

“They Are Different People”

Holocaust Survivors as Reflected in the Fiction of the Generation of 1948*

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Introduction

Students of Hebrew literature are well aware of the fact that, in addition to its aesthetic qualities, the corpus of Hebrew writing acts as something of a collective Jewish memoir. This is especially true of fictional prose, because, of all the forms of *belles lettres*, fiction is the most attentive and receptive form with respect to historical reality. On the one hand, the literature is nourished by the life of the collectivity that it describes, reflects, and critiques. On the other hand, it shapes our basic cultural images, maps our world by constructing critical models of reality, exposes the hidden forces that guide our private and group lives, and actuates the tensions and vicissitudes to which we are prone by means of plots, characters, and depictions of individual destinies. In this I am referring primarily to the Hebrew literature of recent generations, or, in the words of Shimon Halkin, one of the fathers of the academic teaching of Hebrew literature in Israel: “The new Hebrew literature is a unique phenomenon in the history of the Jewish people in recent generations, because in every cell of its body it reflects the countless developments of modern Jewish history, not only its forward thrust but its byways as well.”¹

Naturally, this is not a mechanical or nonselective reflection of reality. In each specific period Hebrew literature can be seen to spotlight arenas and objects that represented the most intense manifestations of the Jewish experience. At the end of the nineteenth century, for example, this was the Jewish town in Eastern Europe, the *shtetl*, oscillating between tradition and modernity, with both the prospects and the dangers this presented. In the

* Based on a lecture delivered at the Tenth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, “The Jewish People at the End of the Second World War,” Jerusalem, 1995.

¹ Shimon Halkin, “History and Historicism in Modern Hebrew Literature,” in *Ways and Byways in Literature*, vol. 1 (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1970), p. 165.

early twentieth century, the agonized young people who sought their future in the cities of the West fired the imagination of the greatest writers. At the same time, the literature after the First and Second *Aliyot* (the first two “waves of immigration,” in 1882-1903, and 1904-1914) was inextricably interwoven with the incipient Zionist activity in the Land of Israel. Since then it has continued to chronicle this development while displaying a wide range of attitudes and approaches - from moving paeans to blistering criticism and harsh despair, and everything in between.

In the course of these developments, Hebrew literature in Israel - mainly fiction, though also poetry and drama - has been vastly enriched in terms of its themes, characters, occupations, geographical settings, and the social sectors with which it deals. Thus, we have a rich literature surrounding the kibbutz and the *moshavah*, along with “Tel Aviv literature” and “Jerusalem literature”; literature depicting army life, Israel’s wars, and the Arab-Israeli conflict; a literature of voyages and of immigration to Israel as well as of leaving the country; literature about the lives of writers and artists, about the academic world and the world of medicine, about distressed neighborhoods and about the ultra-Orthodox community; historical literature, apocalyptic literature, and so on. Indeed, there is hardly any aspect or stratum of the Jewish and Israeli collective experience that has not found an expression of some kind in Hebrew literature - be it as a central theme or as some background to the unfolding of the plot and the formation of interpersonal relations. And if there are subjects that Hebrew literature has avoided having to deal with, that very hedging is itself a phenomenon that speaks volumes.

Within this broad thematic spectrum, works that deal with the Holocaust occupy a substantial place.² The fact is that, as time passes, this subject, as a presence in Hebrew literature, far from fading or contracting, is actually intensifying - just as the presence of the Holocaust itself in Israeli and Jewish life grows ever-more meaningful.³

² For detailed documentation of the fictional works in Hebrew on this subject until the 1970s, see Mendel Piekarz, *The Jewish Holocaust and Heroism Through the Eyes of the Hebrew Press: A Bibliography*, I-IV (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1966); idem, *The Holocaust and its Aftermath: Hebrew Books Published in the Years 1933-1972*, I-II (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1974).

³ See Avner Holtzman, “Contemporary Trends in Israeli Fiction of the Holocaust,” in *Dapim: Research in Literature* (Hebrew), no. 10 (1996), pp. 131-158.

In this article I shall return to the first stage of the depiction of the Holocaust in Hebrew literature; that is, works written in Palestine and in the State of Israel during World War II and in the first decade thereafter; i.e., from the beginning of the 1940s until the mid-1950s. This period is set apart from the periods that followed in two main ways. First, the years of World War II were inherent to the biographies of the writers in question, in contrast to present writers. The latter belong to the second and third generations, as they were born after the war. Second, and more cardinally, none of the writers under consideration lived in Europe during the war years; for the most part, they resided in Palestine and observed events from afar. Thus, their encounter with the Holocaust was mainly through meetings with refugees and survivors who came to Israel during and after the war. These writers refrained from dealing directly with the events of the Holocaust. They felt either morally unequipped for the task and believed that only those who had actually endured the experience first-hand could articulate it verbally, or they sensed an aesthetic inadequacy.

The survivors themselves, however, did not produce any literary works in Hebrew until the second half of the 1950s, when writers who had arrived in Israel from Europe after the war as children or youths became capable of expressing themselves in Hebrew as equivalent to a mother tongue. With the appearance in print of Uri Orlev, Aharon Appelfeld, Benzion Tomer, Shamai Golan, Itamar Yazo-Keszt, and others, Hebrew literature began to be written from the vantage point of the survivors. In their works, they now gave form and substance both to the horrific experiences of the war and the Holocaust and to the difficulties of integration into Israeli society.⁴

Until the mid-1950s, nearly all the Hebrew writers who took the Holocaust as their theme were from the established Jewish community in the country and were thus part of the society that had absorbed the arriving survivors. They, too, can be divided into two distinct sub-groups: the “generation of the fathers”; and the “generation of the sons.” The former group consists of the writers who were born in Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth or early

⁴ See Gershon Shaked, “Lost Childhood (on the theme of the Holocaust in young Israeli fiction),” in *New Wave in Hebrew Literature* (Hebrew) (Merhavia and Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1974), pp. 71-86; Hanna Yazo, *The Holocaust in Hebrew Literature as Historical and Trans-Historical Fiction* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Eked, 1981).

twentieth century and arrived in Palestine from the period of the Second *Aliyah* until the 1930s. They were deeply attached to their places of origin and to the many family members they had left behind when they settled in Palestine. They included prominent writers, such as Devorah Baron, Y.D. Berkowitz, Haim Hazaz, Avigdor Hameiri, S.Y. Agnon, Gershon Schoffman, and others. They treated the Holocaust through a prism of direct psychological affinity but also from a perspective of critical geographical distance. The result is that their writing on the subject, both during and after the war years, reflects, on the one hand, close, vibrant, rich memories of the countries in which the Holocaust was perpetrated, but, at the same time, is often prone to a sense of embarrassed bewilderment and even guilt feelings over the fact that they were in a safe haven while their loved ones remained in the valley of slaughter.⁵

This article will focus on the literary reaction of the “generation of the sons” toward the Holocaust and, more especially, toward the survivors. The “generation of the sons” refers to a group of several dozen writers who, in the words of one of them, Moshe Shamir, were “products of Israel.”⁶ Critics, scholars, and the public discourse have subsumed this generation under a number of parallel collective categories that speak for themselves: the “Generation of 1948,” the “Generation of the Palmach,” the “Generation in the Land,” and the “Generation of the Struggle for Independence.” Its members were born in the period between the end of World War I and the late 1920s. Some of them were born in Palestine, while others arrived in the country as children and grew up during the period of the campaign for independence conducted by the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine). This struggle reached its peak in the War of Independence, against the background of

⁵ See Nurit Govrin, “‘On Their Flesh from Afar’: Reactions to the Holocaust in Hebrew Literature by Those Who Were Not ‘There,’” *Zafon* (Hebrew), 4 (1996), pp. 209-230; Dan Laor, “Did Agnon Write About the Holocaust?” in *S.Y. Agnon: New Perspectives* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1995), pp. 60-97.

⁶ See Moshe Shamir, “Isaac’s Fear,” in Shlomo Tanai and Moshe Shamir, eds., *Yalqut Ha’reim: Young Hebrew Writers in the Mid-Forties* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1992), pp. 3-41.

global historical events, notably World War II, all of which left a powerful imprint on the entire generation.⁷

The first writers of this generation began to publish as individuals and as a group on the eve of World War II and during the years of the world conflict. Their early works reflect primarily the surroundings in which they grew up and the typical formative experiences of young people in Palestine in the 1930s and 1940s - the youth movements, the kibbutz, the *moshavah*, the Palmach and the British army, the War of Independence, and the first years of statehood. This group of writers achieved their breakthrough and established themselves in the immediate postwar years. They secured their place as a dominant, popular new generation while their literary fathers and grandfathers were still active.

In the first decade after the war, first short-story collections and novels were published by some of the new generation's preeminent writers, including Moshe Shamir, Yigal Mossinsohn, Aharon Megged, Hanoach Bartov, Yehudit Hendel, Shlomo Nitzan, and Shoshana Shrira. They produced a realistic literature, rooted in the historical and social context in which it was created, reflecting in diverse ways their fundamental identification with the Zionist project in the Land of Israel.⁸

Since this group of writers held to a crystallized generational identity, wrote within a framework of well-defined aesthetic conventions, and displayed a basic loyalty to the value system that underlay Israel's establishment, their work was conventionally and collectively perceived over the years, by both the critics and the public, as being irremediably tainted. This image tends to blur

⁷ On the general characteristics of this generation from a historical and sociological viewpoint, see Yonathan Shapiro, *An Elite with No Successors* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1984); Emanuel Sivan, *The 1948 Generation: Myth, Profile and Memory* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Ma'arakhot, 1991); Dan Horowitz, *The Heavens and the Earth: A Self-Portrait of the 1948 Generation* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Keter, 1993); Anita Shapira, "Generation in the Land," in *New Jews, Old Jews* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1997), pp. 122-154; Oz Almog, *The Sabra: A Profile* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1997).

⁸ For summations of the "Generation of 1948" from the literary point of view, see Reuven Kritiz, *Hebrew Narrative Fiction of the Struggle for Independence Era* (Hebrew) (Kiryat Motzkin: Poreh, 1978); Nurit Gertz, *Generation Shift in Literary History: Hebrew Narrative Fiction in the Sixties* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Porter Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1984); Gershon Shaked, *Hebrew Narrative Fiction 1880-1980*, vol. 4: *In the Chains of Time. Israeli Realism 1938-1980* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv-Jerusalem: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1993); Avner Holtzman, "The Fiction of the 'Generation in the Land'," in Zvi Zameret and Hanna Yablonka, eds., *The First Decade 1948-1958* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 1998), pp. 263-280.

the individual distinctiveness of each writer and underlines the features shared by the entire group. Generally, it also invokes a superficial and distorting portrayal of that generation, in which this body of fiction is supposedly no more than a crude and simplistic mouthpiece for the political establishment. This image is especially pronounced among writers whose field is not literature. As an illustration, I have chosen one especially compressed and concentrated example: Tom Segev's group portrait of the fiction produced by the "Generation in the Land," from his book *1949 – The First Israelis*:

There was great uniformity in their writings. Most of them produced documentary-style novels whose main subject was always the nation and the country rather than the individual. They wrote and thought in the first person plural, seeking to express the ethos of a reborn nation. Their main subject was the mythical *Sabra*, the native-born soldier boy. Handsome, upright, honest, bold and hounded by none of the complexes of the Diaspora, he was always ready to die in defense of his home and the life of his "girl." He was always ready to kill too, but whenever he had to shoot he would cry in self-pity, for of course he hated war more than anything else. Tough on the outside and tender on the inside, his hair was always blowing in the wind as he rode his jeep, part cowboy in a Western movie, part epic hero in a great Soviet novel; these novels were quite popular in Israel in those days.⁹

It is easy enough to prove that these crude and patronizing generalizations are almost entirely without foundation, and it is of course no accident that Segev fails to cite even one text to support his thesis. While one could argue about the aesthetic merits of some of these works, the fact is that the vast majority of the fiction produced by this generation contains neither ordinary soldiers in a row nor heroic portraits of mythological sabras. There is neither a complete break with the Jewish past nor total self-confidence; nor do we find "shooting and crying," forelocks flapping in the breeze, or Western-

⁹ Tom Segev, *1949: The First Israelis* (New York: Free Press, 1986), p. 290.

style plots. On the contrary, these novels and stories offer a complex portrait of reality that is far from stereotypical and shifts between the positive and the negative, strengths and weaknesses. The constantly growing number of in-depth studies of this literature clearly shows that there is no basis for stereotyping and that the writers are very different from one another. Each has a distinctive profile alongside the shared features of the group as a whole.¹⁰

The attitude of the “Generation of 1948” toward the survivors of the Holocaust is the most sensitive and painful element of the image that is said to characterize its members - in life and literature alike. The accepted view is that the Israelis were uniformly alienating and patronizing toward the survivors, a posture that derived from the “negation of the Diaspora,” a basic concept of their parents. Translated into practical terms, this concept meant that the Hebrew-Zionist education given the new generation in Palestine/Israel sought to create an unbridgeable chasm between the “new Hebrews” and the old Jewish world, with its contemptible “ghetto mentality.” It was precisely against this mentality that the parents of the “Generation of 1948” had rebelled. That education bore fruit, according to the detractors of the “Generation of 1948,” when the sabras, the native-born Israelis, took a position of pronounced superiority toward the broken and downtrodden Holocaust survivors who arrived in the country after 1945.

This convention was given cogent expression in a 1977 book by Amnon Rubinstein, a future minister of Education. In the chapter entitled “The Rise and Fall of the Mythological Sabra,” Rubinstein put forward a series of sweeping generalizations, based on a few unrepresentative examples, to create a portrait of the sabra. For example: “In the sabra mythology, the sabra has to grow up without parents, without a family, without a literary genealogy. The parents who bore him are the product of the Diaspora whose fruits have withered.” He also speaks of “a whole generation of writers who did not know, or did not want to know, about those children who had parental homes and did

¹⁰ A striking example of the change of values that is being fomented in the criticism is the book by Mishka Ben-David, *From Pleshet to Ziklag: Studies in the Novels of the War of Independence* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense Publishing House, Sifriat Tarnil, 1990). This study illustrates the complexity of the corpus of works that is under discussion and shows that a wide range of views on every subject is found in the fiction of the War of Independence. Ben-David’s conclusions totally undermine the conventional image invoked in criticism such as that of Tom Segev, cited above.

not emerge from the sea.”¹¹ He goes on to describe the “negative and arrogant attitude shown to the survivors of the Nazi genocide by the sabra society,” an attitude that in both life and in literature is said to be “one of the central experiences of the sabra reality.”¹²

The controversy over the attitude of the native-born Israelis toward the survivors was exacerbated in the 1980s and 1990s. On the one hand, the Yishuv society and the state’s first years were increasingly subjected to solid, probing historical research. This gave rise to a broad discussion about the Yishuv’s attitude toward the Holocaust at the time it was being perpetrated, the confrontation with its memory, and the encounter with the survivors in its aftermath.¹³ The overall picture that emerges from these studies is that of a highly complex encounter between two groups that at first were alienated from each other. Although the stereotypes later faded, giving rise to a network of mutual associations and tensions, both manifestations are not subsumable under one sweeping categorization. True, there was much disdain and no little superciliousness, but, at the same time, there were manifestations of openness and warmth by the veteran community toward these alien brothers who had come from Europe.

Yet numerous studies took as their point of departure a fierce criticism of Zionist ideology and practice in the 1940s and 1950s, and condemned the supposed manipulative, instrumental, insensitive, and overbearing approach

¹¹ An allusion to the famous opening sentence of Moshe Shamir’s 1951 novel, *With His Own Hands*: “Elik was born from the sea.” This sentence, which was wrenched from its context and incorrectly interpreted by many authors, became the foundation stone of the sabras’ supposed break with their past.

¹² Amnon Rubinstein, “The Rise and Fall of the Mythological Sabra,” in *To Be a Free People* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1977), pp. 103, 110, 135.

¹³ Below are only a few of the most prominent full-length studies and collections of articles that have appeared in the last decade alone: Hanna Yablonka, *Foreign Brethren: Holocaust Survivors in the State of Israel 1948-1952* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi and Ben-Gurion University Press, 1994); Yaakov Markovicki, *Fighting Ember: Recruitment of New Immigrants in the War of Independence* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: The Center for the History of the Haganah Defense Force and the Ministry of Defense, 1995); Dalia Ofer, ed., *Israel in the Great Wave of Immigration 1948-1953* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 1996); Yoel Rapel, ed., *Bonds of Silence: The Surviving Remnant and the Land of Israel* (Hebrew) (28th “Massuah” Yearbook) (Tel Aviv: Publishing House of the Ministry of Defense and Massuah – Holocaust Studies Institute, 2000); Ronny Stauber, *Lesson for this Generation: Holocaust and Heroism in Israeli Public Discourse in the 1950s* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, Ben-Gurion Heritage Center, Kiryat Sde Boker, and Ben-Gurion University Press, 2000).

taken by the Zionist movement and its emissaries toward the survivors.¹⁴

These studies were preceded by a number of literary works by survivors themselves, published since the 1980s, containing very harsh descriptions (whose subjective truth cannot, of course, be doubted) about the demeaning attitude they encountered at the hands of Israeli society in the late 1940s.

Aharon Appelfeld, in his novella, *Burn of the Light*, used nightmarish imagery taken from the world of the transports, concentration camps, and crematoria to describe the immigration to Israel of a group of boys who survived the Holocaust and their absorption in a Youth Aliyah institution.¹⁵ In his novel *White Rose, Red Rose*, David Schütz described the harsh treatment meted out to a group of child survivors by their adoptive families on a *moshav* in the Sharon region in 1948, and their total alienation from the Zionist ethos and its institutions, emissaries, ceremonies, and slogans.¹⁶ Such feelings were expressed most acerbically by Benjamin Harshav in a series of bitter, wrenching poems that he published under the *nom de plume* of “Gabi Daniel.” They add up to a powerful indictment of the Zionist establishment for the injustice done to Holocaust survivors by mobilizing them unfeelingly in order to help realize the movement’s national goals.¹⁷

That critical frame of mind underlay the perception that the writers of the “Generation of 1948” were in fact perfect representatives of their generation.

¹⁴ Among the most prominent books in this group are Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1991); Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Yosef Grodzinsky, *Good Human Material: Jews vs. Zionists 1945-1951* (Hebrew) (Or Yehuda: Hed Artzi, 1998). See also Anita Shapira’s criticism of this research school, in which she exposes its anti-Zionist motives: Anita Shapira, “The History of the Mythology: Approaches to a Historiography on Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust,” in *Alpayim* (Hebrew), no. 18 (1999), pp. 24-53. For a pained and trenchant reaction to Zertal’s book, see Haim Gouri, “On Books and On What’s Between Them,” *ibid.*, no. 14 (1997), pp. 9-30.

¹⁵ Aharon Appelfeld, *Burn of the Light* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1980; see also Gershon Shaked, “Transport to Palestine,” in *Wave after Wave in Hebrew Narrative Fiction* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Keter, 1985), pp. 27-32.

¹⁶ David Schütz, *White Rose, Red Rose* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv and Jerusalem: Hakibbutz Hameuchad / Siman Kria Books and Keter, 1988). See also Avner Holtzman, “Memory as Kaleidoscope: A Study of David Schütz’s *White Rose, Red Rose*,” in *Alei-Siach* (Hebrew), no. 26 (Spring 1989), pp. 69-76.

¹⁷ Benjamin Harshav, “The Surviving Remnant,” “Peter the Great,” “Appendix: The Private Foul-Up,” *The Poems of Gabi Daniel* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Siman Kria Books, 1990), pp. 94-100. On the furor that was stirred by the poem “Peter the Great,” see Anita Shapira, “Historiography and Memory: The Case of Latrun 1948,” in *New Jews, Old Jews*, pp. 46-85; Ziva Ben-Porat, “Gabi Daniel and the Theory of Literature,” in *idem.*, ed., *An Overcoat for Benjamin: The Jubilee Book for Benjamin Harshav*, vol. 1 (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Porter Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999), pp. 99-130.

They were part of the self-absorbed sabra society that had ostensibly shown indifference toward the Holocaust when it occurred and afterward had been hardhearted and patronizing toward the survivors who had reached Israel. This, for example, was the thesis adduced by the poet Natan Zach when he praised the awakening and awareness of the Holocaust in writers such as Amos Oz, Yoram Kaniuk, David Grossman, and Joshua Sobol, in contrast to the works of their predecessors of the Palmach generation.¹⁸ The writer Hanoch Bartov, who was deeply wounded and outraged by this assertion, cited numerous documents and testimonies to prove that he, like his contemporaries, had been fully aware of the Holocaust from the time of their youth. Bartov added that his encounter, as a soldier in the Jewish Brigade, with the survivors in Europe had been a formative experience in his life, his work, and the crystallization of his identity as a Jew, a Zionist, and an Israeli.¹⁹

Indeed, anyone who is familiar with the stereotypical images that crystallized in literary criticism and in the public consciousness about the “Generation of 1948” would expect the portrayal of Holocaust survivors in the fiction produced by the writers of that period to be marked by the supposed sabra superficiality, alienation, insensitivity, and patronage toward the broken and downtrodden remnants who ostensibly embodied all the weakness and wretchedness of the Jewish Diaspora. However, an examination of the works themselves from this perspective gives rise to a very different and thus very surprising picture. It is so much more complex and diverse than the stereotype would suggest as to shatter it completely. It is, in fact, difficult to find in this body of literature even one example that supports the prior expectation of a debasing and demeaning representation of the Holocaust survivors from the viewpoint of the new, native-born Jew. Moreover, the criticism contained in the novels and stories is directed against the insensitivity of the integrating society and not at the survivors, who are generally depicted empathetically and respectfully.

¹⁸ Natan Zach, “Who Is a Jewish Writer, What Is a Jewish Book,” *Ma’ariv* (Hebrew), November 29, 1991.

¹⁹ Hanoch Bartov, “The Wicked Slander about Our Indifference to the Holocaust,” in idem, *I Am Not the Mythological Sabra* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1995), pp. 26-36.

The Teller as Listener

The first attempts by the members of the “Generation of 1948” to portray victims and survivors of the Holocaust were undertaken at the very outset of their careers, while the war in Europe still raged. In the first half of the 1940s, a number of short stories were published in contemporaneous literary journals, which, taken as a whole, provide a diversified representation of Holocaust figures. There are heroic rebels and resistance fighters as well as survivors who managed to reach Palestine. The five examples that I have chosen to illustrate this period are basically confused attempts - some awkward and crude, others more subtle - by young writers (all of them in their twenties) who are trying to touch the fringes of an overwhelming, horrific subject from their modest and limited perspective.

One of the first endeavors is a short story by Zerubavel Gilead, “The Robbed Bird” (1940).²⁰ The narrator is a member of Kibbutz Ein Harod in the Jezreel Valley who has returned from a mission to Poland on the eve of the war. As he follows the reports of the dire events that are taking place there, he wonders what has become of a few young people whom he met while he was in the country. He has nightmares in which he is haunted by the image of a young girl for whom he developed a deep affection and for whose fate he now fears. A few months later, a friend of the girl who succeeds in reaching Palestine gives him regards from the girl and tells him about her heroic deeds as the movement’s liaison officer, a position in which she risks her life by going back and forth between the German- and Russian-occupied areas. The story is suffused with a sense of inner torment, reflected in its fragmentary structure. The emotional storm that energizes the narration is apparent in the frequent transitions between dream and reality and in the shifts from landscapes of the Land of Israel to scenes from Eastern Europe that are still vivid in his memory. Clearly, the story is based on a personal experience, and the author’s memoirs in fact show that he had in mind a young woman whom

²⁰ Zerubavel Gilead, “The Robbed Bird,” in *Mibifnim* (1940), collected in idem, *Conversation on the Beach* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1954), pp. 39-49. Zerubavel Gilead (1912-1988) was born in Bessarabia and arrived in Palestine in 1922. After returning from a mission to Poland, he wrote about his meetings with Polish Jewry and its leaders on the very eve of the Holocaust. In the 1940s he was a member of the National Headquarters of the Palmach and an information and cultural officer of the force; he also wrote the Palmach anthem. His reputation rests mainly on his many volumes of poetry.

he had met while serving as the emissary of the He-Halutz movement in Poland from 1937 to 1939. It may have been Frumka Plotnicka, or, more likely, perhaps, her sister Hancze, as Gilead knew both of them well. Both sisters were heroines of the fighting pioneer underground in Poland and fell in the struggle against the Germans.²¹

Shoshana Shrira's story, "The Girl from the Ghetto," appeared in 1943.²² Here the narrator serves as an attentive ear to a girl who arrived in Palestine from the Warsaw ghetto at the height of the war. It turns out that she was able to leave the ghetto because of a case of mistaken identity. She was taken to be a woman from the Yishuv who was trapped in Poland and whose husband had arranged for her return in exchange for a German prisoner. The Warsaw girl, whether out of genuine or feigned naïveté, deludes herself into believing that she is the woman in question, and conjures up in her imagination the husband who is supposedly eagerly awaiting her arrival and will receive her with open arms. Now, having arrived in the country and having encountered the justified wrath of the husband, who had expected his wife, she relates to the narrator her feelings as a rejected woman. The reality of the Holocaust serves here as a kind of veiled background to the absurd plot, while the thrust of the artistic effort is devoted to a psychological portrayal of a young woman who craves love. This story, too, almost certainly is based on actual events, as Shoshana Shrira herself was a journalist on the daily *Ha-Boker* from 1939, and interviewed the first Holocaust survivors who reached Palestine in the midst of the war.²³

Another short story in which the narrator listens to the tale of a different character is "Motel Partisan" by Yigal Kimhi.²⁴ A British officer who is serving

²¹ See Zerubavel Gilead, "Between Town and Forest: With Frumka Plotnicka," *A Conversation that Never Ended* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Mameuchad, 1974), pp. 11-15; Zerubavel Gilead and Dorothea Krook, "Mission to Poland – People," in *Gideon's Spring: A Man and His Kibbutz* (New York: Tickner and Fields, 1985), pp. 174-194.

²² Shoshana Shrira, "The Girl from the Ghetto," in *Gilyonot*, vol. 14, no. 10 (February 1943), pp. 176-180. Collected in idem., *The Green Nile* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: M. Neuman, 1947), pp. 121-128. On the story, see Kritz, *The Fiction*, pp. 237-238. Shoshana Shrira was born in the Ukraine in 1917, arrived in Palestine in 1925, and lives in Tel Aviv. Since 1937, she has published dozens of stories in the literary press, along with several novels.

²³ See Shoshana Shrira, "On the Knack for Idealization We Have Lost (An Autobiographical Note Until 1948)," in Kritz, *The Fiction*, pp. 237-238.

²⁴ Yigal Kimhi, "Motel Partisan," *Gazit* (Hebrew), vol. 6, no. 5-6 (January-February 1944), pp. 25-27. Collected in idem., *Tents: Stories from Somewhere* (Jerusalem 1944), pp. 59-70. Yigal Kimhi, the son of the writer Dov Kimhi, was born in Jerusalem in 1915. In World War II he

with the narrator in the air force, tells him a kind of legend that is making the rounds, about a young Jew whose city was captured and whose family was murdered in front of his eyes. As a result of these events, he lost his mind and has become a kind of local fool and the object of the Germans' derision and amusement. After the Germans kill his beloved dog, too, he joins the partisans in the forest and, moved by a vague desire for revenge, helps them collect information about the movements of the German forces. This is in order to prepare a powerful bomb with which to blow up a military train as it crosses a bridge. At the climax of the story, Motel himself, in a kind of flash of insight, blows up the train, killing hundreds of Germans, and pays for the act with his life. If there is a moral to the story, it lies in the recognition that the fighters against the Germans are not all heroes of body and spirit; as the British officer explains, "There are also among them people of a very different kind, weaklings, even the downcast, about whom we hardly hear anything." From the narrator's point of view, of course, the story's major meaning lies in the Jewish identity of the extraordinary partisan.

Similarly, in Yigal Mossinsohn's short story, "Ashes" (1944),²⁵ the narrator listens to another character tell his life story in a café. Hanan, a kibbutz member and a soldier in the British army who is about to return to his unit, tells about his wife, Sonia, who arrived in Palestine from Warsaw on the eve of the war but remains anxious about the fate of her mother in Poland. Everyday experiences in Sonia's life in the kibbutz, such as picking up a bar of soap in the shower or the click-clack noise made by the wheels of a train, evoke nightmares and guilt feelings. Finally, she goes mad when a fire breaks out in the kibbutz hayloft; she imagines that the fire is part of the calamity that is occurring in Europe. With his wife locked up in the closed ward of a mental institution, Hanan goes to war with a sense of rage and a thirst for vengeance.

served in the British air force and then in the Haganah. From 1949, he was the secretary to Israel's President Chaim Weizmann. Apart from the collection of stories, he worked mainly as a translator.

²⁵ Yigal Mossinsohn, "Ashes" in *Mishmar* (September 17, 1944). Collected in idem, *Gray as Sack* (Hebrew) (Merhavia: Sifriat Poalim, 1946); and in *Gray as Sack: Stories and Plays* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1989), pp. 100-108. On the story, see Kritz, *The Fiction*, pp. 145-148. Yigal Mossinsohn (1917-1994) was born in Ein Ganim, near Petah Tikva; his parents were members of the Second *Aliyah*. He was a member of Kibbutz Na'an until 1950. Beginning in 1944, he published short stories, novels, and plays dealing with current events and with historical episodes. Mossinsohn was one of the leading writers of the "Generation of 1948" in the 1940s and 1950s.

The fragmentary sentences that Sonia utters to her husband would seem to reflect the author's attitude toward the shared destiny of the Jewish people: "Everything has been burned. Only ashes are left. Ashes. You too are no more than ashes. We are the remnants of a great fire – and mother was burned, too. She was burned in the train station in Warsaw. She waited for me the whole time. We are all burned."

The kibbutz is also the setting for Moshe Shamir's story, "The Second Stutter" (1945), which was written about a month before the end of the war and published immediately after its conclusion.²⁶ In contrast to the previous stories considered here, Shamir's work is long and complex, with two characters at its center. The hefty Kotler and the diminutive Franzy are Holocaust refugees who came to the kibbutz together, live in a dirty room, and work in the carpentry shop. They are bound together by a dark secret, until Franzy reveals, bizarrely and unreasonably, that his friend Kotler is really Major Kunda, the commandant of a concentration camp, who abused him and tried to castrate him with an electric saw. The story proved disquieting to its readers, particularly in Kibbutz Mishmar Ha'emek, of which Shamir was a member at the time. It was assailed mainly for its bluntly naturalistic depiction of the two protagonists and, more particularly, for its implicit criticism of the kibbutz's attitude toward the survivors - not the least because of the author's veiled comparison of the kibbutz to Nazi labor camps. Shamir's achievement lies in his highly complex and realistic portrait of the two protagonists, who seem to evoke humanitarian compassion precisely because of the almost clinical description of the dark and repulsive aspects of their bodies and minds.

²⁶ Moshe Shamir, "The Second Stutter," in *Yalqut Ha're'im*, second collection (Hebrew) (Summer 1945); and in *The Book of "The Companions' Anthology"* (Hebrew), pp. 111-136. Collected in idem, *And Even to See Stars* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved/Yedioth Ahronoth/Sifrei Hemed, 1994), pp. 142-167. On the story, see Kritz, *The Fiction*, pp. 69-72; Nurit Govrin, "The Holocaust in the Hebrew Literature of the Young Generation," *Zafon* (Hebrew), 3 (1995), pp. 151-160. On the context in which the story was published and its place in debunking the conventional image of the "Generation in the Land," see idem, "Yalqut Ha're'im: The Reality of Continuity and the Myth of a Beginning," in Reuven Tsur and Tova Rosen, eds., *Yisrael Levin Jubilee Volume* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: University of Tel Aviv, 1995), vol. 2, pp. 21-52. Moshe Shamir was born in Safed in 1921, and grew up in Tel Aviv. One of the pillars of the literature of the "Generation of 1948," he is the author of dozens of works, among them the novels *He Walked Through the Fields* (1947), *Under the Sun* (1950), *The King of Flesh and Blood* (1954), *David's Stranger* (1956), and the memoir of his brother, who was killed in the War of Independence, *With His Own Hands* (1951).

These five short stories are a representative sample of the initial efforts by young writers who were born or raised in Palestine to address the theme of the Holocaust. Several general impressions and conclusions can be noted. First, it is apparent that the writers were careful not to go beyond the reality with which they were personally familiar, namely that of the Yishuv. They do not purport to describe the experience of the Holocaust itself directly. The exception is Moshe Shamir, who sets part of his story in a concentration camp. However, even here the description of the camp serves mainly as an elucidatory background for the main subject-matter of the story, which focuses on the kibbutz.

Second, it is not by chance that the narrator in the stories, by acting as an auditor for someone else who is telling his own story, effectively places himself well outside the world that is being described. This device reflects the caution with which the narrator approaches the subject, as though to say: I am not authorized to testify directly about what happened in the ghetto, the forest, or the camp, because I was not there, and all I can do is document, quote, formulate, or transmit the story of someone who was there. Moreover, in some cases a kind of double literary filter is at work, which emphasizes even more sharply the distance between the narrator and his subject: Zerubavel Gilead's narrator listens to the testimony of his friend who has returned from Europe about his meeting with the beloved young woman who is a heroine of the resistance; Mossinsohn's narrator listens to Hanan tell the story of his wife, Sonia; and the narrator in Yigal Kimhi's story listens to a British officer recount what he heard from a Russian officer about a demented Jewish partisan.

Third, each of the stories generally restricts itself to telling about one character, or two at most, and to a narrow framework of events in terms of time and place, perhaps reflecting the authors' feeling that it is still too soon to paint on a broader fictional canvas. Fourth, at least some of the stories would appear to be based on real persons and events, due to the feeling that, when dealing with this subject, the literary fiction is dwarfed by reality, so that it is best to rely on authentic material and, at most, recast it in literary form. Fifth, the stories contain a wide variety of characters, with no preferentiality shown for heroic figures such as partisans or members of the underground. True,

Zerubavel Gilead's story is about a daring young woman who risks her life on missions for the movement, and Yigal Kimhi describes a heroic act by a Jewish partisan, but, at the same time, a number of distinctly unheroic figures are also presented: the confused girl who extricates herself from the ghetto in Shoshana Sharira's story; the mad and tormented young woman in the story by Yigal Mossinsohn; and the two physically deformed friends in the story by Moshe Shamir, who generate sheer physical revulsion mixed with curiosity in their surroundings.

Sixth, search as we will, we will not find in these stories even a hint of sabra feelings of superiority toward the Diaspora Jews - both to those who met their fate in Europe and those who reached a safe haven in Palestine. On the contrary, there is much affection and respect for the survivors in the stories. There is an identification with their suffering, a deep examination of their life stories, a desire to draw close and help them, anger at what befell them, admiration for the heroes among them, and feelings of guilt and embarrassment at being in the Yishuv, in relative safety, far from the venue of the horrific events.

The Novella, the Novel, and the Survivor

From the late 1940s, the writers of the "Generation of 1948" turned to the broad frameworks of the novella and the novel, which entailed a more comprehensive and complex confrontation with the theme of the Holocaust. At this stage, the writers still confined themselves to a description of the present and the recent past, with which they themselves were familiar. That is, their works are set in the years of the struggle for independence, or in the nascent State of Israel, and focus on life in Israel as perceived by writers who were born or raised in the country. The survivors, who by this time were a more natural and visible part of the fabric of life in the country, of course also enter the picture. However, the young writers continued to be wary of delving too deeply into the experiences that were part of the survivors' psychological makeup. The result is that, in most of the works in question, they appear as secondary characters that are described externally, as compared with the sabras and longtime residents who occupy the central place in the story and

whose inner lives are rendered more comprehensively. At the same time, there are occasional works that have as their central theme the survivors and their attempts to pick up the pieces of their lives in the Jewish state.

Here, too, we will consider, in chronological order, five of the major works published by the writers of the “Generation of 1948” after the war. After describing them, we will discuss the characteristics they have in common from the viewpoint of their treatment of Holocaust survivors.

He Walked Through the Fields (1947) is the first novel published by Moshe Shamir and a basic work of the “Generation of 1948.”²⁷ The novel is set in the fictional kibbutz of Gat Ha’amakim, in the Jezreel Valley, near the end of World War II. The central characters are the members of the Kahane family: nineteen-year-old Uri, the first child born on the kibbutz, and his parents, Willy and Ruthke, who are among its leading members. When Uri returns to the kibbutz from his studies at an agricultural school, he discovers that his parents have separated: his father has enlisted in the British army, and his mother is living with her lover. Against this background, Uri enters into a relationship with Mika, an orphan girl from the “Teheran Children,” a group of Polish-Jewish children who were brought to Palestine in February 1943, via Teheran. She found a home on the kibbutz after a tortuous journey. Mika becomes pregnant, while Uri, who does not know about this development, joins the Palmach and immerses himself in training. In the dramatic ending of the novel, Uri is killed in a training accident on the morning that Mika goes to Haifa to have an abortion, and Uri’s father rushes after her to stop her so that Uri will live on in the child he fathered.²⁸

Yehudit Hendel’s novella, “They Are Different People,” was published in 1949.²⁹ This is the only work in the literature produced by the “Generation of

²⁷ Moshe Shamir, *He Walked Through the Fields* (Hebrew) (Merhavia: Sifriat Poalim, 1947; new edition, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1973).

²⁸ For a detailed literary discussion of the novel, see Reuven Kritz, “A Realistic *Bildungsroman*: Lines of Characterization and Story Patterns in *He Walked Through the Fields*,” in idem., *Story Patterns* (Hebrew) (Kiryat Motzkin: Poreh, 1976), pp. 280-300. On the ongoing presence of this novel in Israeli culture, see “Fifty Year Anniversary of Moshe Shamir’s Book *He Walked Through the Fields*,” in *Jewish Studies* (Hebrew), no. 39 (1999), pp. 51-110 (including articles by Michal Arbel, Gad Kaynar, Judd Ne’eman, and Avigdor Poseq).

²⁹ Yehudit Hendel, “They Are Other,” first published in *Molad* (Hebrew) (April 1949) under the title “Overloaded.” Collected in idem., *They Are Different People: Short Stories* (Hebrew) (Merhavia: Sifriat Poalim, 1950), pp. 9-66 (new edition: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2000).

1948” that is written exclusively from the viewpoint of a Holocaust survivor. The protagonist, Ruben Sheftel, whose family has perished in the Holocaust, embarks for Palestine in the midst of the War of Independence. On the ship he meets Paula, who, like him, is a lonely survivor, and the two become a couple. However, when they reach Haifa, they are separated, mobilized into the army, and do not see each other again. Sheftel is sent for a short period of training, during which he becomes friends with Laiser, who is a sorry specimen both psychologically and physically. The two are dispatched to the Battle of Latrun before they are fully prepared. During the fighting, Sheftel misunderstands the orders he receives and accidentally causes the death of his sabra commander, who is killed while searching for him. Sheftel and Laiser spend their leave in Haifa, where, in the wake of several encounters with the local community, Sheftel feels increasingly alienated and inferior. At the end of the story, he is walking alone along a dark street, his mind ragged with fragments of bitter, despairing thoughts.³⁰

Yigal Mossinsohn’s 1953 novel, *Way of a Man*,³¹ stirred a literary-political furor because of the opposition stance taken by the author vis-à-vis the Zionist left and the kibbutz movement, of which he was a member at the time. The novel, which is set in 1946, fiercely assails the kibbutz movement for the contradiction between the lofty egalitarianism and humanistic ideals it espouses and the day-to-day life in the kibbutzim. The latter, according to the author, is marred by cruelty and injustice, hardheartedness and insensitivity toward the plight of individuals, including Holocaust survivors who, to their misfortune, have ended up on a kibbutz. At the same time, the book displays empathy for the activism of the breakaway right-wing groups and for their members’ heroism and sacrifice. Through his protagonist, Rafael Huber, Mossinsohn openly denounces the *saison* (French for “hunting season”), the

Yehudit Hendel was born in Warsaw in 1926, and was brought to Palestine as an infant. She has been a published author since 1942; eight volumes of her fictional and documentary prose in a variety of genres have appeared to date.

³⁰ See, especially, Nurit Gertz, “I Am the Other”: The Place of the Holocaust Survivor in Yehudit Hendel’s ‘They Are ‘Different People,’” in Ben-Porat, ed., *An Overcoat*, vol. 1, pp. 150-169; Avner Holtzman, “From the Ladder of a Ship to the Front Lines’: On the History of the Literary Image of the New-Immigrant Soldiers,” in Hanna Naveh, ed., *Sadan: Studies in Hebrew Literature. Vol. 5: The Representation of the War of Independence in Hebrew Literature* (Hebrew) (forthcoming).

³¹ Yigal Mossinsohn, *Way of a Man* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: N. Tversky Publishers, 1953).

name given to the operation in which Haganah personnel turned over activists of the Irgun and Lehi (two rival, right-wing underground groups) to the British authorities. Huber's tilt toward the other camp is shown through a love affair he has with the daughter of an ideologue of the Revisionist movement.

In 1954, Hanoach Bartov published *Each Had Six Wings*,³² a panoramic, multi-character novel that tells the story of a Jerusalem neighborhood whose Arab residents fled during the War of Independence and is now populated by new immigrants from various countries. Many of them are Holocaust survivors, and they are depicted as coalescing into a new society. Several individuals and families stand out among the neighborhood's inhabitants: Klinger, a shoemaker, his wife, Gitel, and their adolescent son, Menashe; Rakefet, the young sabra teacher whose beloved was killed in the War of Independence; Zirkin, the discharged soldier, who, like the Klingers, spent the war years wandering in remote areas of Russia; the physician Theodore Stern, a Holocaust refugee from Poland who is the embodiment of refined European culture; and Glick, an old baker, broken and worn out, and his young wife, Manya, whom he saved during war after they both lost their previous families. The critical event in the novel is the mobilization of the entire neighborhood to assist Glick in his battle against the government and municipal bureaucracy, which has rejected his request to open a bakery shop. The campaign against the authorities is successful, and the novel ends on an optimistic note, with the birth of a daughter to Manya and Glick. The entire neighborhood celebrates the event, which symbolizes the opening of new horizons for the future.³³

In 1956, Shlomo Nitzan published the novel, *Togetherness*, the second part of a trilogy that tells the story of the 1940s and 1950s in Israel through

³² Hanoach Bartov, *Each Had Six Wings* (Hebrew) (Merhavia: Sifriat Poalim, 1954; second version, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1973). Hanoach Bartov was born in Petah Tikva in 1926 to a religious family and in World War II served in Europe in the Jewish Brigade (he drew on his experiences in the unit for his novel *The Brigade*, 1965). He began to publish short stories in 1945, and, since 1953, has published numerous novels. Bartov is considered one of the most important writers of his generation.

³³ See also Nurit Gertz, "Zionism, the Kibbutz and the Small town: The Struggle for the Soul of the New Immigrants in Hanoach Bartov's *Each Had Six Wings*," in *Studies in Zionism, the Yishuv and the State of Israel* (Hebrew), vol. 8 (1998), pp. 498-521.

one family, the Bickels.³⁴ In late 1947, the head of the family, Dov-Ber Bickel, one of the leaders of the Yishuv, goes to the United Nations for the diplomatic battle that precedes the decision on the Palestine question. His two sons, who grow up in his shadow, at first appear to be opposites. Shaulik, the younger, is, on the surface, a successful sabra, a fine young man who is well liked by everyone and who becomes a daring commander in the War of Independence. The first-born, Ezra, is a more complicated character. He draws his strength from his father's authority but, in fact, fails in everything he undertakes and is consumed with frustration and inferiority feelings. Even his married life goes awry when his wife prefers Micha Levin, an impressive figure and a survivor of the Warsaw ghetto. Subsequently, however, the contrasts between the brothers are seen to be less sharp. Ezra, in the course of his military service during the war - in which he is eventually killed - is revealed to have deep feelings and primal qualities, whereas Shaulik finds himself at loose ends after the great days of the founding of the state have gone by. He then leads a dreary, humdrum life of emptiness, parasitism, and insularity.³⁵

Each of these works thus describes a narrow or broad swath of life in the second half of the 1940s, at the heart of which are the War of Independence and the establishment of the State of Israel. In each, the encounter between the veteran population and the Holocaust survivors is given expression as either a central theme or a secondary motif. Although each of the works is unique, they share several qualities in their portrayal of the survivors. The following are the major trends that are found in all or most of these works:

A. In descriptions of encounters or confrontations between Holocaust survivors and native Israelis, the latter are generally in a position of power and control, though comparisons of the essential inner makeup of the two groups are always favorable to the survivors. As characters, they are more mature,

³⁴ Shlomo Nitzan, *Togetherness* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1956; new edition, including the three sections of the trilogy, *Between Him and Them*, *Togetherness*, and *Not Even a Tent Peg*, Jerusalem: Bialik, 1991). Shlomo Nitzan was born in Latvia in 1922, and immigrated to Palestine in 1933. His first stories were published in the early 1940s. He is also well known as the author of children's books and was, for many years, an editor of the children's weekly *Mishmar Leyeladim*. The trilogy, which was first published between 1953 and 1960, is his major work.

³⁵ See also Dan Miron, "The Landscape of History as an Interior Scene: On Shlomo Nitzan's *Togetherness* Trilogy," in idem, *Essays on Literature and Society* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Zmora Bitan, 1991), pp. 278-303.

rich, complex, interesting, and deep than the sabras with whom they are juxtaposed. This is largely due to their greater life experience but, in some cases, as a result of their broader cultural horizons as well.

This is apparent in the implicit contrast that is made in Moshe Shamir's novel between the adult gravitas of Mika, the Holocaust refugee, and her beloved, Uri, who psychologically is still little more than a boy. The human depth of Mika's character, her inner anguish, her tormented universe of memories, can hardly be compared with the meager world of the frightened youth, which is all instincts and physicality, who flees all responsibility for his life, is propelled to act by subconscious urges, and is led to his death by some sort of foreordained destiny that he has no chance of annulling.

Yehudit Hendel's protagonist, Sheftel, is in a saliently inferior position vis-à-vis the group of indifferent and insensitive sabras with whom he sits in a Haifa café, even though he adopts, abjectly, the disparaging epithet they use for the new-immigrant recruits. Yet his tormented consciousness, which is revealed to the reader, makes him far more interesting than the other characters.

In the novel by Shlomo Nitzan, Micha Levin, who took part in the Waraw ghetto uprising and lost his wife and child there, is neither as tall nor as handsome as Ezra Bickel, a member of the Israeli elite. However, he exceeds him immeasurably in sensitivity, maturity, and wisdom of the heart. It is not surprising that Deena, Ezra's wife, who abandons her collapsing marriage and finds solace in Micha's arms, is amazed at the maturity and gentleness with which he treats her.

In Hanoch Bartov's novel, *Stern*, the forty-year-old physician of refined culture who lost his family in the Holocaust, charms his beloved, Rakefet, a young native-born teacher, with his sweeping knowledge and perfect manners (his dry rationalism, however, is perceived to be a negative quality as compared with Rakefet's fresh and emotional spontaneity).

B. It should not be construed that the Holocaust survivors are portrayed as mere angels. On the contrary, all the narrators seem to make an effort to understand their world "from the inside" and to characterize them as complex, rounded, unique characters, who are possessed of positive traits alongside

weaknesses and rough spots. This is true of all the characters we have discussed: Shamir's Mika, Hendel's Sheftel, Nitzan's Levin, Bartov's Dr. Stern. The authors' attempt to depict them as complex individual personalities is apparent in works in which they appear in pairs or in groups; such as the comparison that is drawn between Sheftel and Laiser in Yehudit Hendel's novella, and particularly in the panoply of characters in Hanoch Bartov's *Each Had Six Wings*.

Bartov's novel, indeed, was the most comprehensive, complex, and empathetic attempt by an Israeli writer in that period to construct a complete fictional world composed almost exclusively of new-immigrant refugees living in one neighborhood. Each family has its own distinctive story and reached Palestine after its own course of wandering in Europe; each of the characters in the novel is a self-contained world, made up of both weaknesses and strengths.

An attempt of a different kind to understand - and break down - the barrier of alienation between the sabras and the survivors is at the heart of Yigal Mossinsohn's novel. His protagonist, the kibbutznik Rafael Huber, who is under detention at Latrun prison in the wake of the British security operation on "Black Sabbath" (June 29, 1946), is anxious. He feels helpless at what he expects will be British revenge for the dynamiting by Etzel activists of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. It is only in this state of mind, this "ghetto mentality" of total impotence, that he is able to comprehend a tiny fraction of the experiences he encountered in the shattered Jews whom he met on the kibbutz:

That night, lying in bed half awake and half asleep, wracked by a vague fear that the British would seek reprisal and revenge against him just when he was helpless and unarmed, Rafael understood, perhaps for the first time, the memories harbored by immigrants from Europe and its crematoria. Somehow this authenticated their existence, which was foreign, doleful, and tormented. Because the native sons were imaginatively incapable of coming to terms with the survivors' stories of the atrocities they had suffered, they felt cut off from them by growing barriers. These ever-higher barriers gave rise to a sense of

estrangement and alienation, and the final result was that the survivors were viewed with a certain resentment and hatred that cannot be explained in words, that is beyond consciousness, like dark cellars the existence of which is unknown.³⁶

C. Some of these works are critical of manifestations of insensitivity and hardheartedness toward the new-immigrant survivors on the part of the state authorities, the army, the kibbutz movements, and individuals. Yehudit Hendel's novella, which tells about a new arrival who is taken from the ship, placed on an army truck, and thrown, insufficiently prepared, onto the battlefield of the War of Independence, can be read, in this context, as a severe indictment of the establishment. This is all the more so because no direct charge is leveled; rather, everything is related through the naïve eyes of the passive and submissive protagonist.

Yigal Mossinsohn, in his novel, describes an appalling act perpetrated against a new immigrant named Mendel Vilencik, from the "Anders Army," who joins a kibbutz after a series of hellish experiences during the war. Completely alone on the kibbutz, he is assigned to debilitating work that the others consider beneath them. One day he is bitten by a snake while at work, but the doctor and the paramedic shrug off his screaming as no more than a hysterical reaction. He is left to suffer all night and dies. The bulk of the criticism here is actually directed at the behavior of the kibbutz in the aftermath of the incident. No one is shocked, no one seeks to impute responsibility for the event. In fact, the whole kibbutz is preoccupied with a trivial argument involving one of the members who bought himself a three-door closet contrary to the principle of equality.

In Hanoach Bartov's novel, criticism of state institutions becomes a central element in the plot. The entire neighborhood of new immigrants mobilizes, under the leadership of Rakefet, the teacher, to knock on the doors of government offices in support of Glick, the elderly pastry baker, who is on the verge of hunger because the cruel bureaucracy has denied him a license to open his own shop.

³⁶ Mossinsohn, *Way of a Man*, p. 123.

D. At the same time, such criticism must be placed in its proper context. The common ground shared by most of these works, with different degrees of intensity and commitment, is the perception of the survivors and their integration as a positive, constructive, optimistic process of an ingathering of exiles, reflecting the realization of the Zionist vision.³⁷ This set of values is not contested even in Yehudit Hendel's story, which, rather, is critical of the methods used to implement it, as these display insensitivity and a patronizing attitude toward the survivors. The most explicit examples are the novels by Shamir and Bartov, both of which conclude - and not by chance - with the actual or expected birth of a baby. Mika will give birth to Uri's child, who will continue the existence of his dead father and will also symbolize the complete integration of his mother, who has suffered so much, into the kibbutz. The birth of Manya and Glick's daughter at the end of Bartov's novel heralds the start of a new life for her parents, who lost their previous families in the Holocaust. This new beginning is reflected in the decision to give the girl a distinctively sabra name, Rakefet, which amazes everyone but is explained clearly by the father:

“How?” Glick repeated the question, “how did we think of it...? It was Manya, my wife, who said... and the truth is: What name shall we give her? There is so much that we remember, hers and mine. And here we have just one baby daughter for us both...” His sallow, dry face was turned to Reb Shimshen, and only now, it seemed, was he contemplating the subject. “This is what Manya, my wife said, we will give her a new name. A different name. A name without memories. So she will not have to bear it all on her shoulders... Rakefet, [Hebrew for cyclamen] that is a worthy name for her.”³⁸

³⁷ This point is elaborated by Dan Laor, “Between Reality and Vision. On the Reflection of the Mass Immigration in the Israeli Novel,” in Mordechai Naor, ed., *New Immigrants and Transit Camps: 1948-1952* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, Iddan Series, 1987), pp. 205-220; idem, “‘Mass Immigration’ and the Language of Literature,” in *Zionism* (Hebrew), no. 14 (1989), pp. 161-175.

³⁸ Bartov, *Each Had Six Wings*, p. 225 in the 1973 edition. In the same year that Bartov's novel was originally published, Aharon Megged wrote his well-known story “Yad Vashem” (meaning, literally, a memorial), which is focused entirely on the question of what to name a newborn infant – should he be called Mendele, as the aged grandfather wishes, in memory of his grandson who perished in the Holocaust, or Ehud, as his parents prefer, to symbolize the

In both novels, these concluding scenes represent a concentrated expression of broader developments. Shamir describes the integration of the refugee boys and girls into kibbutz life as a natural, harmonious process:

The group became part of the fabric of kibbutz life without causing much of a headache either to themselves or to the members of the kibbutz...The tractors themselves no longer noticed whether they were being revved up by the most senior veteran or by a greenhorn Teheran orphan.³⁹

Bartov describes the crystallization of the new-immigrant families into an Israeli community whose members are mutually responsible for one another. Nor is the land-settlement solution absent: Menashe, the son of Klinger, the shoemaker, finds redemption on the kibbutz, which seems to him a land of wonders, and his father, who arrives to take him home, is also captivated by life on the kibbutz and contemplates the idea of moving there in his old age.

Conclusions

Empathy, appreciation, and sometimes even a feeling of inferiority in the face of the Holocaust survivors, together with an effort to characterize them as complex human individuals; criticism of the wrongs and the injustices in the attitude that was displayed toward them in Israel, together with the aspiration to make them part of the Zionist project are among the major components that helped shape the portrait of the Holocaust survivors in the fiction produced by the "Generation of 1948." It is a far more complex and diversified picture than one could gather from the superficial labels that are used to characterize the literature of this generation in general and its treatment of this subject in particular.

At the same time, it is noteworthy that the works surveyed here, with all their symptomatic importance, are, when all is said and done, only a small

drawing of a line over the past and the opening of a new era of life in Israel. The boy is finally given the name EHUD, though it is apparent that inwardly the narrator does not fully accept this choice.

³⁹ Shamir, *He Walked Through the Fields*, pp. 117-118, 1973 edition.

portion of the fiction produced by the “Generation of 1948.” Characters and themes from the world of the survivors occupy a secondary, even marginal, place in the entire range of the typical subjects that interested this generation of writers in the 1940s and 1950s, as most of their work is based on direct personal experiences. Indeed, one of the arguments against them at the time, was that they focused on the limited experiences of the surroundings in which they grew up. Various critics urged them to address new spheres and, in particular, to give expression to the world of the new immigrants, who were changing the country’s human landscape. In response, some of the writers themselves said that they were incapable of doing artistic justice to human universes that were so alien to their experience. For example, they said, the experience of life in the transit camps would be given artistic expression in the future by youngsters who were now growing up in the camps and just learning how to write their names in Hebrew.⁴⁰

The disparagers will say that the meager treatment accorded the Holocaust and the survivors reflects the egocentrism of a generation whose members showed little interest in anything beyond their own narrow world. The defenders will say that this approach attests to the artistic integrity of these writers, the native sons and those who were educated in the Yishuv, who did not believe themselves capable of rendering faithfully a complex experiential world such as that of the survivors (just as most of them refrained from tackling the even-less familiar world of the immigrants from Islamic countries). They left that task to writers who had experienced the Holocaust in the flesh.⁴¹

In any event, even after fiction by the survivors began to appear - notably, the work of Aharon Appelfeld - and even after new generations of Israeli writers, from Amos Oz to David Grossman, made considerable contributions

⁴⁰ This was the argument adduced by Moshe Shamir in a debate he conducted in 1953, with the critic Azriel Uchmani, who called on writers to enter into the world of the new immigrants “in the name of the life that is taking shape.” For further discussion of this subject, see Avner Holtzman, “Toward People or Beyond Literature: Uchmani, Shamir and the Debate Over Socialist Realism in Hebrew Literature,” in *Alei Siach* (Hebrew), no. 36 (1995), pp. 127-140.

⁴¹ “Their work traced the collective biography of the generation and referred to it. Although they tried to breach the confines of that biography, some areas of their surroundings remained sealed to them: they knew the survivors only from the outside” (Shaked, *Hebrew Narrative Fiction*, p. 27). At the same time, Shaked notes: “The literature since Megged and Bartov was far more generous than the society in its attitude toward the survivors” (*ibid.*, p. 370).

of their own to this sphere, the writers of the “Generation of 1948” did not abandon their effort to cope with the subject of the Holocaust and with the image of the survivors in stories, novels, and plays. Some of these writers, such as Hanoch Bartov, Haim Gouri, and Aharon Megged, embedded the Holocaust in almost everything they wrote, and they reject, with justified anger, what Bartov calls, “the wicked slander of our indifference to the Holocaust.”⁴²

This discussion of what the members of that generation wrote about the Holocaust and the survivors during the war years and in the decade that followed shows that they have no reason to seek expiation, nothing for which to apologize, and nothing of which to be ashamed.

Translated from the Hebrew by Ralph Mandel

Source: *Yad Vashem Studies*, XXX, Jerusalem, 2002, pp. 337-368.

⁴² Bartov, “The Wicked Slander about Our Indifference to the Holocaust.”