, much as they sought to break away from their predecessors continued to construct a male centered world. In this case they do not differ from Yosef Haim Brener, Micha Yosef Berdychevski, Chaim Nahman Bialik and even earlier authors like Mendele Mokher Sfarim. Critics like Hamutal Bar Yosef suggest that the denigration of woman and love in these early authors stems from the genre and style of European Decadence.⁸

But whether this tendency is rooted in European culture, or Jewish Halakha and its tendency to exclude women from the production of meaning and knowledge, the fact remains that even in the Palmah Generation women continue to emerge as outsiders, as shadows in the margins of meaningful life and action. While women in the previous authors appear as the symbols of secularism, empty ritualism, diaspora, the gentile world, in the Palmah Generation they appear as Other to the national and socialist ideal. Igal Mossinsohn's work then is representative of Palmah literature in general. He was part of his culture, the ideology of his time, and he helped perpetuate its myths and desiderata. Mossinsohn's portrayals of women will have a particularly profound effect on Amos Oz, and Pinhas Sadeh, who will emphasize sexuality as a source of sin, destruction and danger both on the personal and cosmic levels.⁹

Endnotes:

¹ This article is based on a paper entitled Sex Objects and Nymphomaniacs in Yigal Mossinsohn's Fiction, [June 1-3, 1997], National Association of Professors of Hebrew, Los Angeles.

² Gershon Shaked, *Hebrew Narrative Fiction 1880-1980*, vol. 3 (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Keter, 1988), 181-261. [Hebrew]

³ See Esther Fuchs, "Private Woman Public Man: Women in Moshe Shamir's Novels," *Shofar* 16 (Fall 1997): 74-84.

⁴ See Esther Fuchs, "The Enemy as Woman: Fictional Women in the Literature of the Palmach," *Israel Studies* 4 (Spring 1999): 212-232. On the ambivalent attitude of the Zionist settlers toward sexual expression despite the seeming rebellion against Jewish traditional morals, see David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 176-203.

⁵ *Life on the Razor's Edge: An Anthology of Israeli Fiction* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1982). [Hebrew]; Reuven Kritz, *Hebrew Narrative Fiction of the Struggle for Independence* (Tel Aviv: Pura, 1978). [Hebrew]

⁶ Yigal Mossinsohn, *Gray as Sack* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1989). [Hebrew] This and all the following translations from the original Hebrew are mine.

⁷ There are three things which are too wonderful for me/Yea, four which I know not/The way of an eagle in the air;/The way of a serpent upon a rock/The way of a ship in the midst of the sea; /And the way of a man with a young woman [*The Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1955)].

⁸ Hamutal Bar-Yosef, *Decadent Trends in Hebrew Literature: Bialik, Berdychovski, Brener* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik and Ben Gurion University, 1997). [Hebrew]

⁹ See Esther Fuchs, *Israeli Mythogynies: Women in Contemporary Hebrew Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).