Diagnosis: Loneliness
Female Protagonists in Selected Short Stories of Savyon Liebrecht

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Summary

TITLE: Diagnosis: Loneliness, Female Protagonists in Selected Short Stories of Savyon Liebrecht

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CHAPTERS: Three

CONTRIBUTION: This thesis explores the theme of loneliness in select short stories of Israeli feminist author Savyon Liebrecht. It's principle contribution is the linking of Liebrecht's oeuvre to research on the condition of perceived social isolation and exploring how those symptoms are displayed by her characters. A secondary outcome is the surfacing of Liebrecht's stories to an English-speaking audience that is still largely unfamiliar with her work. And finally, this thesis seeks to explore the degree to which Liebrecht depicts loneliness as a universal part of the female experience.

GOALS:

1. To accomplish a significant, lengthy research project that would give me experience upon which I can build for future independent research and publishing.
2. To bring to light the work of an unsung Israeli female author by writing about her stories in English.
3. To deepen my education and pastoral skills by researching loneliness, its symptoms, and impact on human beings.
4. To discover something new and to write about it with excellence.

ORGANIZATION: This thesis is divided into an introduction, three chapters (one for each of short story) and conclusion. Each chapter contains four subheadings exploring themes of loneliness, gender, the role of the "other," and the narrative structure.

RESEARCH: The primary sources used in this thesis were three short stories from two of Savyon Liebrecht's Hebrew collections: "Heder al Ha-Gag" ("A Room on the Roof") and "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar," ("Apples from the Desert") from the collection *Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar,* and "B'Derech L'Cedar City," ("The Road to Cedar City") from the collection *Susim al K'vish Gehah* (*Horses on the Highway*). For secondary research, I consulted academic scholarship on and book reviews of Liebrecht's work as well as articles on contemporary Israeli women's writing. I read seminal feminist texts like *The Second Sex* and *A Room of One's Own* and conducted research about intersectionality, feminism and linguistics, and gender. I consulted psychological research on the condition of loneliness and its symptoms. I used the Tanakh and Concordance to explore the biblical layers of Liebrecht's prose and investigated geography and history where relevant. While this paper did not end up exploring epigenetics and the science of trauma transmission, I also conducted a fair amount of research in this arena before deciding to pursue the theme of loneliness instead.

To Joshua Moise,
May you cherish the wisdom of women's voices.

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Introduction

Savyon Liebrecht was born Sabina Sosnowski in Munich, Germany in 1948, the same year as the birth/establishment of State of Israel.[1] Her Polish parents survived the Shoah, and though they never spoke about their experiences and losses—their silence on this trauma significantly influenced her work—, she learned from an old photograph that her father's first wife and daughter were murdered by the Nazis.[2] Liebrecht was brought to Israel at age one and became the oldest of three children. She spent time on a kibbutz during her military service, and wrote her first novel there.[3] Thereafter she went to London to study journalism, but returned to Israel and completed her degree in Philosophy and English Literature at Tel Aviv University.[4] She married at age 23, and subsequently gave birth to a daughter and a son.

Liebrecht did not find success early. Failing to find a publisher and facing consistent rejection, she turned to the needs of her family. Given her parents' experience in the Holocaust, children were a supreme imperative for Liebrecht, who "needed a new family as a power-base of security and normality."[5] Literary scholar Lily Rattok quotes Liebrecht explaining her pivot away from writing: "For a woman writer each new book is one less baby."[6]

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[1] Bettina Spoerri, "Katastrophen im Blick: Eine Begegnung mit der Schriftstellerin Savyon Liebrecht." *Jüdische Allgemeine,* 8 June 2006. Accessed 26 Jan 2018. http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/article/view/id/6007.
[2] Lily Rattok, "Introduction: The Healing Power of Storytelling," *Apples from the Desert* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1998), p. 11.
[3] Savyon Liebrecht, "Women in Israel: The Stated Truth and the Hidden Truth," *Modern Hebrew Literature* No. 4, New Series, Autumn/Winter 2007/8 (Israel: The Institute for Translation of Hebrew Literature, 2007), pp. 148.
[4] Lily Rattok, "Introduction: The Healing Power of Storytelling," p. 10.
[5] Ibid., p. 12.
[6] Ibid.

Liebrecht returned to the page when she entered a creative writing workshop at age 35 and benefitted from the mentorship and encouragement of Amalia Kahana-Carmon, a founding mother of Israeli women's literature.[7] By then, conditions in Israel where changing, and there was greater receptiveness to the female authorial voice and to the subject of the Shoah.[8] In 1986 she published her debut short story collection *Tapuhim min ha-midbar* (תפוחים מן המדבר; *Apples from the Desert*). From there, her prolific career blossomed with her second collection *Susim al k'vish Gehah* (סוסים על כביש גהה; *Horses on the Highway*) in 1988, *Sinit ani midaberet Aleichah* (סינית אני מדברת אליך; *What Am I Speaking, Chinese? She Said to Him*) in 1992, and *Tsarif sof l'Sippur Ahava* (צריך סוף לסיפור אהבה; *On Love Stories and Other Endings*) in 1995. 1998 saw the publication of Liebrecht's first novel *Ish v'isha v'ish* (איש ואישה ואיש; *A Man and a Woman and a Man*), and in 2000 came her first collection of novellas *Nashim mitoch ha-katalog* (נשים מתוך קטלוג; *Mail-Order Women*). Since 2000, Liebrecht has continued to produce short stories, novels and novellas, many of which are adapted to film and television. She has written numerous plays staged throughout Israel and in Germany, and her work is translated into English, German, Spanish, French, Chinese, Italian, Estonian, Polish, Slovak.[9] Liebrecht's television scripts have earned her the Alterman Prize (Israel, 1987) and the Prime Minister's Prize (Israel 1991, 1999), and her writing has garnered countless international awards including the Amelia Rosselli Prize (Italy, 2002), the Maior-Amalfi

[7] Lily Rattok, "Introduction: The Healing Power of Storytelling," pp. 30-1 (footnote 2).
[8] Ibid., p. 12.
[9] "Savyon Liebrecht," *The Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature.* Accessed 25 Jan 2017. http://www.ithl.org.il/page_14275

Award (Italy, 2005), the WIZO Prize (Italy, 2005; France, 2009) and Playwright of the Year (Israel 2004, 2006).[10]

In my own survey of Liebrecht's literature, I was deeply moved by her vivid depictions of female moral error. In *A Man and a Woman and A Man,* I met Hamutal, the wife and mother who temporarily abandons her family to pursue an affair with a stranger she meets in her mother's nursing home. The short story "Excision" features Henya chopping off her granddaughter's prized, blonde hair when she is sent home from school with lice, an impulse that surfaces from Henya's experience during the Holocaust. The novella "America" revolves around the confrontation between Hadassa and Alma, two young women abandoned by their mothers as children when their parents' marriages fell apart. Hamutal's mother, Henya, and the mothers of Hadassa and Alma are all Holocaust survivors. Similar to Liebrecht's youth, the worlds of these works are shaped by World War II without that violence playing an explicit role.

In much of her writing, Liebrecht demonstrates an awareness of the Shoah and its toll on victims. What makes her work so compelling is her capacity to depict the human failings of survivors without judgment or blame. Liebrecht recognized earlier than science that the trauma of the genocide generated all sorts of pathologies in those who survived. Only in recent years with the work of psychiatrist Rachel Yehuda and others in the burgeoning field of epigenetics, has a vocabulary emerged to describe survivors' psychic wounds, and the biological way they persist through subsequent generations. In a 2015 podcast interview with Dr. Yehuda, Krista Tippett helped clarify for her listeners

[10] "סביון ליברכט," ויקיפדיה, נערך לאחרונה ב־6 בינואר 2018. https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/סביון_ליברכט.

the overarching thesis of epigeneticists that "not only do experiences lodge physiologically, but physiological changes can actually be passed on to the next generation, transmitted generationally, transgenerationally."[11] Every single Israeli Jewish character that Liebrecht writes has absorbed some of the genetic or social trauma produced by the brutality of World War II.

Many scholars have already explored the role of the Holocaust in Liebrecht's oeuvre, and while the subject is far from exhausted, there is another compelling dimension of her work that spoke to me as a rabbinical student. My calling arises in response to what political scientist Robert Putnam terms "bowling alone" or "the decline of social capital."[12] In his groundbreaking study from 2000 Putnam proved that Americans have become increasingly disconnected from family, friends, neighbors and democratic institutions. Civic and religious engagement are essential to the healthy functioning of society and, I believe, to a full and meaningful life. Loneliness and isolation are scourges that can be curtailed by strong churches and synagogues, rotary clubs and parent-teacher associations. I am mission-driven as a rabbi to drive out isolation with community, and loneliness with love.

Every female character I met in my survey of Liebrecht's work exhibits characteristics of loneliness. They are scared, uncertain and chronically vulnerable. In "Heder al Ha-Gag" ("A Room on the Roof"), a nameless Israeli woman secretly initiates

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[11] Rachel Yehuda and Krista Tippett, "How Trauma and Resilience Cross Generations," *On Being*, 30 January 2015. Accessed 18 Jan 2018. https://onbeing.org/programs/rachel-yehuda-how-trauma-and-resilience-cross-generations/.

[12] Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," 1995. Accessed 26 Jan 2018. http://www.directory-online.com/Rotary/Accounts/6970/Downloads/4381/Bowling%20Alone%20Article.pdf

a building project against her husband's wishes while he is out of town on business. Alone with her newborn, and acting ostensibly as a forewoman over three Arab workers, presents a variety of tensions. The absence of her husband augments her feelings of physical vulnerability (opening her home to three strange men), and simultaneously desirability—an incipient relationship forms between the protagonist and the head laborer Hasan.

"Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar" ("Apples from the Desert") tells the story of Victoria Abravanel, an Orthodox Sephardi mother stuck in a loveless marriage who travels to the desert to "rescue" her daughter from a secular kibbutz where she shares a bed with her Ashkenazi boyfriend. During her visit, Victoria must come to terms with her daughter's miraculous transformation and newfound happiness, and the way these triumphs highlight Victoria's painful experience of emotional deprivation.

In "B'Derech L'Cedar City" ("The Road to Cedar City"), Hassida Harari endures the erratic symptoms of menopause during a miserable road trip through Utah with her husband and son, who incessantly mock her, complain about her pace, and make her feel like a burden. When the Hararis are forced to share a minivan ride with a Palestinian family—a young couple with a baby—Hassida develops an unexpected bond with the mother and child.

Close analysis of the behaviors and anxieties of these three protagonists, with special emphasis on their inner thoughts, illuminates distrust, fear and perceived victimization. Such conditions bespeak a diagnosable condition of loneliness. Liebrecht's characters are all isolated, most overtly from family members—whether by physical distance or emotional estrangement—but it is their loneliness, not their physical

aloneness, which so burdens these women with an unceasing sense of existential threat. Interactions between these women and family, Arab workers, and Israeli and American strangers invite readers to consider the implications of loneliness on the female voice. How can women be empowered as storytellers if they are ignored, silenced or gravely afraid? Does loneliness have something to tell us about the slow emergence of female authors in Israel in the 20th century?[13] The following thesis will explore these questions and conclude with one of Savyon Liebrecht's strategies to wrench women free from the loneliness that has imprisoned them.

[13] Thankfully, many women are writing and publishing in Israel in the 21st century.

A Room on the Roof - חדר על הגג

In the short story, "Heder al Ha-Gag" ("A Room on the Roof") a nameless female narrator sets out, against the wishes of her husband, to build a room on the roof of their home. Liebrecht's title is an unmistakable allusion to Virginia Woolf's 1929 trailblazing essay "A Room of One's Own," in which Woolf endeavors to explain why success in fiction writing remains elusive for women, and to prescribe the basic requirements—money and a room of one's own—that would enable female writers to flourish. Woolf contends that women have failed because they lack financial independence, intellectual freedom and worldly experience.[14] "What effect does poverty have on the mind and on fiction?"[15] Woolf ponders. Or framed more positively, what conditions are conducive to any person's creativity?[16] "A Room of One's Own" seeks to answer this question and ultimately presages three phases of modern feminist literary critique.

Woolf begins by exposing masculine bias. On a visit to Oxford University, she finds herself at the door to the library:

> I must have opened it, for instantly there issued, like a guardian angel barring the way with a flutter of black gown instead of white wings, a deprecating, silvery, kindly gentleman, who regretted in a low voice as he waved me back that the ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction."[17]

This confrontation between the female narrator and "the gentleman" encapsulates the paranoid territorialism of men in her time.[18] "I must have opened it," writes Woolf. In

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[14] Louis Kronenberger, "Virginia Woolf Discusses Women and Fiction," *The New York Times*, 10 Nov 1929.
[15] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, (New York: Harcourt, 1929), p. 24.
[16] Ibid., p. 25.
[17] Ibid., p. 8.
[18] Readers recall the moment in the beginning of Woolf's essay when she is intercepted by a male figure as she crosses a plot of grass. "His face expressed horror and

other words, the mere unconscious gesture of leaning against the door to a library tripped the alarm, prompting a "book bouncer," as it were, to reject her entry. How, Woolf provokes her readers, can women possibly write, if they cannot freely enter a library and read?

From a critique of entrenched masculine bias, Woolf invents the untold story of an imaginary female literary ancestor. "I could not help thinking," she reflects, "it would have been impossible, completely and entirely for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare."[19] Inventing the personage of Judith Shakespeare, William's sister, Woolf imagines the probable arc of her life. Despite being as adventurous and imaginative and "as agog to see the world"[20] as her brother, Judith would have been deprived of an education and betrothed in her early teens. To escape this marriage, she would flee home for London and beg at stage doors to work in theater. After a series of painful rejections, an actor-manager would "take pity" on Judith, and impregnating her, destroy all hope for her future. "Who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught and tangled in a woman's body?"[21] Woolf muses, before sentencing Judith to suicide. The body of a woman, like the Oxford library, contained no outlet. A woman of Shakespeare's genius would self-destruct from the sheer force of unexpressed talent.

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indignation. Instinct rather than reason came to my help; he was a Beadle; I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me." Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 6.

[19] Ibid., p. 46.

[20] Ibid., p. 47.

[21] Ibid., p. 48.

Men have erroneous notions about women that have cost women, and the world, dearly, but Woolf portends a future that ceases to reinforce the traditional binary. She sees past gender altogether and even critiques its intrusion into fiction. Gender injustice causes too much fury – a distraction to female writers. Woolf concludes that the first great lesson for women authors is to write as if they have forgotten their sex, so that their pages are full of the curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself.[22]

Creativity, Woolf insists, thrives in a state of pan-gendered unity. She envisions a state of mind "in which one could continue without effort because nothing is required to be held back," and wonders, "whether there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, and whether they also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness." Perhaps, she continues, the English poet Samuel Coleridge meant two sexes of the mind spiritually co-operating when he said that a great mind is androgynous.[23] Women writers accessing the harmony of such a multi-gendered mindset are unburdened by the albatrosses of their sex. Writing beyond gender liberates them.

"A Room of One's Own" names sexism to uncover the very barriers women must overcome to write successfully. When they gain access to the library, however, women should not waste energy on the injustice of the system—on the distraction of hates and grievances[24]-- that excluded them, and should instead dive swiftly into their craft. Woolf

[22] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 93.
[23] Ibid., p. 98.
[24] Ibid., p. 59.

pities writers like English poet Lady Winchelsea, whose "fire was hot within her," but who could not liberate herself from hate, fear, bitterness and resentment.[25]

Savyon Liebrecht does not heed Woolf's recommendation to write androgynously. Her stories are steeped in gendered voice and experience, and her characters, rooted first and foremost in their female bodies, are keenly aware of how their sex subjects them to challenging patriarchies. This is not to say, however, that Liebrecht's writing is not shaped by several of the ideas in Woolf's foundational essay. Liebrecht benefits from the groundwork of female writers before her who have made it possible for women to enter the proverbial library, and she composes stories, like those Judith Shakespeare might have written had she been given the opportunity, stories that otherwise may have remained untold. In "A Room on the Roof," a nameless woman (who shall forthwith be called "the Builder") feels an unyielding necessity to build a room on the roof of her house. Given Jewish tradition's image of the mother as an embodied home—the host of children—the Builder's desire to add on the roof evokes her need to nurture her "top floor," her intellect.

Gender

By the title, Liebrecht subtly conveys the "why" of the construction project. The Builder needs a creative outlet. She longs to produce something outside herself that can stand on its own and play host to her ingenuity. The Builder expands her self-definition beyond her maternal role, donning the hat of a forewoman working with Arab men - a dramatic departure from the limited universe of responsibility to her newborn son, Udi.

[25] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 60.

Liebrecht intentionally sets the Builder's construction on the heels of childbirth. An heir of Woolf's dauntless legacy, the Builder has more options than Judith Shakespeare once she becomes pregnant and seeks to engage in acts of creativity beyond procreation – an insistence that her functioning in the world extend outside the realm of domesticity. The narrator tells us that the room is fated (אלא שהרעיון כבר הכה שורש, משתרג בה מכוח עצמו, כביצית שחיבקה את הזרע ועכשיו בכוחה הדבר, כבר העובר מותח את עור הבטן, אין להרדים את צמיחתו).[26] Akin to a second child, the idea to erect it is a germinating fetus that twists inside of the Builder with its own unstoppable force. The point, of course, is that an idea, not a fetus, burgeons within her.

Liebrecht depicts a woman radically activated by her urge to build. Defying the gender norms of her Israeli context, the Builder secretly observes construction projects in her neighborhood while out on walks with Udi. Like the angel in Woof's essay that ushers off the barrator, various laborers shoo "The Builder" away, insisting that the area is too dangerous.[27] Liebrecht's point is well taken – women, in particular mothers, are deemed too delicate to be outside the home, not to mention near a construction site, but the Builder is not like other women. She refuses to be consigned, in professor Margaret Homans' words, to the "object side" of the subject-object dyad. Homans, a literature scholar who writes on woman and language, asserts,

> A dualism of presence and absence, of subject and object, structures everything our culture considers thinkable; yet women cannot participate in it as subjects as easily as can men because of the powerful, persuasive way in which the feminine is again and again said to be on the object's side of that dyad. Women who do conceive of themselves as subjects—that is, as present, thinking women…must continually guard against

[26] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," *תפוחים מן המדבר*, 43.
[27] Ibid., p. 44.

> fulfilling those imposed definitions by being returned to the position of the object.[28]

The Builder refuses to be an object in Israeli society—which sees her as a fragile vessel for reproduction—or in her marriage—Yoel, her husband, wants to limit her creative impulse to her mothering of their son. "Heder al Ha-Gag" unfolds while the Builder is the sole parent in the house, a direct refutation of Apollo's fallacious conviction in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* that mothers are not parents, but merely nurses of newly planted seeds.[29] As a "present, thinking" woman, the Builder adopts the role of mother and father, nursing her newborn son and redefining the physical boundaries of home.

Bucking the paternalistic and chauvinistic assumptions of her milieu, the Builder takes on numerous traditionally masculine roles as the commissioner of the project, the forewoman on site, and the head of her household while Yoel is abroad. In so doing, she defies a status quo that demotes women to jejune objects of home (or to the home itself). Such a bold breach of assumed gender roles is not without significant risk. The Builder succeeds in claiming physical space for herself—the story concludes with a bright, pleasant room on the roof[30]--but she suffers acutely. "A Room on the Roof" is less a story of building a room, than a drama about the harsh consequences of transgressing the tight boundaries drawn around women, and between Arabs and Jews in Israeli society.

At the beginning of the story, gender mores are too entrenched for the Builder to compete with Yoel for household leadership. He attempts to wield uncontested power by objecting to her idea for a new room. He cites the filthiness of construction, the poor

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[28] Margaret Homans, *Bearing* the *Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Writing*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986)**,** pp. 4-5.
[29] Ibid., p. 2.
[30].60 "חדר בהיר, נאה." סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג,"

timing with a four-month-old baby, and his belief that she already has enough space. Only when she receives a sign from the heavens אות נשלח מין השמים,[31] in the form of Yoel's two-month business trip to Texas, does the Builder finally have the time and the autonomy to pursue the project that had ripened, "like a girl coming of age."[32] Liebrecht employs language of female sexuality to describe the Builder's vision for her room. It is an ovum that embraces a sperm (כביצית שחיבקה את הזרע), a fetus stretching the skin of the belly (העובר מותח את עור הבטן), and a pubescent girl (כנערה שהגיעה לפרקה).[33] Liebrecht concertedly participates in the revolutionary act of writing through the female body. The contours of her fictional universe are determined by the experiences of puberty, pregnancy and parturition. As French feminist philosophers Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément insist in their essay, "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/ Forays":

> Woman must write her body, must make up the unimpeded tongue that bursts partitions, classes and rhetorics, orders and codes, must inundate, run through, go beyond the discourse with its last reserves …To write – the act that will "realize" the un-censored relationship of a woman to her sexuality, to her woman-being giving her back access to her own forces; that will return her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her vast bodily territories kept under seal; that will tear her out of the superegoed, over-Mosesed structure where the same position of guilt is reserved for her (guilty of everything, every time: of having desires, of not having any; of being frigid, of being "too" hot; of not being both at once; of being too much of a mother and not enough; of nurturing and of not nurturing…) Write yourself: your body must make itself heard.[34]

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[31] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 45.
[32] Ibid., p. 44.
[33] Ibid., pp. 43-44
[34] Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, Vol. 24, Betsy Wing, trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), pp. 94-7.

Liebrecht heeds the call of Cixous and Clément to craft characters and worlds that are anchored in women's voices and physical experiences. The complex interlacing of sexuality and fear, power and guilt, and curiosity and condemnation reflect the pronounced reckoning of women—a "repressed" person in the "Age of the Phallus"[35]—with their privilege and their deprivation. Liebrecht writes characters and bodies that shatter, stagger and overturn the long silence of their sex, giving volume to a "voiceless rebellion."[36]

The Builder is propelled to pursue her project by a nascent force akin to new life, but such an enterprise invites people and power structures into her world that she is ill-prepared to police. Struggling to find her place in her own home as forewoman, mother, woman, and Israeli, the Builder confronts deep-seated feelings of vulnerability, suspicion and prejudice. Her volatile relationship with the Arab workers, ricocheting between tenderness and terror, her obsession with how they perceive her, and her sense of powerlessness (specifically, the need to rely on male intervention on her behalf) are all characteristics of a person who suffers perceived social isolation, or loneliness. Close examination of the Builder's thoughts about and behaviors toward the Arab workers provokes readers to consider how loneliness might be a condition of the female sex in a world of glorified phallic monosexuality that annihilates the contributions and voices of women.[37]

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[35] Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman,* Vol. 24, Betsy Wing, trans., p. 95.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., p. 85.

The Arab Other

"Heder al Ha-Gag" opens with a foreshadowing description of hibiscus that epitomizes the Builder's complex relationship with the Arab laborers.[38]

> ההיביסקוס השושני מתלתל את דור העלים המשוננים הקשורים בתוך מעטפת הניצנים ורק ראשיהם מציצים מתוך הגביעים הארוכים, הגדושים, הפקועים כשפתי נערה מתחנחנת, שפעת הרוגע שמסביב מתעתעת רק את חלק לבה הרדום ממילא, לא את זה הרדוף, הדרוך אל מעבר לשקט המדומה, היודע אי–נחת של מי שנתון תחת עיניים בוחנות תמידית, ותמידית סמויות מן העין.[39]

> The lilylike hibiscus waved its circlet of toothed leaves bound in an envelope of buds, only their heads peeping out of long, laden calyxes, pouting like the lips of a coquettish girl, the abundant tranquility all about deluding only the part of her already dormant, not the part that was driven, tensed toward something beyond the apparent silence, knowing the restlessness of someone under eyes constantly prying but always unseen.[40]

The telling juxtaposition of toothed leaves in an envelope of buds peeping from flirty calyxes warns readers that the Builder has two radically different dispositions with regard to the Arab workers. At one extreme she is a sharp, ready to chew them out any time their work deviates from her stringent expectations. At the opposite extreme, she, like the hibiscus flower, is gentle and sometimes coquettishly teasing, confusing the laborers with her solicitous gestures. But the Builder also shares an important dimension of her lived experience with the Arabs. As a woman in a chauvinistic culture, she knows what it is to be simultaneously objectified and invisible, just as Arabs in Israeli society are

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[38] There is a notable pattern in Liebrecht's writing of multi-faceted symbolism. A flower is a never just a flower, nor is a room just a room. This thesis will attempt to unpack some key examples of her laden prose as they relate to the episodes that highlight the Builder's loneliness. Liebrecht frequently invokes nature and inanimate objects as figurations of social conflict.

[39] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 42.

[40] Savyon Liebrecht, "A Room on the Roof," *Apples from the Desert*, Jeffrey M. Green, trans., p. 39.

pigeonholed as threats and ignored as second-class citizens. Women and Arabs are silenced by powerful entrenched forces of patriarchalism and xenophobia in Israel, but despite their shared victimhood, they remain wary of one another. The Builder is fearful of what lurks just below the surface, behind the flashes in the Arab workers' pupils (רק לעתים תימלט ותנצנץ מתוך האישונים).[41] She cannot dispense with the restless suspicion to which she has been conditioned, and obsessively scrutinizes the workers, seeking proof that they are dangerous.

The Builder's desire to forge connections beyond her isolated home life is constantly overshadowed by the deeper need to justify the Arabs' ongoing oppression. This back and forth between harmony and hazard is amplified by the very materials used in construction. The Builder's notebook pages are densely packed with details about reinforced concrete and thickness of walls.[42] She may bring Arab laborers into her home, but she commissions them to build walls. Her notebook might be filled with notes on the room she envisions, but her readers see the concrete and the iron rods separating Israel from the Palestinian territories. Her foray into construction triggers images of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Is she building yet another wall of separation or co-creating a new kind of space alongside the Arabs who work for her? The drama of the Builder's psyche jerks between the desire to overcome cultural barriers that separate her from these men and the instinct to protect herself from them.

Feminist Bible critic and scholar of modern Hebrew literature Esther Fuchs

[41] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 46.
[42] Ibid., p. 42.

emphasizes the power struggle between the Builder and the laborers, which reveals the entanglements in relationships between Israeli women and Palestinian men.

> Both sides are vulnerable, and lack confidence. The more she asserts her status as the "lady" the weaker the heroine becomes, as the lower-class laborers show up her ignorance about construction, her physical vulnerability as a wife and a mother, and her sexual vulnerability as a young woman surrounded by three strange men. In a way, the story points up the inescapable dependence of Israeli women on their husbands, for theirs is a society whose fate is intertwined with a foreign, inimical, unknown community that may strike out at them at any time.[43]

According to Fuchs, the Builder's psychological vacillation between fear and friendship, reflects the complex entanglements between Israelis and Palestinians. Despite a pioneering impulse to learn about construction, and to commission a space of her own in partnership with Arabs, the Builder cannot overcome the ingrained biases she holds toward her Palestinian neighbors. Fuchs incorrectly normalizes a facet of this relationship that is clearly warped. The vision of Palestinians as some menacing threat to Israelis which points to an "inescapable dependence" on protective husbands, is not accurate. After all, it is the Israelis who hold power militarily, culturally, and civilly. It is the Palestinians, in fact, who feel the inescapable gaze and suspicion of Israelis.

While the Builder clearly manifests the fear that Fuchs describes, believing that violence at the hands of the Arab laborers is always imminent or inevitable, Liebrecht writes her this way to highlight a deeply troubled orientation. This is *not* sustainable, Liebrecht seems to be telling us. And cognitive psychological research affirms her. The Builder is afflicted by loneliness as demonstrated by her increased attention to threats,

[43] Esther Fuchs, "Lost and Lonely in the Promised Land: Hebrew Women Authors Write Their Lives," *Bridges* 7, no. 2 (1998)**,** p. 47.

and by her sharp sensitivity to negative social information.[44] Given Israel's power, Israelis need not see Palestinians as necessarily or inevitably inimical. Liebrecht suggests that the Builder's fear might not be warranted, and portrays her, like Israelis at large, as one who examines her world from a position of deep social isolation. Liebrecht depicts this temperament in the Builder's numerous and erratic interactions with the Arab laborers.

Readers are first introduced to "three Arab men" reeking of wood smoke and unwashed flesh, with bad teeth and unfashionable, poorly-fitting shoes. These men visit the Builder in her dreams and come too close to her in her waking hours. The sense of encroachment alerts readers to the Builder's fear of the workers, but the proximity is immediately complicated by the humanizing addition of Arab names – Ahmad and Hassan—and the sexual undertones of their interactions with her, moments that are attractive or repulsive/threatening all at once. Ahmad's rear grazes the Builder's legs on one day and his elbow touches her breast on another. Hassan offers to spend the night with her when her Udi falls out of his crib. Was Ahmad simply doing his job? Was Hassan being chivalrous? Or did both men seek out subtle opportunities to impose themselves on the Builder's body? The moments and exchanges are so fleeting that one senses she is overthinking things, and this is exactly Liebrecht's intent. As the story progresses, the most intense drama occurs in the Builder's mind, the product of her inventive angst—a veritable anxious room on the roof of her psyche! What appears from the outside as a typical construction project with missed deadlines and some shoddy

[44] John T. Cacioppo and Louise C. Hawkley, "Perceived Social Isolation and Cognition," *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 2009 Oct, Vol. 13, No. 10, pp. 447-54.

work, becomes for the Builder a show-down with terrorists on one day and an Arab outreach project the next. She is so exhaustingly fickle that readers begin to identify with the jaw-clamping and teeth clenching of the workers who must suppress their rage at her.[45]

Story Structure

"Heder al Ha-Gag" is told retrospectively, and this narrative structure is hardly incidental. Liebrecht communicates with her readers that the trajectory is anti-developmental. The story of the Builder is no Bildungsroman; she will not start in a benightedness and grow toward enlightenment. The Builder is stunted by her loneliness and unable to achieve the kind of progress in her Palestinian relationships that might bode well for the two nations at large. Like a room with four walls, the story is self-contained. Its creation is possible, but once the room is built, Liebrecht suggests, the collaboration between Israeli and Arab fulfills its finite purpose.

Considering the poignant lack of progress in Israeli-Arab relations in "A Room on the Roof," it useful to consider Israeli literary scholar Ruth Ronen's understanding of the "Possible Worlds" theory. According to Ronen, "the fictional world presented in a literary work is a 'unique system separate from, although dependent on cultural-historical reality in which it is created and with which it holds obvious affinities."'[46] Liebrecht constructs a social experiment in Israeli-Arab relationships by pushing the typical

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[45] הלסתות הסוגרות זו על זו, כעסוקות בלעיסת דבר קשה, חופרות תעלה לעורך קו–השיניים. לימים תלמד: כך חונקים את הכעס, המשטמה, מהדקים שיניים לכבוש את חמת הטירוף הגואה, אשר רק לעתים תימלט ותנצנה מתוך האישונים. סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 46.

[46] David C. Jacobson, "Intimate Relations Between Israelis and Palestinians in Fiction by Israeli Women Writers," *Shofar 25*, no. 3 (2007), p. 35.

boundary of how her characters interact. There are suggestive touches, shared meals, and even gifts.[47] To be believable however, her story must root itself in the cultural-historical reality of contemporary Israel. While the Builder defies norms by hiring laborers herself and acting as forewoman over the project, and by gesturing toward hospitality and even friendship throughout the story, the partnership is ultimately doomed. A world is possible in which an Israeli woman has fleeting moments of familiarity and warmth with Arab laborers, but, Liebrecht posits, a world in which those overtures evolve into meaningful, balanced relationship is not.

Loneliness

The Builder ventures into untraditional territory by hiring Arab workers while her husband is away, but this is the limit of her trailblazing. Her chronic fear starkly impedes the formation of healthy relationships with them. Long after the room is built, and the Arabs are gone, and Yoel has returned home, she avoids the roof when it is dark, so anxious is she that the Hasan, Ahmad and Salah might pop up from behind potted plants.[48] In a provocative tone of relief, she admits:

> אלא שלא היה כלפי מי להטיח האשמות. בעצמה הזמינה על ראשה את הדבר. ואם לא נשחט תינוקה ולא נשדדו תכשיטיה ולא אונה לא רע—עליה לברך על מזלה הטוב ולמחוק את שני חודשי החורף האלו מזִכרונה כאילו לא היו מעולם.[49]

> But there was no one else to accuse. She had brought the whole thing down on her own head. And if her baby wasn't slaughtered, and her jewels weren't stolen, and nothing bad happened to her—she should bless her

[47] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 42, 50, 55.
[48] Ibid., p. 42.
[49] Ibid., p. 43.

> good fortune and erase those two winter months from her memory as if they had never been.[50]

In the third paragraph of the story, the Arabs approach the Builder too closely in her dreams, and by the fifth paragraph they have transformed from lurking strangers into murderers and thieves. She jolts readers with her candid prejudice, and admits that she invited this uncertainty into her life. The phrase "הזמינה על ראשה" ("brought upon her head") suggests that the room she will create is equally subject to the anxieties and fears of the rest of her body, reiterating Yoel's warning that building on the roof will cause tons of soil and rocks to fall on her head.[51] Cultivating her intellect, Liebrecht implicitly suggests, will expose her to external forces that cannot menace her inside the cloister of home.

Just as the lily-like hibiscus with its deceptive tranquility bears its toothed leaves, the brave Builder with her impressive, feminist project reveals the sharp edges governing her perceptions of Arab men. The reader wonders for the first time, how well she can be trusted. Female fear of male aggression is certainly valid and justified in misogynistic cultures, but the extreme terror that her jewelry will be stolen and her baby slaughtered reflects a deeply warped sense of the other; the Builder is paranoid. Liebrecht's use of the *niphal* tense—נשחט, ("slaughtered") and נשדדו ("stolen")—reflects the limits of the Builder's control. She sees herself and Udi as passive in her own story; potential victims to be acted upon. This ingrained sense of threat bespeaks her loneliness. American journalist Judith Shulevitz writes that loneliness makes one moody, self-doubting, angry,

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[50] Savyon Liebrecht, "A Room on the Roof," *Apples from the Desert,* Jeffrey M. Green, trans., p. 40.

[51] "ויש לך מושג כמה טון חול ואבנים יפלו לך על הראש כשיהרסו את התקרה בשביל פתח מדרגות?" סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 43.

pessimistic, shy and hyper-sensitive to criticism.[52] An examination of three additional episodes in the short story prove her point unequivocally.

"Heder al Ha-Gag" begins with the Builder's morose reflection on two months of interaction that she would erase from her memory as if they had never been. Once Liebrecht warns her readers that some aspect of this social experiment is doomed, the story brings us back to the beginning. The Builder reveals latent racism from the outset in the way she describes the Arab workers. As she researches construction, meeting with Jewish foremen to ask questions, she calls the glances of the laborers in her direction "oblique" (מבטים אלכסוניים), suggesting a strand of deviousness. But it is her description of their bodies--"on all fours" (על ארבעתם), "panting" (מתנשפים), "running" (ריצה), and "ripping out hunks of bread with their teeth" (קורעים בשיניהם נגיסות מארוחתם)—which truly betray her prejudice.[53] The Builder does not see men, but dogs. And just like dogs, man's best friend, she imputes a perverse loyalty to the workers who laugh at her questions on the inside, in collusion with their Jewish foreman (חשה איך צוחקים לה הערבים בתוכם, יד אחת עם מנהלם היהודי).[54]

The day after Yoel leaves for America and the Builder works out an agreement for her project, she describes the three Arab workers as "looking amazingly alike" (הדומים זה לזה להפליא)[55], a reflection of her inability to discern each man's individual humanity. However, just as readers are about to write off the Builder as a common racist, she displays a perceptive appreciation for the workers' behavior in her home. She notes

[52] Judith Shulevitz, "The Lethality of Loneliness," *New Republic*, 13 May 2013.
[53] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 44.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid., p. 45.

how they sit on the edges of her chairs, "careful not to ruin the upholstery," (נזהרים שלא להשחית את הריפוד)[56]. In noting their respect for her furniture, she breaks through the canine comparison, but the gesture toward dignity is quickly undone when she describes their behavior in her home.

> איך הגיעו הדברים לידי כך שהגברים השומטים מבטם מפני עיניה, ממעיטים עצמם בנוכחותה בהשפלת כתפיים, כמצמצמים רוחב גופם, משיבים לשאלותיה בקול רפה, כאשמים–תמיד, איך אירע שבנובמבר ישבו על פיאות הכסאות באותו ערב ראשון, ובדצמבר כבר הילכו בביתה כאדונים...פותחים את דלת המקרר לחפש ירקות טריים, מחטטטים במגרות הארון אחר קצף גילוח ריחני, מלטפים את ראש תינוקה.[57]

> How did things go so far that those men, whose gaze avoided her eyes, who shrank in her presence with shoulders bowed as though narrowing their bodies, answering her questions with a soft voice as though forever guilty, how did it happen that on that first evening in November they sat on the edge of the chairs, and by December they were already marching through her house like lords of the manor…opening the refrigerator to look for fresh vegetables, rummaging through the cabinet for fragrant shaving cream, and patting her baby on the head?[58]

This litany of examples of the formerly subservient workers now taking license, representing a blurring of boundaries between boss and employee, host and guest, Israeli woman and Arab man, previews three events that will disrupt the delicate order that governs the Builder's first encounter with the laborers. But even before these events take place, there is one phrase, "forever guilty" (תמיד–אשמים),[59] which foreshadows the inevitable degeneration of these fragile relationships. The Builder, who in one moment appreciates the sensitivity of these men to decorum in her home, can turn around and frame that same behavior as reflective of some inherent flaw. Why does she hear guilt in

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[56] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 45.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Savyon Liebrecht, "A Room on the Roof," *Apples from the Desert*, Jeffrey M. Green, trans., p. 43.
[59] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 45.

the softness of their voices? Liebrecht implies that just as the fate of the story is sealed by starting at the end, so too is the laborers' destiny, and by extension, the Builder's. Regardless of how authentic she is in her desire to forge bonds with the Arab workers—through sharing coffee with them[60], buying them gifts[61], and even paying them before their work is complete[62]—she will never see them as full equals; they cannot access a blank slate, or a room of their own, in which to write their own story.

Once the laborers begin construction, the erratic shifts in the Builder's behavior become increasingly apparent. She seems to soften toward them when she acknowledges that they don't actually look like a "single person" but have distinct features. Hassan has elongated, bright eyes, and Ahmad, a broad nose, narrow eyes and thick lips, while Salah has sunken cheeks, pointed ears and pimples.[63] While these descriptions are far from flattering, they signal the Builder's effort to recognize the distinct characteristics of each man. The reader senses for a moment that broad stereotypes might begin to break down, but then she withdraws into typecasting. When the three men leave in the middle of the first work day without consulting her, the Builder decides she must "demonstrate her authority over them by yelling at them" (החליטה כי עליה להפגין כוחה מולם).[64] Liebrecht signals the Builder's regression with her description of Hassan as "the one with the golden eyes" (בעל עיניים הזהובות) and "the beaten dog" (הכלב המוכה). From an individual with a name and distinct features, he reverts in her eyes to a nameless dog, his dignity fading rapidly.

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[60] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 46.
[61] Ibid., p. 55.
[62] Ibid., p. 60.
[63] Ibid., pp. 45-6.
[64] Ibid., p. 46.

משהו נרתע בה למראה עיני הכלב המוכה שהרים אליה אל החלון, מצליל הקול המרוסק שהפיק. אך היא, דורכת כוחותיה לבלום את הרעד שהעיר בה ואשר מאיים לרכך את חרונה...חיקתה בזדון את מלתו השגויה.[65]

> Something in her recoiled at the sight of the beaten dog's eyes he raised up toward her in her window, at the sound of his broken voice. But she, tense her strength to suppress the tremor that awoke within her, threatening to soften her anger….Maliciously she imitated his grammatical error.[66]

Her inner struggle to assert herself as the boss conflicts with a creeping remorse; she is the one verbally beating the dog, after all. When a tremor inside of her threatens to soften her anger, she suppresses the pang of conscience by maliciously imitating Hassan's grammatical errors as he speaks to her, defending his tardiness. The Builder is at war with herself from their very first exchange.

Two hours later, the Builder is still bedeviled by her tense exchange with laborers. Liebrecht conveys her inability to find psychological comfort as the exacting employer or the curious co-creator by depicting her mind as "constantly on the uncomfortable feeling…that she had spoken to [the Arab workers] like a cruel lord of the manor."[67] The Builder cannot cope with the guilt that she has offended them, and makes an overture of hospitality, offering coffee and dessert on her finest china. But even her graciousness is plagued with shame. Making the coffee is "doing something she shouldn't" (כי דבר אסור היא עושה) and transpires when she drowns out the voice of reason (לכבוש את קול הצלילות).[68] One notes Liebrecht's use of the word *asur* to describe the coffee as a gesture filled with

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[65] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 46.

[66] Savyon Liebrecht, "A Room on the Roof," *Apples from the Desert,* Jeffrey M. Green, trans., p. 45.

[67] דעתה נתונה כל הזמן לא–הנחת השוכן בה...כאשר דיברה אליהם כאדונית עריצה. סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 47.

[68] Ibid.

forbidden intrigue, but also evoking a sense of incarceration, and a limitation on the Builder's capacity to make choices about how she relates to others. To succeed in this small task, she must *likbosh* "conquer" the voice of reason, a verb filled with military connotations including Israel's occupation of Palestine. Liebrecht suggests the elusiveness of a middle ground between conquering "the Other" and becoming their victim. Regardless of which instinct she follows—to be tough and demanding by yelling at the laborers, or sympathetic and generous by offering them a snack—the Builder is "relentlessly aware of her ridiculous position" (מודעת כל העת למצבה המגוחך) and never emotes self-assurance.[69]

In an examination of the ways loneliness undermines emotional and psychological wellness, the Editor at Large of *Psychology Today*, Hara Estroff Marano, writes:

> A lack of close friends and a dearth of broader social contact generally bring the emotional discomfort or distress known as loneliness. It begins with an awareness of a deficiency of relationships. This cognitive awareness plays through our brain with an emotional soundtrack. It makes us sad. We might feel an emptiness. We may be filled with a longing for contact. We feel isolated, distanced from others, deprived. These feelings tear away at our emotional well-being.[70]

The Builder's harshness toward the laborers distances her from them, creating a social gap that emphasizes her loneliness. At first, they are nameless animals who inhabit the construction landscape of her neighborhood. When they arrive at her home, however, they are individuals with names and distinct features who sit in her living room with delicateness and deference. Within a day they revert to criminals, skipping out from work early and testing the Builder's assertiveness as a boss, and just hours later she sits in her

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[69] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 47.

[70] Hara Estroff Marano, "The Dangers of Loneliness," *Psychology Today*, 1 July 2003.

home embarrassed that she can't remember their names.[71] The Builder clearly struggles with feelings of emptiness, which is augmented by the absence of adults in her orbit with whom she can share her jerking hesitations about the Arabs in her home. The drama that plays out in her conceptions of and behavior toward them is generated from a mind bereft of companionship and counsel. The Builder longs for contact, but lacks the capacity to determine what healthy connection would look like.

Psychology experts at the University of Chicago John T. Cacioppo and Louise C. Hawley, who specialize in the study of loneliness, contend that lonely people are hypersensitive to negative social information and suffer diminished pleasure from positive social interactions. Such an orientation, "might be expected to shape social expectations and motivations and contribute to a downward spiraling of negative affect and depressive symptomatology. Loneliness is related to stronger expectations of and motivations to avoid bad social outcomes and weaker expectations of and motivations to approach good social outcomes."[72] The Builder sits in discomfort, "relentlessly aware" of her absurd social predicament. She knows, even when she attempts to assuage the tension between herself and the laborers, that it will end poorly – an expectation of a negative social outcome. And she is correct.

Offering coffee to the workers – "Hello, hello, I have some coffee for you" ("האלו, האלו יש כאן קפה")[73]—she immediately feels ashamed of the tone of her voice (ונכלמת מן הצעקה שנמלטה מפיה). She is so anxious in communicating with these men that

[71] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 47.
[72] John T. Cacioppo and Louise C. Hawkley, "Perceived Social Isolation and Cognition," *Trends in Cognitive Science*, pp. 447-54.
[73] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 47.

even the simple act of making coffee is a showdown between cultures. And the Builder surmises tremendous insult in the response of the laborers to her offer. She leaves the tray on the roof and escapes quickly (behavior characteristic of an insecure teenage girl nervous about speaking to boys) to attend to her baby. When she returns to collect the tray, the scene described could be a still-life or the aftermath of a battle.

> המגש ועליו הקנקן המצויר ניצת–ורד והספלים היפים עמדו בפינת הגג, בדלי סיגריות מחוצים בתחתיתם בתוך שאריות נוזל עכור. היא עמדה והביטה רגע ארוך במראה שתזכור אחר כך כמעין סמל: כלי הרוזנטל המשובחים מתוך אוסף המערכת העשיר שהביא עמה סבתה מגרמניה מערמים זה על גבי זה ברשלנות, מוטלים על צדם ליד שקי המלט החתומים והפטישים הכבדים.[74]

> The tray with the rosebud pattern coffeepot and the pretty cups stood in a corner of the roof, cigarette butts crushed in the remainder of the murky liquid in the saucers. She stood and looked for a long while at the sight, which she would recall afterward as a kind of symbol: the fine Rosental china from the rich collection her grandmother had brought from Germany heaped up carelessly, lying next to sacks of cement and heavy hammers.[75]

Cacioppo and Hawkley find that the brains of the lonely, in contrast to those who are not, are on high alert for social threats and, as a result, tend to view their social world as threatening and punitive.[76] The Builder disregards her better judgment to offer the Arab laborers coffee, and how is this gesture received? The narrator describes a scene of desecration, cigarettes stubbed out in the china her grandmother saved from the Shoah. Liebrecht decorates the porcelain with rosebuds, a floral connection to the hibiscus that opens the story. On a symbolic level, how do the Arabs greet the Builder's offering? With apparent rebuke, caking the precious remnant of her survivor grandmother with

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[74] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 47.
[75] Savyon Liebrecht, "A Room on the Roof," *Apples from the Desert,* Jeffrey M. Green, trans., p. 46.
[76] John T. Cacioppo and Louise C. Hawkley, "Perceived Social Isolation and Cognition," *Trends in Cognitive Science*, pp. 447-54.

ashes. The scene is redolent with Holocaust imagery and the Builder seems to impute the violence of the Nazis to the Arabs. In her loneliness, which sets her as a victim in a punishing world, the Builder imagines herself living through another holocaust, executed against the body of her sacred objects. That she can read such brutality into the careless treatment of a coffee cup signals to the reader how out of touch the Builder is with reality.

For a short story, "Heder al Ha-Gag" contains an exhausting number of dramatic face-offs between the Builder and the Arab laborers. Of course, all of these showdowns occur in her mind, a reflection of her social isolation and boredom. As a mother, alone with her baby, the Builder invents considerable theater out of a few passing moments of contact with Salah, Hassan and Ahmad. The radical shifts in her feeling toward them—from yearning for connection to suspecting them as terrorists—prompt the reader to see her as fundamentally untrustworthy. She is governed too much by her volatile emotions and gives credence to ideas that erupt from a cultural context that promotes unfair prejudice and distrust of Arabs. This is most clearly apparent when she sits with the Arab laborers for the first time to share coffee.

In a fraught moment of invasive companionship, Hassan invites himself into the Builder's kitchen to make coffee. "Yesterday lady make coffee. Today I make coffee like in my house" ("אתמול גיברת עושה קפה. היום אני עושה קפה כמו אסלי מבבית").[77] With her sister Noa's warning in her ear--"You made a mistake about the coffee. Let them make it themselves, and don't serve them anything anymore. If they enter the house—you'll never get rid of them" ("עשית טעות בעניין הקפה תני להם שיכינו להם לבד, ואל תגישי להם יותר

[77] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 48.

"כלום. אם ייכנסו הביתה—לא תצליחי להיפטר מהם").[78]—the Builder is taken aback by his friendliness, stepping away just far enough and allowing Hassan to enter her home through the space between her body and the doorjamb.[79]

And why is the Builder staggered by his gesture? After all, she offered him coffee the day before, and now he's offering to respond in kind. Had the Builder not manufactured a scene of slaughter on her grandmother's precious china, Hassan's overture would feel less shocking. But the Builder does not see the world through a lens of neutral social interactions, she sees threats in the workers' every glance and sip. When Hassan enters her home, she is struck by his friendliness, "as though they hadn't sparred with each other the day before, as though she hadn't been wracked all night long with worry as to how she would mobilize the police and the courts if they again tried to violate the agreement they had signed" (נדהמת ממחווה הידידות, כאילו לא עמדו אתמול כניצים, כאילו לא התחבטה כל הלילה במחשבות איך תגייס לצדה את המשטרה ובתי–המשפט אם ינסו שוב להפר את הכתב בכתב ההסכם שחתמו).[80] What "sparring" does the Builder reference? Possibly the rough treatment of her grandmother's porcelain or a disagreement about construction, in which she threatens to call in the foreman, David, and then Hassan immediately agrees to accommodate her wishes: "Lady, you don't need David. We add two centimeters" ("גברת, לא צריך דויד. עושים שני סנטים עוד").[81]

Conforming to Cacioppo and Hawkley's observations about loneliness, the Builder lives in a punitive world. How can Hassan offer her coffee after stubbing out his

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[78] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 48.
[79] Ibid., p. 49. דחק עצמו בקלילות ברווח שבין גופה לבין המשקוף.
[80] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 48–49.
[81] Ibid., p. 48.

cigarette in rosebud cup and saucer? After arguing with her about the height of the room's concrete rim in relation to the floor? In fact, the former event is moment of thoughtless habit—inconsiderate, yes; sparring, no—and the latter is a tiff that means way more to her than it ever does to the laborers. The Builder does not sleep, so wracked is she with fury at the Arabs' capacity to take advantage of her. Calling the police and the courts over two centimeters of concrete?! The Builder reveals the depth of her loneliness by her pronounced sense of victimization. "Who are the lonely," asks Shulevitz. "They're the outsiders: not just the elderly, but also the poor, the bullied, the *different*. Surveys confirm that people who feel discriminated against are more likely to feel lonely….Women are lonelier than men."[82] The Builder is unquestionably a lonely woman, who spends many quiet hours of social isolation anticipating the ways that she will be exploited.

Once Hassan enters her home, readers wonder about the possibility of companionship. Can she move past her paranoia to embrace a warm gesture of reciprocity? It seems for half of a sentence that she can. Watching Hassan in her kitchen, she admires the choreography of his coffee preparation, "her eyes drawn to the graceful, fluent movements," (נמשכת בעיניה אל התנועות הגמישות, החנניות).[83] For a single clause, Hassan evolves from a criminal to a dancer, drawing the Builder's gaze toward his dexterity. But the Builder cannot relinquish her penetrating fear and knows that "danger is latent in what [is] happening before her" (יודעת כי סכנה אצורה בדבר המתרחש מולה).[84] The Builder has the capacity to appreciate the ways in which the Arabs disabuse her of her

[82] Judith Shulevitz, "The Lethality of Loneliness," *New Republic*, 13 May 2013.
[83] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 49.
[84] Ibid.

prejudices—with their distinctive features, respectful behavior in her home, and their agility—inducing readers to imagine a possibility where sociocultural barriers erode and new relationships of understanding and mutuality form. But she is limited by the politics that separate Israelis from Arabs.[85] English Professor David Mesher describes the Builder's bafflement at Hassan's behavior as "disingenuous" because "she has continually sent mixed messages to the workers: playing the role of haughty taskmaster one day, and then guiltily serving them [coffee] on fine china the next."[86] Mesher detects in the Builder's lurching inconsistency, the roots of her unreliability as a narrator. She has no reason to be baffled by Hassan who has consistently shown respect while inside of her home. It is she, who moves from benefactor to bully, who induces headaches of disjointedness.

Why is danger latent for the Builder in the simple act of an Arab man preparing coffee in her kitchen? We need not rely on our own imaginations to fill in the gap; the Builder delineates for us. Sharing coffee over her violet lace tablecloth from Spain—another pure family object that is defiled by the laborers—with Hassan, Ahmad and Salah, the Builder's mind is hijacked by her aggressively morbid paranoia:

> היא לגמה מן הנוזל המר ורק חלק ממנה, זה שאינו צוחק עמם, חשב: האם הידיים האלו המגישות קפה הטמינו את הבובה הממולכדת שנמצאה בבוקר בשער בית–הספר הדתי שבקצה הרחוב?[87]

> She sipped the bitter liquid and only part of her, the part that didn't laugh with them, thought: Could these hands, serving coffee, be the ones that

[85] D. Mesher, "The Malamud Factor: Recent Jewish Short Fiction," *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought.*
[86] Ibid.
[87] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 50.

> planted the booby-trapped doll at the gate of the religious school at the end of the street?[88]

So profound is the Builder's fear of "the Other," is her fear of men, is her fear of Arabs, that just as she manufactures a massacre on her tea cups, she is able to implicate the hands serving her coffee in a murderous plot against schoolchildren.

In his study of the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians in Israeli fiction, David C. Jacobson notes a theme that pervades "Heder al Ha-Gag," "When Palestinians attempt to transcend their socially inferior role and exert power over Israelis…Israelis, in response, develop feelings of vulnerability; this process leads to a destabilization of the status quo in Israeli-Palestinian relations which opens up the possibility of some intimacy between members of these enemy people."[89] The Builder acknowledges that part of her laughs along with Hassan, Salah and Ahmad. The side of herself that she hides from her readers, the face of warmth that begins to emanate toward the Arabs at her breakfast table, reflects a change in status quo. A bond of equal footing between two peoples sharing coffee (the more expedient version of breaking bread – a genre of peacemaking imagery) begins to form, controverting the cultural norm that insists they must be at war. However, the Builder's intense vulnerability swallows the potential for intimacy.

Jacobson argues that often it is the Palestinians, feeling slighted by Israelis, who dissolve the incipient intimacy.[90] Liebrecht is aware of this dynamic, no doubt, and crafts a character so burdened by her own loneliness, that her inclination to feel affronted

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[89] David C. Jacobson, "Intimate Relations Between Israelis and Palestinians in Fiction by Israeli Women Writers," *Shofar*, pp. 35-6.

[90] David C. Jacobson, "Intimate Relations Between Israelis and Palestinians in Fiction by Israeli Women Writers," p. 36.

surpasses even that of the downtrodden Arabs. Ultimately, Hassan does feel spurned by the Builder, and disappears suddenly never to return, leaving her confused and personally wounded. But it is the Builder who thirsts for connection even more deeply than the struggling laborers—they have each other, after all—and then recoils abruptly from camaraderie. A scene structured to be prosaic—adults fueling up on coffee before the workday—is an inviting reconciliation between arch rivals, a menacing confrontation with rogue criminals, and a titillating encounter between exotic strangers. The hands serving her might be tainted with terrorism, reflecting an aggressive, racial dimension to the Builder's prejudice.

Woven throughout the short story is the Builder's belief that the bodies of the Arabs are capable of transmitting filth and terror. After laborers change in her bathroom to prepare for a family wedding, helping themselves to her husband's cologne and using her towels, she reacts as if they've brought plague.

> ובתנועות תזזית, כבטירוף, אספה את כל המגבות והטילה, מסבה ראשה בתחושת קבס, לתוך תוף מכונת הכביסה, והשליכה את הסבון החדש לסלסלת האשפה, והחלה ממרקת את הברזים ואת הכיור ומקרצפת בחומר חיטוי את הרצפה שעליה דרכו כפותיהם היחפות.[91]

> With jerky movements, like a madwoman, she gathered the towels and threw them all, averting her head with a bilious sensation, into the washing machine, throwing the new soap into the garbage pail. She began polishing the faucets and sink and scouring with disinfectant the floor which their bare feet had trod on.[92]

The use of חומר חיטוי ("disinfectant") exposes her fear-laced racism. The word *hitui,* "disinfection," shares its root with *het,* חטא, "sin." While she scrubs the surfaces clean of

[91] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 55.
[92] Savyon Liebrecht, "A Room on the Roof," *Apples from the Desert,* Jeffrey M. Green, trans. p. 55.

their pestilence, the Builder also eradicates the traces of her sinful overtures toward them. The Arabs can never truly be clean; they are contaminated. The frantic fit of sterilization that takes place in the wake of their departure reminds readers that the Builder is captive to bias that can never be deracinated. Even when the laborers are cleaning up in her bathroom, she is gripped by a sudden fear that they are assembling weapons behind the locked door, preparing to kidnap her and Udi.[93] For all the fleeting moments of almost-amity between the Builder and Hassan—when they share coffee, when he soothes Udi's crying, when he speaks to her about his family and his studies—her suspicion will always overwhelm her sympathy.

Jacobson asserts that as a relationship builds between Israeli characters and Palestinians, the Israeli cedes some of her socially endorsed power over the Palestinian and experiences moments of feeling weaker, even at times to the point of humiliation.[94] Humiliation underscores powerlessness. Unlike embarrassment, which we bring upon ourselves and can be often be recast with humor, humiliation is traumatic and triggered by others. "Humiliation involves abasement of pride and dignity, it is the public failure of one's status claims."[95] Interestingly, the varied the consequences of humiliation—fear, trauma, flashbacks, sleeplessness, suspicion, paranoia, social isolation—overlap with those of loneliness. How much more pronounced must the Builder's anxieties be when compounded with public failure?

The Builder constantly senses the gaze of the Arab workers: Hassan raises his eyes to her like a beaten dog, Salah steals furtive glances at her "as though hatching a

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[93] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 52–53.
[94] Ibid., p 40.
[95] Neel Burton, "The Psychology of Humiliation," *Psychology Today*, 24 Aug 2017.

foul plot in his mind" (כאילו כבר נרקמת מזימה בראשו), Salah smiles directly at her, "bearing his yellow teeth like the fangs of a beast" (חושף שיניים צהובות כניבי חיה), and Muhammad, the laborer who replaces Hassan, ogles her openly (סוקר אותה גלויות).[96] The Builder exists in a paradigm where she is on display, helpless to hide. As noted in the opening of the story, she shares with the Arabs the restlessness of being "someone under eyes constantly prying but always unseen" (תחת עיניים בוחנות תמידית, ותמידית סמויות מן העין).[97] In other words, like Palestinians in Israel, her defenselessness is on display, and her agency is disregarded.

Sensing that so much unwanted attention is directed at her, the Builder is hypersensitive to social dynamics that shift power between her and the workers. The humiliation described by Jacobson impacts the Builder on two critical levels. There is injury to her ego as an Israeli woman engaged in the liberating act of building a room of her own. When men, and Arab men no less, gawk at her as a sexual object, they diminish the seriousness of her project. Her feminist unfettering is reduced by their lascivious leering, abasing her role as forewoman and creator. Second, as a mother alone in the house with her child, and no husband nearby, she feels humiliation in her exhausting need for vigilance. As the Builder conjures up the many ways these men can harm or violate her—planting bombs down the street or building weapons in her bathroom, slaughtering Udi or taking them hostage, or pushing her off the roof, or stealing her jewels—she must confront that fact that she is not nearly as confident or secure as she wants to believe. This is why she consistently invokes male sources of power like the foreman David, the

[96] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 46, 59.
[97] Ibid., p. 42.

police, and the courts. It turns out that there is nothing liberating in her desire to create her own space – pursuing a construction project alone in her house ultimately underscores how imprisoned she is in her defenseless female body.

At the conclusion of "Heder al Ha-Gag," there is a room on the roof, but the cost of building it remains invisible, hidden or imprisoned within the Builder's memories. Yoel returns to Israel from his stint in America and the Builder, though tormented by flashbacks from her time alone—Muhammad staring at her with hatred (מביט בה בשנאה), Hassan's clenched fists (ידיו המתאגרפות של חסאן)[98]—is outwardly nonchalant, telling him they were fairly decent ("הם היו די בסדר")[99]. No longer the only adult in the house, the Builder may appear less socially isolated, but readers know her loneliness remains profound. The frantic shifts in her emotional state do not cease now that Yoel is home. As she tells him of Hassan's warm treatment of Udi, she notices "a softness flowing into her voice" (הבחינה ברכות הזורמת בקולה), and immediately changes her tone, adding volume and stridency, "But once they made some trouble about the money and tried to trick me by putting in iron rods that were too thin. Arabs, you know…" (אבל פעם עשו גם קצת בעיות" בעניין הכסף וניסו לרמות אותי ושמו ברזלים דקים מדי בעמודים. ערבים, אתה יודע...")[100] The very last line of the short story betrays the same turbulence as every interaction preceding it. Nothing has evolved in her, nothing has changed vis-à-vis the Arabs; there is no new understanding. And we know by Liebrecht's use of the ellipsis that we should have anticipated this ending, we should *know*.

[98] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 61.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.

"A Room on the Roof" is the story of a lonely woman who endeavors to defy cultural norms in search of connection. Invoking Virginia Woolf's trope of "a room of one's own," Liebrecht frames the construction project as an attempt at feminist empowerment and liberation, the creation of a space above the fray—on the roof—where the protagonist can rise above the petty conflicts dominating the ground floor of her home, her body, and her country. She even enlists the help of Arabs as co-creators, who can serve as partners in the realization of her dream. But such a project, we know from the start, is doomed. The story is a flashback, saturated with regret, about a room that never should have been built, or that having been built, stands less for development than retrenchment, less for freedom than imprisonment within an inexorable status quo. A symbol of growth and hope in the mind of a socially isolated woman desperate for relationship, is in reality, a painful reminder of a social, cultural and political reality that reinforces her sequestration and physical vulnerability, as well as that of the Arab men who built it. To tear down the room would be to concede that Yoel was right, and that she had enough space to begin with - an untenable solution for a woman who felt the addition was as destined as a germinating fetus (כביצית שחיבקה את הזרע ועכשיו בכוחה הדבר).[101] Ultimately, the room is erected, not as a monument of cross-cultural understanding and collaboration, but as a cenotaph to the illusions of progress dashed during its construction.

[101] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 43.

Apples from the Desert – תפוחים מן המדבר

In "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar" ("Apples from the Desert") Liebrecht spins a different tale about Israeli female loneliness, one in which the protagonist—also a mother pursuing a goal independently—*succeeds* in surmounting the limits of her social isolation to build meaningful connections with others. Readers follow Victoria Abravanel on her journey from the Orthodox neighborhood Sha'arei Hesed in central Jerusalem to retrieve her defiant daughter from Neve Midbar, a secular kibbutz in the middle of the Negev Desert. There are many intentional contrasting elements between "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar" and "Heder al Ha-Gag," and primary among them is the naming of our lead figure. Unlike the Builder, whose story reinforces stringent boundaries around women and Arabs in Israeli society that leave them feeling limited, unknown and invisible, Victoria Abravanel undergoes an awakening that enables her, antithetically, to claim more "room" for herself as a religious woman and as a mother.

Names

Liebrecht names the protagonist in explicit contrast to her traditional context. Her first name, Victoria, evokes the British monarchy as well as the rigid and repressed social mores of the Victorian era. Her surname, Abravanel, denotes her proud Sephardic roots; she is likely the scion of a scholarly family. These choices suggest Liebrecht's diasporic characterization of this woman, and hint that the story will expose the ways in which she is physically and socially displaced from her community in Sha'arei Hesed. Whereas the drama of "A Room on the Roof" happens in a circumscribed, overtly domestic realm, with clear boundaries, "Apples from the Desert" is a story that embraces movement. The

opening sentence conveys that Victoria has left the familiar for the untrodden landscape of the desert. "All the way from the Orthodox quarter of Sha'arei Hesed in Jerusalem to the great stretch of sand where the driver called out 'Neve Midbar' and searched for her in his rearview mirror, Victoria Abravanel—her heart pounding and her fists clenched—had only one thing on her mind" (כל הדרך משכנות שערי חסד בירושלים ועד משטח החול הגדול שם הכריז הנהג "נווה מדבר", וחיפש אותה במראה שמולו, היתה ויקטוריה אברבאנל—לבה סוער בה ואגרופיה קשים—נתונה בעניין אחד).[102] The Hebrew offers a level of double-entendre undetectable in the English. Victoria is leaving the "Gates of Loving-Kindness" (שערי חסד) to travel to the "stretch of sand" (משטח החול) known as Neve Midbar. The word *chol* ("sand") also means secular or profane and often appears in contrast to the word *kadosh* ("holy"). In addition, *chol* is also the abbreviation for *chutz la'aretz* ("abroad") and, therefore, what appears in English as a symbolic mound of sand in the desert, actually represents a distance far away, from the perceived "holiness" guarded by Sha'arei Hesed to the foreign profaneness of Neve Midbar.

Victoria's pounding heart and clenched fists convey the urgency of her mission and her concomitant nerves. She travels eight hours from home to the yellowing landscape—a panorama lit with the color of hope—spread out before her (נוף ההולך ומצהיב ומשתטח מול עיניה) with an unclear strategy.[103] Should she confront her rebellious daughter, Rivka, who, six months prior, left Sha'arei Hesed to live on a secular kibbutz, and now (according to Victoria's sister, Sarah) cohabits with a man? Will she "rescue" her? Cut her off? Victoria's mind is not made up; she spends the entire bus trip pondering

[102] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," *תפוחים מן המדבר*, 69.
[103] Ibid.

how she will behave when she is face to face with Rivka (שמונה שעות שעשתה בדרכים הפכה במוחה איך תנהג כשתבוא עם בתה פנים אל פנים).[104] Again, the Hebrew is telling. The phrase "פנים אל פנים" ("face to face") evokes the story of Jacob in Genesis.

Before he reunites with his estranged brother, Esau, Jacob wrestles with an unnamed man. Neither person prevails against the other and as dawn breaks, Jacob demands the man bless him before leaving. The man solicits Jacob's name and when he responds, "Jacob," the man further replies, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings divine and human, and have prevailed" (Gen 32:29).[105] Jacob seeks to know the name of the man who blesses him, but he refuses to divulge, and departs. Thereafter, Jacob names the site of this wrestling match Peniel meaning, "I have seen a divine being face to face, yet my life has been preserved" (Gen 31:31).[106] Moses also confronts the Divine *panim el panim* in the tent of meeting in the desert, a moment of revelation that Exodus compares to the intimacy of a man speaking to his friend.[107]

Liebrecht inserts a key biblical phrase into Victoria's bus musings to invoke a trope of sacred and uncertain encounter. Victoria does not know what to expect when she sees Rivka in the desert, much as Jacob does not know how his brother Esau will treat him. Jacob prepares to meet Esau with fear and trembling, sending gifts to placate him and directing his family and possessions away from camp across the Jabbok river.[108] So too, Victoria approaches Neve Midbar wondering whether Rivka will throw her out (מה

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[104] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," *תפוחים מן המדבר*, 69.
[105] לא יעקב יאמר עוד שמך כי אם־ישראל כי־שרית עם־אלהים ועם אנשים ותוכל
[106] כי־ראיתי אלהים *פנים אל פנים* ותנצל נפשי
[107] כאשר ידבר איש אל-רעהו (Ex 33:11)
[108] Gen 32:14-23

?אם תהפוך לה רבקה גבה ותרגשנה), if the man Rivka lives with will strike her (ומה אם ירים
?עליה הבחור ידו להכותה), if she'll spend the night locked out of their home (ואיך תעשה את
?הלילה אם ינעלו דלתם מולה).[109] Like Jacob, she prepares for the worst, and like Jacob, she will be greeted with a humbling degree of love and acceptance. Like Moses, she will speak to her daughter as never before, like a friend.[110] Liebrecht's use of the phrase *panim el panim*, alerts readers to this likely arc and warns them that Victoria's anxiety is unwarranted.

While Victoria is the paradigm of tradition in "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar," seeking to return her wayward child to the Orthodox environment and way of life she left behind, it is her daughter who has the traditional name of our second-generation matriarch, Rivka. Rivka is the first and one of the only Israelite women to choose her own destiny. Like Rivka Abravanel, Rivka bat Bethuel leaves home to build her adult life in a new land. When consulted by her family about departing with Abraham's servant (to marry Isaac), she responds, "*Elech*" ("I will go").[111] Biblical Rivka is the quintessence of graciousness—she provides water for Abraham's servant and his camels, a physically taxing demonstration of hospitality[112]--and she and Isaac are the first Israelite couple to demonstrate marital love.[113] The Torah employs the verb *to go* seven times highlighting Rivka's active character, and her behavior is depicted by a series of action verbs—she runs, draws water, fills jars, and rides a camel—that emphasize her individuality and

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[109] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 70.
[110] ישבה ויקטוריה עם בתה רבקה ודיברה עמה כאשר לא דיברה עם ילדיה מעודה. Ibid, p. 71.
[111] התלכי עם־האיש הזה (Gen 24:58)
[112] Gen 24:17-20
[113] ויבאה יצחק האהלה שרה אמו ויקח את־רבקה ותהי־לו לאשה ויאהבה וינחם יצחק אחרי אמו Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebekah as his wife. Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death (Gen 24:67).

vitality.[114] In choosing the name Rivka, therefore, Liebrecht conveys to her readers that Victoria's daughter is assertive and strong[115], that her choice to leave home is virtuous, that the uncertainty of the far off desert holds the prospect of love and legacy, and that she will welcome her mother with magnanimity.

And Rivka is not the only character with a traditional name. Victoria is surrounded by women who evoke the Israelite matriarchs. Her sister, Sara, is the one who alerts her to the news that Rivka is living with a man, prompting Victoria to leave home for the first time in four years.[116] Sara has a close relationship with her niece, demonstrated by the confidences Rivka shares with her. It is Sara who knows that Rivka met her current boyfriend, Dov, two years prior when he visited her class to recruit Orthodox girls to the military, and thereafter began writing to her.[117] Rivka tells her mother that she misses "Aunt Sara's laugh." And it is Sara or "Sarike," with whom Victoria will confer when she returns from her errand without her daughter in tow. Sara, like her namesake, is the *materfamilias*. While she cares about upholding social mores—and thus alerts Victoria to Rivka's status in the desert—she is also a confidant and reliable fixture of female support for both women. In the Bible, it is Rivka who comforts

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[114] Carol Meyers, "Rebekah: Bible" *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, 20 Mar 2009.

[115] When Victoria first meets Rivka in "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar" her appearance evokes an image that could apply to a modern version of her biblical namesake. "The girl put down the laundry basket she was carrying and ran to her, her head thrust forward and her eyes weeping…the frayed trousers with patches on the back, and the shoes spotted with chicken droppings" והנערה הניחה מידה סל כביסה שהיתה נושאת ורצה לקראתה, וכבר היה ראשה מחוץ כנגדה ועיניה בוכות מעצמן...והמכנסיים שטלאי באחוריהם וחוטים נסרחים בשוליהם, והנעלים המרובבות לשלשת. סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 70.

[116] Ibid.

[117] כבר נודע לה מפי אחותה שרה המבקרת את אחייניתה כל ראשית חודש: בת שש–עשרה היתה כשהכירה. קצין בצבא היה והביאוהו בפני הבנות להסביר על שירות בנות דתיות בצבא...מכתבים היה מוסר לה בעורמה, בידי חבר, גם כשחזר לקיבוצו. Ibid., p. 69.

Isaac in the wake of his mother, Sara's death (Gen 24:67). In "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar," Victoria sits somewhere between these two generations, finding comfort in the reality of her daughter, Rivka's, happiness, and in the sororal support of Sara.

Dov or, more affectionately, Dubi, is named for the bipolar perceptions of Victoria and Rivka. To our protagonist, he is a threatening predator, a bruin, whose slightest attempt at affection is misconstrued as an attack. To Rivka, he is a teddy bear, a soft, worn-in symbol of comfort, familiarity and childishness. Victoria calls Dubi, "הענק הבהיר" ("the fair-haired giant")[118] and criticizes his name, "מה זה דובי, איזה מין שם זה?" ("What's this 'Dubi'? What kind of name is that?"),[119] betraying the cultural prejudices between Ashkenazic Jews, who name children after animals and dead relatives, and Sephardic Jews, who name after the living.[120] Ironically, while Dov seems more menacing in Victoria's eyes, he also receives the brunt of her anger; he provokes the protective "mama bear." For Rivka, Dubi triggers joy and laughter, and he illumines her beauty. The principle male character in this story has a genderless name, conveying the liminal space he occupies as a submissive partner to Rivka ("She doesn't want to be my wife")[121] and a threat to rigid social order ("there was a fuss about letting people from the army come and poison young girls' hearts, but the venom had already worked on Rivka").[122]

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[118] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 70.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Dubi clarifies that he is named after his Grandfather, who was murdered by the Nazis. Ibid. "זה דב על שם אבא של אמי. הגרמנים הרגו אותו במלחמה."
[121] Ibid. היא לא רוצה להיות אשתי.
[122] Ibid., p. 69. קמה צעקה על שהניחו לאנשי הצבא לבוא ולהרעיל את לב הבנות, אלא שברבקה כבר נפל רבב.

Liebrecht also endows place names with layers of meaning. Sha'arei Hesed, the neighborhood whence Victoria travels, is purposefully opaque. The name translates roughly to "Gates of Loving-Kindness" and the reader wonders whether the *hesed* is carefully guarded inside the gates, or, as the story suggests, lies beyond them. Beersheva marks the point on the map where Victoria's rage toward her daughter attenuates and she vacillates toward tenderness. "The further Victoria got from Beersheva, the more her heroic spirit deserted her and the pictures in her imagination made her sigh" (ככל שהלכה ורחקה מבאר–שבע החלה רוח הגבורה נוטשת אותה, ומראות שראתה בדמיונה הוציאו אנחה מפיה).[123] The word באר means "well" and Beersheva is the sight of numerous biblical conflicts and contracts involving our patriarchs and matriarchs.

After their expulsion from Abraham and Sarah's house, Hagar and Ishmael wander in the desert. It is במדבר באר שבע that they run of out of water and Hagar distances herself from her son, so as not to see him expire of dehydration. But God intervenes and provides a well to sustain them.[124] Abraham digs wells in Beersheva, but must confront Abimelech, king of the Philistines, when his servants seize them. After resolving the conflict, Abimelech and Abraham make a pact and dwell peacefully together.[125] Isaac too, digs wells in Beersheva, just as his father had, and ratifies a treaty asserting his rights to the water. He names the well in Beersheva שִׁבְעָה after swearing and oath (ישבעו) with Abimelech and the Philistines, and this is the etiological explanation for the place-name Beersheva.[126]

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[123] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 70.
[124] Gen 21:14-20
[125] Gen 21:25-34
[126] Gen 26:23-33

Liebrecht chooses Beersheva as the location of Victoria's emotional tide-turning because its symbolism in the Israeli (and Israelite) consciousness is so complex. Education Professor Robert T. Hyman enumerates the many functions of wells in Tanakh: a resource for physical survival, emotional survival, the workplace of young women who watered flocks, and thus a frequent type-scene for marital coupling, the source of contention between nations vying for control of natural resources and alternatively, a locus of cooperation, a landmark, a hiding place, a metaphor, and a place of revelation.[127] For Victoria, Beersheva marks a place of self-awareness and contention; she notices the internal conflict brewing between her desire to fulfill the task of retrieving and disciplining her daughter, and the swelling sympathy that recognizes Rivka's independence and autonomy.

Victoria's destination in "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar" is a kibbutz called Neve Midbar. The name means "oasis," which, like a well, offers sustenance and relief, and also connotes peace and security. Rivka has left "Gates of Loving-Kindness" to live in "Oasis," and the reader senses that there is infinitely more freedom outside the gates, in the middle of the desert, than within them. The drama of the story revolves around Victoria realizing that her daughter is (and maybe in another life, even she would be) better suited to life outside the restrictive gates of Sha'arei Hesed.

Not to be overlooked is the title of Liebrecht's story "Apples from the Desert," which intrigues readers with its aura of miracle. We know that apples do not grow in deserts and thus brace ourselves for the unexpected, and even the remarkable.

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[127] Robert T. Hyman, "Multiple Functions of Wells in Tanakh" *Jewish Bible Quarterly.*

Story Structure

The title is also the beginning of our short story, and just as Liebrecht stuffs names and titles full of meaning, she also communicates through the story's structure. "Apples from the Desert" is telling in form, especially in contrast to "A Room on the Roof." "Heder al Ha-Gag" begins at the end; the nameless protagonist tells her story from the perch of having "survived" her building experiment with the Arabs. Readers know instantly, that her tale will not evince progress, but only thwarted growth. On the contrary, "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar" is a journey narrative. While Victoria does return to her starting place in Sha'arei Hesed, she is transformed during her absence. Her story has no foregone conclusion, and readers must travel with her to the Negev to know how the drama unfolds.

On the most basic symbolic level, the desert in Jewish tradition is a liminal space between slavery and freedom. It boasts the release from bondage, but lacks the security and structure of the Promised Land. The Book of Numbers known as במדבר ("In the Desert") is about "taking the Egypt out of the Israelites" or dismantling the psychology of enslavement that had rooted itself in the Israelites over generations.[128] In her dissertation on the trope of women's mobility in contemporary Arab women's literary narratives, Banan Al-Daraiseh encapsulates the deeper significance of this genre, and it is equally applicable to Israeli literature:

> Literary representations of the trope of journey demonstrate how travel creates a geographic in-between space for the protagonists that allows them to contest essentialized views of their identities and narrate their own individual, hybrid, cross-cultural, and transnational identities that

[128] Irwin Kula, "Through the Wilderness," *my Jewish Learning*. Accessed 18 Dec 2017. https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/through-the-wilderness/.

> continually undergo transformation and change…the mobility, travel experiences, journeys, and physical displacement the author/protagonists go through serve as tropes of female agency: movement allows them to map personal geographies and exist in a liminal space of their own construction that in turn enables them to create individual narratives that counter fixed…and traditional local patriarchal discourses that present them at different historical moments as speechless, subaltern, subservient, and stripped of their agency.[129]

Al-Daraiseh highlights a few of the themes present in "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar," including the exploration of female agency and the liminal space of identity between Orthodoxy and secularity. "Apples from the Desert" begins as a mother's mission to seize her daughter's agency, but propitiously results in the empowerment of them both. In Victoria's recognition of Rivka's thriving independence, she asserts a modicum of her own.

Victoria begins her journey boarding and alighting from four buses, and nervously wrapping and adjusting her kerchief before resolving to travel to Neve Midbar (ארבע פעמים ירדה ועלתה באוטובוסים הבאים אל התחנות ויוצאים מהן, שוב ושוב התירה את מטפחת השבת שהתפרעה ברוח ועטפה בה את ראשה).[130] She is the quintessence of ambivalence as she prepares to spend a night in the desert with her daughter. When she finally settles onto a bus that will depart Jerusalem, she pulls out a snack, pronounces the prescribed blessings and consumes them: bread and an apple with a rotten core (העלתה מכיס תיק הרשת שלה לחם בנייר חום ותפוח שלבו רע).[131] Liebrecht uses the kerchief and apple as leitmotifs throughout her pithy story. The kerchief that Victoria ceaselessly alters at the beginning of her mission, is an emblem of *tzniut* (female modesty) and physical boundaries. Underneath it

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[129] Banan Al-Daraiseh (2007), "The Journey Narrative: The Trope of Women's Mobility and Travel in Contemporary Arab Women's Literary Narratives" PhD diss., p. 2.
[130] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 69.
[131] Ibid.

lies the forbidden—a married woman's hair, akin to the tree of knowledge—and beyond it is a world of bodies tightly regulated. The kerchief transforms within the story into plastic sheets that ensure "apple modesty," preserving cold air for the nascent desert fruit, and keeping the heat at bay. That same malleable symbol of covering and protection returns in Victoria's dream when a man approaches a white curtain, moves it aside and sees the trees of the Garden of Eden.

Victoria's fantasy weaves itself out of two occurrences the previous day: Dubi excitedly sharing his descriptions of his desert orchard, and her memory as a fifteen-year-old of a wordless flirtation through the *mehitza* at synagogue with Moshe Elkayam, the goldsmith's son, that she could never pursue. Dubi describes the special apple trees bearing fruit in the summer "like a tree in the Garden of Eden" (והוא מניב פירות כעץ גן עדן).[132] In her sleep, Victoria envisions a man from behind who approaches a white curtain and, drawing it aside, sees the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge planted in cans of organic fertilizer (ובחלומה איש ניגש אל וילונות לבנים והיא רואה אותו מגבו. מסיט האיש את הוילון ועצי גן עדן לפניו: עץ החיים ועץ הדעת ועצים נחמדי מראה נתונים בפחיות של זבל אורגני).[133] Later in her dream, this man turns out to be Moshe Elkayam. The purpose of the white curtain in Victoria's dream is less explicit than the plastic sheets, but the reader knows that modesty is still very much at play. The plastic sheets and the curtain, akin to the *mehitza* of Victoria's adolescence, are barriers against heat. For the apples that heat is literal—they can only grow in the cold—but for human beings that heat is physical intimacy,

[132] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 73.
[133] Ibid., p. 74.

desire and other aspects of the "forbidden." The kerchief that Victoria wraps around her hair also shares in this vocabulary of modest symbolism.

Liebrecht invokes Eden twice in "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar" to suggest that Victoria, like Eve, harbors a desire for knowledge, in this case, knowledge of true love and passion, which she forwent with Moshe Elkayam, and experiences vicariously for the first time through Rivka and Dubi. As Al-Daraiseh points out, Victoria's physical displacement enables her to create her own narrative, conjured out of memories from her youth that are prompted by witnessing this pure, uninhibited desert love. Dubi is the embodiment of a teddy bear: he hugs readily, he calls Victoria "mother," displaying a desire to connect with her, and he openly professes his wish to marry Rivka. Victoria's love for Moshe was silent, but just as powerful. As she recalls their furtive glances in shul and the way she pushed up against the wooden lattice of the women's section to see his hands, the reader detects a lust just as fervent as Dubi's for Rivka, only quieter and more subdued because of the traditional context in which it bloomed.[134] David Mesher argues that Liebrecht's female protagonists can only experience qualified success in her stories because they are not exploring new lives, but revisiting old ones.[135] While Al-Daraiseh posits the opportunity, in journeys like Victoria's, to extricate oneself from the subservient role imposed by the local, patriarchal discourse of "home," Mesher limns the extent to which reinvention is possible. Victoria finds a liberating peace in reckoning

[134] בת חמש–עשרה היתה. בשבתות בבית הכנסת היתה מחליפה מבטים עם משה אלקיים בן הצורף, ואחר כובשת עיניה ברצפה. בעזרת נשים היתה נדחקת אל שבכת העץ לראות את ידיו ההופכות בתוכן כסף וזהב ואבנים טובים. דבר קם ביניהם ללא אומר. סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 72.

[135] D. Mesher, "The Malamud Factor: Recent Jewish Short Fiction," *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought*, p. 125.

with her past and accepting her daughter's present, but she still returns home to the same, loveless marriage.

The final appearance of the kerchief, closes the loop on the leitmotifs of desire and boundary. On her way home from the Negev, as the mountains of Jerusalem appear in the distance, Victoria resolves how to share the news of her daughter's new life with her family:

> עם אחותה, הקוראת מחשבותיה, לא תכביר סוד. תמשוך המטפחת הקשורה לראשה ותקרב פיה לאוזן אחותה כדרך שעשו בהיותן ילדות, ותאמר לא בלחישה: "שריקה, את חיינו הוצאנו לבד, את בלי ואני עם חופה וקידושין. בתי הקטנה לימדה אותי דבר. ואנחנו, זוכרת, איך חשבנו אותה קצת מפגרת, לא עלינו? איך הייתי בוכה עליה? לא חן ולא הדר ולא בינה ולא כשרון וגובה של עוג מלך הבשן...ותראי אותה היום....חלב ודבש. וחכמה גם כן. וכל הזמן צוחקת. ואולי, בעזרת השם, עוד נראה ממנה נחת.[136]

> From her sister, who could read her mind, she wouldn't keep a secret. She'd pull her kerchief aside, put her mouth up to her ear, like when they were children, and whisper, "Sarike, we've spent our lives alone, you without a husband, and me with one. My little daughter taught me something. And us, remember how we thought she was a bit backward, God forbid. How I used to cry over her? No beauty, no grace, no intelligence or talent, and as tall as Og, King of Bashan…Just look at her now….Milk and honey. Smart, too. And laughing all the time. Maybe, with God's help, we'll see joy from her."[137]

The kerchief is drawn back in this final scene, allowing for a redemptive intimacy between Victoria and her sister. With the kerchief barrier removed, Victoria can confide in Sarah as she did when they were children, and reveal all the knowledge she has gleaned from her foray into the desert. Victoria strips away the kerchief from her sister's ear to share her newfound pride in and hope for her daughter, and the reader remembers Adam and Eve's revelatory gaze after their first bites of the apple: ותפקחנה עיני שניהם וידעו

[136] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 74.
[137] Savyon Liebrecht, "Apples from the Desert," Barbara Harshav, trans., p. 72.

כי עירמם הם ("Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked" Gen 3:7). Adam and Eve taste fruit from the Tree of Knowledge and, recognizing their nakedness, sew loincloths to cover themselves. In "Apples from the Desert," however, Victoria's discovery involves an uncovering. By removing herself from the traditional domain of Sha'arei Hesed and exposing herself to the fresh orientation of a "geographic in-between space" (in Al-Daraiseh's language), Victoria sees the error of her previous assumptions about her daughter. She now recognizes Rivka's beauty, grace, intelligence and talent. People from the kibbutz approach her to *kvell* about her daughter, leading her in turn to swell with pride.[138] In visiting the desert, Victoria concludes that Rivka has found her Promised Land; she is *chalav ud'vash*, milk and honey and laughter.

The kerchief's ultimate representation, therefore, is notable for its removal, a motion of unveiling that allows for Victoria to more readily detect and claim the truth. A radical transformation occurs in Victoria's vision of Rivka. Only by "lifting the veil," as it were, and changing her context away from Sha'arei Hesed could she find the loving-kindness that had eluded her and her daughter while inside the confines of her "gated" home community. And while we know that the kerchief will eventually be replaced, and that Victoria will resume a regimented life inside her neighborhood, she carries a new kind of wisdom that cannot now be unlearned; the love that eluded her now brims in Rivka's life. She has no words to describe Dubi's eyes on her daughter's face, "איך תתאר...את עיני הבחור בפני בתה?"[139] Instead of dragging her daughter back to Jerusalem by

[138] "'את אמא של רבקה? כל הכבוד שיש לך בת כזאת.' ולבה תפח בה פתאום." סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 73.
[139] Ibid., p. 74.

her hair, or shrieking like a mourner about the disgrace she brought down on their noble family,[140] Victoria thanks God for Rivka's joy.[141] The burden of pain and shame evaporates in the dry desert. While Mesher's contention is correct—Victoria's success as a protagonist is limited because she must live out her days in a loveless marriage—so too is Al Daraiseh's. Victoria creates a hybrid, cross-cultural identity that can brook a secular daughter in the desert, living unmarried with a man who grows miraculous apples.

Apples, too, are a powerful leitmotif in "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar." Their featured role in the title of the story suggests to readers that something anomalous will transpire. Apples, readers know (and the story reiterates), naturally thrive in cold temperatures. The desert is an unlikely home for an apple orchard. The theme of miracles, explored later in this chapter, bespeaks one significant structural difference between "Apples from the Desert" from "A Room on the Roof." No miracles occur in "Heder al Ha-Gag," which begins where it ends, from the vantage point of disillusioned relief. The nameless protagonist's experiment in female autonomy and Arab-Israeli creative collaboration goes painfully awry, leaving her stalked in her dreams by the Arab laborers she spurned, and fearful of treading on her roof after dark should they pop up and scare her.[142] In stark contrast, "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar" is a story about the wonder of progress.

Victoria, a protagonist convinced of her own victimization at the hands of her auto-emancipated daughter, Rivka—"the disgrace that Rivka had brought down on their

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[140] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 69.

[141] טוב לה שם, תודה לאל. Ibid., p. 75

[142] בחלומותיה עוד פקדו אותה לעתים, מתקרבים אליה רבה מדי...היתה מדירה עצמה מן הגג בשעות החשכה, חוששת שיגיחו מעבר לעציצים הגבוהים. סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," *תפוחים מן המדבר*,42.

noble family" (חרפת עולם שתביא על משפחתם האצילה)[143] —travels to the desert to recapture her, and force her back into the mold of their traditional community. Liebrecht hints in the second sentence of the story, however, that Victoria's game plan has no potential for success, at least not in terms of her initial goal; as she departs the Jerusalem bus station, she blesses and then consumes bread and, notably, an apple with a rotten core (תפוח שלבו רע).[144] The *lev*, the heart (or core), of the apple has gone bad, foreshadowing the death of a certain kind of mindset.

Liebrecht has Victoria ingest this decayed piece of fruit as she leaves Jerusalem, imbuing her snack with the power of a cleansing ritual. As she departs a context that Al-Daraiseh calls "traditional, local, patriarchal," and in which she, as a woman, is classified as "speechless, subaltern, subservient, and stripped of their agency," Victoria eliminates the rotten apple by eating it. She is like Eve, who consumes the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge only to have her eyes opened to her nakedness. But Liebrecht invokes the trope of a woman eating an apple to contend that the fruit from Sha'arei Hesed is rotten, arousing a specious kind of self-awareness in those who consume it. What appears on the surface, therefore, as a journey into the desert to find and rescue a wayward daughter, whose heart, like a rotten apple, has been poisoned by a young soldier(להרעיל את לב הבנות)[145] , becomes a pilgrimage in search of fresh fruit, the kind that authentically enlightens those who eat it.

When apples appear again in the story, Victoria has already recognized that her daughter is thriving in the desert. She knows she will not drag her back to Jerusalem by

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[143] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 69.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.

her hair (ועם זאת כבר ידעה: בשערותיה לא תביא את בתה לירושלים).[146] Liebrecht reintroduces the apples after a moment of stark disabusal. Dubi, the soldier that "poisoned" Rivka and lured her into the desert to share his bed, desperately wants to marry her. He insists on calling Victoria *Ima* to accentuate his desire to make their union official. The "fair-haired giant" who rose his hand to strike Victoria in her paranoid imagination, turns out in fact to be a lovable teddy bear who draws out Rivka's natural beauty (טוב מראה פני בתה), and sparkle, (מאז שהיתה ילדה לא ראתה ברק כזה בעיניה).[147] Only after this revelation that Dubi is a good man with noble intentions, and that Rivka has a better life on the secular kibbutz than she ever could have built inside Sha'arei Hesed, does Victoria learn about Dubi's apple orchard. The miracle of Rivka's transformation is symbolically complemented by the miracle apples from the Nevada desert "that grow into trees with little roots and sometimes produce fruit in the summer like a tree in the Garden of Eden" (והוא צומח לעץ בגובה תינוק ששורשיו קטנים ולפעמים פריחת קיץ לו, והוא מניב פירות כעץ גן עדן).[148]

Rivka is the miracle apple who was rotting inside Sha'arei Hesed and blooms wondrously in the desert. Victoria arrives in Neve Midbar, shell-shocked by the change in landscape. "How could you leave the pure air and the beautiful mountains of Jerusalem – and come here?" (איך אפשר לעזוב את אוויר ירושלים הטהור והריה היפים – ולבוא הנה?).[149] How could her apple fall so far from her tree? Victoria is quick to recognize that her daughter's metamorphosis results from her change in socio-geographic context, from the shtetl to the kibbutz, from the city to the "organic soil" of the desert in which she is now

[146] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 72.
[147] Ibid., p. 71.
[148] Ibid., pp. 72-3.
[149] Ibid., p. 70.

planted. In Jerusalem, Rivka had neither grace nor beauty, even her identity was misunderstood and she was frequently mistaken for a boy. Her own father, ignorant of her worth and personality, tries to marry her off to a pale *yeshiva-boher* as if she is damaged goods. But on the kibbutz, she is a beloved member of the community, the "apple" of Dubi's eye, and a thriving beauty, "Milk and honey. Smart, too. And laughing all the time."[150]

The apples subsequently turn up in Victoria's dream about the Garden of Eden. The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge are apple trees laden with fruit, but when the unknown man approaches the tree, the fruit rolls into his hands and turns into precious stones of gold and silver. Each reader can make meaning from the symbolism of this dream, but one clear point is that the apples must be left on the tree to remain themselves. Plucked from their branches, they turn to stone, and so too will Rivka if she is forced to return to Jerusalem. Simultaneously, Victoria's dream is about her unconsummated love affair with Moshe Elkayam. The apples, a symbol for her daughter, cannot exist in a world where she pursues Moshe. Had she married him, there would be no Rivka. Victoria's loveless marriage produces fruit; the same cannot be fathomed, even in her subconscious, for a foregone adolescent romance.

Dubi gifts some of his miracle apples to Victoria. She travels home to Jerusalem with a sack of them, hard as stones, on her lap.[151] Hard apples are tough and resilient. Like Rivka, they thrive in the challenging environment of the desert, and that quality, unusual in apples, as in women, turns out to be an asset. And what does Victoria intend to

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[150] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 74.

[151] Ibid. ושק תפוחים קשים כאבנים שנתן לה דובי על ברכיה.

do with such hard fruit? She'll dip them in honey and give them to her husband, Shaul, sharing her disbelief that such fruit could even exist, "Now, taste that and tell me: apples that bloom in the summer and are put in organic fertilizer and their roots stay small—did you ever hear of such a thing in your life?" (עכשיו תטעם מזה ותגיד: תפוחים שיש להם פריחת קיץ ושמים אותם בזול אורגני והשרשים שלהם נהיים קטנים–שמעת דבר כזה בחיים שלך?).[152] Liebrecht concludes the story with Victoria's loving tone of feigned disbelief. She is speaking, of course, about their daughter. How could this loveless match produce such miraculous fruit?!

A story that began with a heart pounding and clench-fisted mother preparing to brave the desert all the way from her Orthodox neighborhood in Jerusalem concludes with that distance largely collapsed. The strange, even alien territory of Neve Midbar turns out to be the organic fertilizer in which Rivka blossoms. And in her flowering, she has the capacity to embrace her mother with a warmth and an assertiveness that redefines Victoria's sense of the secular, her sense of herself, and even the way she defines her marriage and her relationship to her daughter. She thanks God for her Rivka's happiness, recognizing the Almighty's hand in her decision to begin a new life on the kibbutz. Before Victoria departs for Jerusalem, Rivka touches her fingers to her cheek and confirms, "You see everything's fine, right?" ("את רואה שהכול בסדר, נכון?").[153] It is a touching, even maternal gesture, temporarily inverting their two roles, and it is the final affirmation that Victoria needs before returning home sans daughter.

[152] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 75.
[153] Ibid., p. 74.

Liebrecht continues to subscribe in "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar" to Ruth Ronen's "Possible Worlds" theory by limiting the degree to which Victoria can truly transform. While she ultimately accepts Rivka's life in the desert, she still embodies a tension between the anger that prompted her journey and the acceptance of her new reality:

> כל הדרך הזרה ישבה, עיניה עוד מחזיקות זעפן ולבה כבר מפויס, סלה שכוב לצד רגליה ושק תפוחים קשים כאבנים שנתן לה דובי על ברכיה, וידיה אוספות את פיו לבל יתפזרו.[154]

> All the way back to Sha'arei Hesed she sat, her eyes still clutching at their rage but her heart already reconciled, her basket at her feet and, on her lap, a sack of apples hard as stones that Dubi gave her, and her hands gathered at its mouth so they would not fall out.[155]

The reader sees Victoria, her eyes scrunched closed, grasping at a rage she cannot see because it has all but vanished. Her hands, in front of her heart, grip the bag of miracle apples, tokens imbued with Rivka's indomitable spirit and Dubi's nurturing love, that she can take home to Jerusalem.

Throughout the story, Liebrecht marks a distinction between Victoria's "seeing" and her "knowing." As she sits on the bus headed for Neve Midbar "her eyes were fixed on the yellowing landscape" (עיניה בנוף ההולך ומצהיב) and "her heart was fixed on her rebellious daughter Rivka" (ליבה ברבקה בתה הסוררת).[156] Victoria plots to teach Rivka about "a girl's honor in a man's eyes" (תאיר עיניה בדבר כבוד עלמה בעיני איש).[157] One notes in the Hebrew that the word for "eyes" appears twice – Victoria will describe through *einehah* ("her eyes"- i.e. "teach") the issue of a young woman's honor *b'einei* ("in the eyes") of a man. When her anticipatory desperation grows acute, Victoria imagines she

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[154] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 74.
[155] Savyon Liebrecht, "Apples from the Desert," Barbara Harshav, trans., p. 71.
[156] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 69.
[157] Ibid.

will "attack the boy with her nails, rip off his skin and poke out his eyes for what he had done" (תתנפל על הבחור בצפרניה, תקרע עורו מעליו ותנקר עיניו על שכך עשה).[158] Her memories of her adolescent romance with Moshe Elkayam are entirely optic – they exchanged glances and then she would turn her eyes toward the floor (ואחר כובשת עיניה ברצפה),[159] presumably, to hide her incipient bashfulness. That romance, like her plans to attack Dubi and to teach her daughter about proper conduct for a young woman, vanishes. Liebrecht uses seeing and eyes to convey the fickleness of our vision, and the blinding boundaries of our own perception. The heart, Liebrecht contends, is a more trustworthy organ.

It is Victoria's heart that is reconciled to her daughter's new life, even before her eyes can meet her in the tranquility of acceptance. And it is Victoria's heart, focused on her daughter, that endows her with the resolve to finally leave the familiar shtetl of Sha'arei Hesed. And it is an apple with a rotten heart that she consumes on the bus, foreshadowing the permanent relocation of Rivka—the apple of her deceptive eyes—from Jerusalem to the desert. And it is the deed of the heart – love – that exasperates but ultimately convinces Victoria that her daughter belongs in Neve Midbar.[160] When Rivka insists on remaining unmarried until she is certain about love, Victoria exclaims, "Again love!" (שוב פעם אהבה!) and beats her thighs "with her palms until they trembled – a gesture of rage without the rage" (טפחה בשתי כפותיה על ירכיה עד שהזדעזעו. מחווה של רוגז ללא

[158] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 69.
[159] Ibid., p. 73.
[160] Rivka explains to Victoria that love is the reason she left Jerusalem; she did not love Yekutiel's son, to whom her father tried to arrange a marriage (clearly reflecting Shaul's cluelessness about her as a person, and confirming her sense that she was not loved by him). She does love Dubi. Victoria is incensed by talk of love, " ומה את חושבת, אהבה זה הכול?" But for Rivka, love is everything. She insists on living with love, the opposite of Victoria and Shaul.

רוגז).[161] A gesture of rage without rage; Liebrecht vividly captures a body in the fit of an old habit drained of its intention. Victoria is acclimating to a reality starkly different from her own and radically dissimilar to her expectations for her child. For Liebrecht to create a credible "possible world," her protagonist must reflect the jerking shifts of a person caught between her eyes and her heart, a person battling to shed lifelong assumptions for the sake of deeper truth.

On the bus home, Victoria's eyes clutch at a rage that is subsiding while her hands clutch the hardened apples gifted to her by the man she once intended to blind. Into the desert she consumes a rotten apple and out of the desert she props a sack of tough fruit on her lap like one would a young child. She returns home to Jerusalem bolstered by the sweet, resilient symbols of her daughter nurtured by the organic soil of the desert and the love of a man who could see, long before Victoria could, that her Rivka is a miracle.

Loneliness

Whereas the structure of "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar" differs significantly from "Heder al Ha-Gag" both stories share considerable overlap in the theme of their protagonist's loneliness. Each woman exhibits the fickleness of someone untethered from her social universe, dubious of others' intentions, and hungry for human connection. Victoria's marriage to Shaul is loveless; he neither touches her with love (שלא שם עליה ידו באהבה) nor reads her heart (לא קרא לבה מעולם).[162] She tells her sister, Sarah, "we've spent our lives alone, you without a husband and me with one" (את חיינו הוצאנו לבד, את בלי ואני

[161] Ibid., p. 73.
[162] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 74.

עם חופה וקידושין).[163] Victoria's profound isolation leads her to struggle, like the Builder, to fully trust her impulse toward relationship-building, especially across lines of gender and ethnicity. The Builder is physically surrounded by men; the only female connection is her sister Noa, to whom she speaks by phone. The Builder relies upon David, the Israeli contractor, as a source of authority when she feels threatened by the Arab laborers. The ingrained stereotypes of dangerous foreignness and physical male power incessantly gnaw at her, undermining her attempts to relate to them as equal collaborators on her building project.

Victoria's world, while ostensibly governed by men, is less dominated by them. Orthodox communities feature prominent gender separation with women occupying the domestic realm and/or working, and men studying in yeshiva and/or working. Rivka depicts a home life in which Shaul seldom interacts with anyone:

> אבא לא התעניין באף אחד. הכי פחות בי. כל היום בחנות ועם הסגרים והתפילות. כאילו אני לא בתו.[164]

> Papa doesn't care about anybody. Especially not me. All day long in the store and with his books and prayers. Like I'm not his daughter.[165]

A reader presumes that Victoria's experience with men beyond her own family is severely limited. Liebrecht need not, therefore, invent an Arab "Other" in order to challenge Victoria's capacity to relate to an outsider, he need only be Ashkenazic, a different *kind* of Jew. Her dismissive treatment of Dubi's name—"What's this 'Dubi'? What kind of name is that?"[166]—highlights the cultural difference between Sephardim,

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[163] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 74.
[164] Ibid., p. 71.
[165] Savyon Liebrecht, "Apples from the Desert," Barbara Harshav, trans., p. 68.
[166] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 72.

who name after living relatives, and Ashkenazim, who do not. But it is the tone with which she interrogates Dubi that reveals the intensity of her reaction to him: "משך הכעס מלים מפיה."[167] Anger pulls the words out of her mouth.

Rage propels almost all of Victoria's interactions with Dubi, but it is never unadulterated. Liebrecht complicates Victoria's fury to reflect the inner battle between embracing daughter's life and the reality of its goodness, and the powerful forces of tradition and patriarchy that condemn Rivka's choices. Before Victoria arrives in Neve Midbar, the reader senses her exhaustion as she is pulled, like a rope in tug of war, between her eyes—the expectations of her community—and her heart—her instincts as a mother. By the middle of her journey, at Beersheva, Victoria's resolve to drag her daughter home at any cost, and to physically harm the man who lured her to the desert, begins to wane. The closer she gets to Neve Midbar, the more her "heroic spirit" (רוח הגבורה) deserts her and the images of her aggressive rescue tactics make her sigh, doubtless, with resignation.[168] As her confidence evaporates, it is replaced by grave uncertainty and fear, reflective of the emotional ping-ponging the Builder exhibited when alone with the Arab laborers.

> ומה אם ירים עליה הבחור ידו להכותה? ואיך תעשה את הלילה אם ינעלו דלתם מולה, והאוטובוס אינו יוצא לפני הבוקר הבא? ומה אם לא נתקבלה ההודעה שמסר חיים בעל הקיוסק בטלפון?[169]

> What if Rivka turned her back on her and threw her out? What if the boy raised his hand to strike her? How would she spend the night if they locked her out and the bus didn't leave till the next morning? What if they didn't get her message?[170]

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[167] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 72.
[168] Ibid., p. 70.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Savyon Liebrecht, "Apples from the Desert," Barbara Harshav, trans., p. 66.

The radical shift in Victoria's psychology from warrior confidence to frightened victim, while seated on a bus, manifests what the 20th century European psychiatrist Frieda Fromm-Reichmann calls, "the extremely uncanny experience of real loneliness," which has much in common with other serious mental states, such as panic.[171] The tsunami of questions that flows from Victoria's growing uncertainty about her visit to Rivka's kibbutz is a panic attack. The woman who, moments ago, was sharpening her fingernails for battle, now worries that her daughter's boyfriend will strike her with his hand. Each question increases in absurdity, showing Victoria's detachment from reality. She envisions herself abandoned by her daughter, harmed by the boyfriend, thrown out on the street to sleep in the cold. And in a crescendo she falls back to earth wondering whether they even know to expect her. Readers can taste the exhaustion of Victoria's psychological state and Liebrecht portrays in this one burst of brooding the loneliness that Fromm-Reichmann compares to "a loss of reality or a sense of world catastrophe."[172]

Like the Builder, Victoria has a punitive and threatening vision of the world. Cacioppo and Hawkley at the University of Chicago write about the social cognition of the lonely. Their research demonstrates that experimental manipulations of loneliness cause people to feel more anxious, to fear negative evaluation, and to act more coldly toward others. Lonely individuals also tend to form more negative social impressions of others, and their expectations and actions toward others tend to be less charitable than those of the non-lonely.[173] Victoria exhibits anxiety and fear on the bus, calculating

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[171] Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, "Loneliness," *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, p. 313.
[172] Ibid.
[173] John T. Cacioppo and Louise C. Hawkley, "Perceived Social Isolation and Cognition," *Trends in Cognitive Science*, pp. 447-54.

catastrophe before she even arrives. She also acts exceedingly cold toward Dubi from the moment she meets him.

Victoria's nerves are painfully apparent when Rivka introduces her to Dubi. From the description of their first encounter, the reader feels as if Victoria is being attacked by a bear, finding herself squeezed in two big arms, a face close to hers: "מצאה עצמה ויקטוריה שוב הדוקה בין זרועות גדולות ופנים בהירים היו סמוכים לשלה וקול גבר אמר: 'שלום אמא.'"[174] It is a startling moment that begins with an intense violation of Victoria's personal space, surely an alarming demonstration of physical intimacy given her traditional background. One is skeptical that a secular Israeli man would hug a woman wearing a kerchief—a clear symbol of her religious orientation and an indication that she does not touch male non-relatives—but Dubi quickly shows himself to be a teddy bear rather than a frightening predator. His physical greeting is his unalloyed display of affection for the woman who created Rivka. Liebrecht plays a clever trick on her readers with this encounter, tempting us to trust Victoria as a narrator and then quickly revealing that her perception is skewed by unfounded anxiety. Not only will she have a place to stay, but she is warmly embraced by Rivka and her boyfriend.

Mapped against the structure of "Heder al Ha-Gag," "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar" sets Dubi in place of the three Arab laborers. He is "the Other": a man, a secular Jew, and Ashkenazi. Like Hasan, Ahmad and Salah, he will bear the brunt of Victoria's emotional insecurity. The trip from Jerusalem to Neve Midbar is 318 kilometers – an eight-hour drive by bus Liebrecht tells us. Given Victoria's state when she arrives, however, eight hours might as well be eight lightyears:

[174] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 70.

> עייפה מן הדרך, ומבולבלת ממראה עיניה, ונרעשת מתהפוכות היום, וכולאת בכוח את חרונה ההולך ומסתלק ממנה למרות עצמה, וזוכרת כל העת את שליחותה, ישבה ויקטוריה עם בתה רבקה...[175]

> Weary from the journey, confused by what she was seeing, shaken by the vicissitudes of the day, and straining to repress her rage, which was getting away in spite of herself—and always remembering her mission—Victoria sat down with her daughter Rivka…[176]

Victoria's physical exhaustion and confusion bespeak the energy she spent on the bus worrying about her arrival. As Cacioppo and Hawkley describe, loneliness breeds hypersensitivity to negative social information and diminished pleasure from positive social stimuli, so even when Victoria embraces her daughter and recognizes how much better she looks in her short hair and rugged clothing, she is still unable to inhabit her joy.[177]

Victoria embodies the tension between her mission and her maternal instinct, "repressing a rage" that was getting away "in spite of herself" (למרות עצמה). Liebrecht employs this exact phrase in "Heder al Ha-Gag" to convey the inner battle of the Builder at the moment when Hassan first enters her apartment. After insisting to her sister that she would never let the workers into her home, she guards the doorway like a bouncer, her hand stretched toward the door frame as if halting all entry, (היא השתהתה בפתח, מגוננת על גבולה בידה השלוחה אל המשקוף כמו מבקשת לעצור בעד הנכנסים).[178] But Hassan's friendliness disarms her, her blocking arm dropping from the door frame and instead moving in an arc to welcome him inside. "Anger at herself welled up inside her for treating him, despite

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[175] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 71.
[176] Savyon Liebrecht, "Apples from the Desert," Barbara Harshav, trans., p. 67.
[177] John T. Cacioppo and Louise C. Hawkley, "Perceived Social Isolation and Cognition," *Trends in Cognitive Science*, pp. 447-54.
[178] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," 50.

herself, as a welcome guest” (הכעס התעורר בה על עצמה, על שהיא נוהגת בו, למרות עצמה, כבאורח רצוי).[179] The reader notes that in both stories, Liebrecht invokes למרות עצמה to convey the unexpected softening of the protagonist in the face of “the Other.”

The Builder wants to guard and to protect her home, “her territory,” but when faced with the warmth of Hasan she instinctively responds to his humanity, welcoming him inside. So too, Victoria spends a bus ride coordinating violent and painful strategies to remove her daughter from the kibbutz, but *panim el panim* with Rivka and her boyfriend, she immediately begins to soften. Her loneliness is clear in her inability to accept the inchoate joy. She is a knot of emotional conflict, straining to grip her diminishing rage, while also repressing the expression of it, and ignoring the sparks of pleasure that naturally arise from seeing one’s child so successful.

Victoria’s erratic emotional state is most pronounced in her encounters with Dubi. When he escorts her from her room to the dining hall “she pour[s] all her rage on him, and she was drawn to him, which only served to increase her wrath” (שמה אליו את כל זעפה, ואולם לבה כבר הלך אחריו, וגם זה הגביר את רגזונה).[180] Like the Builder it is Victoria’s vulnerability to the charms of “the Other” that anger her – she recognizes that she is not in control of her desire for attachment and this fuels her rage. The reader notes again the appearance of the heart as a metonym for the instinct that draws Victoria toward deeper truth - in this case, the goodness of Dubi.[181]

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[179] סביון ליברכט, ”חדר על הגג,“ 50.
[180] סביון ליברכט, ”תפוחים מן המדבר,“ 72.
[181] The phrase “drawn to” in English is an idiomatic translation of the phrase ואולם לבה כבר הלך אחריו, which literally translates to “however, her heart already went after him.”

Anger pulls words out of Victoria's mouth while she walks with Dubi.[182] She "hardens her heart against him" (הקישחה לבה לעומתו) invoking the well-known trope of Pharaoh in the Exodus story. Interestingly, Liebrecht does not use the verb *l'hachbid*, להכביד ("to make heavy, to harden") that appears in Exodus, but rather *l'hakshiach*, להקשיח ("to harden"), which appears only twice in Tanakh: in Isaiah 63:17, למה תתענו יהוה מדרכיך תקשיח לבנו מיראתך ("Why, Adonai, do You make us stray from Your ways, and turn our hearts away from revering You?") and in Job 39:16, הקשיח בניה ללא־לה ("[The ostrich's] young are cruelly abandoned as if they were not hers"). Liebrecht draws a distinction between Pharaoh, whose heart was hardened by God, and Victoria, who controls her heart. The Isaiah text beseeches God, blaming the Almighty for the wayward hearts of the Israelites, but we know this is hyperbole on Isaiah's part, and that the Israelites are responsible for straying. And in Job it is the ostrich who neglects her young, because God deprived her of understanding. Liebrecht suggests to her readers that Victoria has more control over her anger than her behavior suggests. She suffers from a profoundly disorienting kind of loneliness, but unlike the Builder in "Heder al Ha-Gag," she is able to forge meaningful connections that transform her.

Liebrecht never depicts a scene in which Victoria's heart is finally softened toward Dubi. When she goes to bed at night "her heart is both heavy and light" (ולבה כבד על דבר אחד וקל על האחר)[183] suggesting the ongoing turmoil between accepting Rivka's triumphant reality, and a psychological orientation that sees this outcome as punitive. Victoria's heart, the muscle of truth, is heavy with the burdens of her past, but light with

[182] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 72.
[183] Ibid., p. 74.

the knowledge that her daughter has a bright future. Whereas the Builder's loneliness keeps her imprisoned in isolation, unable to forge connections with the Arab laborers, Victoria prevails. As her name suggests, she can claim victory after her journey, having found the strength to relinquish the assumptions and social mores that prompted her trip, in favor of the sweeter reality that her daughter is milk and honey and laughing all the time. It is the apples, not Victoria's heart, that are hardened at the story's end. Victoria clutches them, the symbols of her resilient daughter, and the gift of her quasi-son, and also a remnant of the fury that faded into fruit.

Miracles

"Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar" is a story of miracles. The miracle of apples grown in the desert. The miracle of an Orthodox, Sephardi mother accepting her daughter's choice to live on a secular kibbutz with an Ashkenazi man. The miracle of personal transformation. The miracle of love as a bulwark against loneliness. The miracle of the desert as an arena of deeper truths. The reader knows from the title that Liebrecht will spin a tale of the unexpected, but the subtle ways in which she hints at this motif reveal the artistry of her prose.

Victoria's hesitation to leave Jerusalem—boarding and alighting from four different buses—reflects more than her nervousness to confront her daughter in the Negev. She has not left the perimeter of her tiny neighborhood for four years. The contours of her world, therefore, are extremely limited, constantly reinforcing the roles

imposed by her "traditional, local, patriarchal" context.[184] Notably, Victoria left Sha'arei Hesed to visit the "barren Shifra Ben-Sasson of Tiberias" when she gave birth.

The quintessential miracle of Jewish tradition is a barren woman giving birth: Sarah bears Isaac (Gen 21:2); Rebecca, Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:21); Rachel, Joseph (Gen 30:22), Hannah, Samuel (1 Sam 1:20). Liebrecht suggests that Victoria is a cloistered person who only emerges to bear witness to miracles. Her trip to the Negev, the opposite landscape of Tiberias (a city on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee), must also be prompted by a miraculous birth. We learn that the birth she will witness is that of her daughter Rivka, who blooms in the desert out of her teenage awkwardness—"Not like when she wore a skirt and stockings, with her broad shoulders, as if she were a man dressed in women's clothes" (לא כשהיתה בחצאית ובגרביים ובכתפיה הגדולות מדי, כאיש מחופש בבגדי אשה)—into a shimmering beauty.[185]

The desert is also the archetypal backdrop for miracles in Tanakh. When Victoria disembarks in Neve Midbar, the wind strikes at her throat (רוח המקום היבש מכה בגרונה), forcing her to swallow, as she did the rotten apple, part of the Negev's essence.[186] The wind is not just any *ruach* but *ruach ha-maqom*, a metaphoric phrase for the "spirit of God." It is God that strikes at Victoria's throat when she arrives in the Negev, alerting readers to the divinity of her surroundings. Too physically drained from her trip, Victoria only begins to detect the ways the desert will act upon her fatigued body. The scene

[184] Banan Al-Daraiseh (2007), "The Journey Narrative: The Trope of Women's Mobility and Travel in Contemporary Arab Women's Literary Narratives" PhD diss., p. 2.
[185] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 71.
[186] Ibid., p. 70.

before her is a strange land, ארץ זרה, a faded landscape that transfixes her in confusion – How could her daughter choose this place?[187]

Victoria follows the trajectory of our most revered prophets as she ventures into the desert. It is במדבר, in the desert, where Moses comes upon Mount Horeb and encounters the burning bush. Like Victoria, he does not anticipate finding God, but stumbles, unexpectedly, into holiness. Rashi tells us that Moses only encounters Mount Horeb because he is directing his flock away from private property.[188] Elijah the Tishbite flees into the desert and wanders forty days and nights until he too, encounters Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:8). Upon that same mountain where, generations before, a bush blazed unconsumed, Elijah witnesses wind, earthquake and fire before finally finding God in the *kol d'mamah dakah*, the still, small voice. Similarly, Victoria endures the striking wind, the fiery heat, and even the quaking unpredictability of seeking her daughter in a strange land, before finding the miracle of God's help leading her daughter to joy. One wonders if Neve Midbar is within reach of Mount Horeb.

The miraculous, Liebrecht tells us, is the hand of God, and it is seldom found where expected. Victoria's transformation is possible because she, unlike the Builder, leaves home in search of truth. She is confused (מבולבלת), weary (עייפה) and shaken (נרעשת) from her journey, but her debilitation does not undermine her capacity to detect, like Moses, the miracle before her. It is her eyes, a symbol of her deceptively limited perspective, that instantly recognize Rivka's efflorescence: "Her eyes saw and knew: her

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[187] אבריה כבדים מן הישיבה ועיניה הלומות שמש. הניחה סליה לרגליה ועמדה והביטה בנוף כמי שהגיע לארץ זרה: פתוח המישור עד קצה העין מצהיב וקרח העצים עומדים בענן אבק וצבעם דהוי. איך אפשר לעזוב את אוויר ירושלים הטהור והריה היפים– ולבוא הנה? סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 70.

[188] So as not to graze there (Ex 3:1).

daughter's face looked good" (ורק עיניה ראו וידעו: טוב מראה פני בתה).[189] Victoria's recognition of the miracle marks the beginning of her transformation, a journey that will feature the tumult of uncertainty and self-doubt that Moses confronted. And like our most revered prophet, who dies in the land of Moab never reaching the Promised Land, Victoria will live out her days in her own Moab, bearing witness to the miracle she conceived.

[189] סביון ליברכט, "תפוחים מן המדבר," 71.

The Road to Cedar City – בדרך לסידר סיטי

"B'Derech L'Cedar City" ("The Road to Cedar City") wends its way through the familiar-looking but foreign terrain of Utah in the United States. Hassida Harari, her husband, Colonel Yehiel Harari, and their eighteen-year-old son, Yuval, find themselves sharing in a minivan ride with a young Palestinian family when their rental car unexpectedly breaks down on vacation. The entire story unfolds between Otter Creek Lake, where their axle malfunctions, and a travel agency in Cedar City, a rest stop on their journey to obtain a replacement car in St. George. The title conveys the liminality of this tale, which unfolds between a place of rupture and a detour, the place names of which call to mind the Arab Middle East—Cedars of Lebanon—and Christianity. The Harari family's ultimate destination lies beyond Liebrecht's pages and is itself a digression from their itinerary, added only because of reckless driving.[190]

Hassida Harari is the most explicitly vulnerable protagonist of the three short stories examined in this thesis. Suffering the physical symptoms of menopause, she is chronically exhausted and overheated. Whereas "Heder al Ha-Gag" begins at the chronological end of the narrative, warning readers of stunted progress, and "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar" evinces miraculous, linear development, "B'Derech L'Cedar City" falls in between both of these narrative structures. Liebrecht writes a journey narrative that neither begins nor ends, but exists in a middle space, the duration of an inconvenience. Hassida, the most overtly afflicted of Liebrecht's heroines, is also her least trustworthy. Her menopause, a metaphor for of her body's wild deregulation, is out of touch with

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[190] "You were not supposed to drive on a dirt road. It says so specifically in the contract that you, Mr. Harari, signed" שאסור היה לכם לעלות על דרך עפר וכן כתוב במפורש בחוזה שאתה חתמה עליו, מיסטר הררי. סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," *סוסים על כביש גהה*, 48.

reality. She is hot when the air is cool, she is dizzy and out of breath on the tranquil, tree-lined streets of expansive Utah.

While readers detect early on that Hassida operates from a perspective saturated with exaggeration, her pain and her isolation are genuinely acute. Increasingly alienated from her husband and son, who exclude her from their newly-formed, masculine bond, she is desperate for connection. Confined with the Haddad family "also from Israel"[191] and a garrulous driver who insists on fomenting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by praising the indomitability of the IDF, an eruption becomes inevitable. Hassida, the wife of a Colonel, the mother of an almost-soldier and a veteran herself, must decide with whom she will ally. Will her ingrained distrust and bias against "the Other" keep her loyal to her family, or will she break away, seizing an opportunity to embrace unlikely comrades?

Loneliness and Gender

Hassida is the only protagonist who describes her crippling isolation, comparing herself to "prey," naming her exclusion from the bond between her husband and son, and detailing her distressing fear that they will commit her to an asylum to absolve themselves of responsibility for her.[192] Liebrecht introduces a woman enduring menopause and straining to keep up with her swiftly moving, estranging family, "panting audibly, feeling the slight, familiar dizziness that always preceded a hot flash and an acute pain in her depleted lungs" (מתנשמת בקול חרחור, חשה את נגיעת הסחרחורת הקלה, המוכרת,

[191] Part of this story's comic relief emerges from the ignorance of the minivan driver who assumes that the Haddad and Harari families are proud Israeli compatriots.
[192] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 44, 47.

המבשרת את הדף החום ואת הכאב החריף בריאות הריקות מאוויר).[193] As she falls further behind, the avenue appears to her "like an expanding ocean separating her from her husband and son" (ים הולך וצומח בינה לבין בנה ובעלה).[194] Hassida is quick to diagnose her feeling of ostracism, attributing her revelation to the change of context. She affirms, in the following passage, Banan Al-Daraiseh's thesis that women who leave home can create individual narratives that counter the fixed discourses they had no agency in framing.[195]

> כאן, בנוף הזר והמרהיב כבתוך מראה מלוטשת ראתה את מה שנעלם מעיניה בחיק הבית: אינם שייכים עמה, שני הגברים הללו שקמו נגדה לפתע כאויבים; התאספו מולה בברית מוזרה ורעה; אינם טורחים להבליע את הצחוק הזדוני השמור אצלם עבורה, מהתלים בה ללא רחמים, מניחים אותה טרף לעיני כל: עוברים ושבים, פקידי מלון, זבנים.[196]

> Here, in this strange and magnificent landscape, she saw, as in a polished mirror, what had eluded her at home: They no longer belonged to her, those two men who had suddenly turned against her, becoming her enemies. They ganged up on her, forming a strange, malicious alliance; they no longer bothered to conceal their invidious mockery, they taunted her mercilessly; they left her prey to gazes of strangers, passersby, hotel clerks, and saleswomen.[197]

Hassida's profound sense of loss and rejection, compounded by her seeming victimization at the hands of her husband and son, make her sympathetic to the reader. She appears intensely vulnerable and innocent – a loving wife and parent suffering alone through the enervating and disorienting symptoms of menopause, a process that eradicates the very rhythms that made her a mother. Close examination of her interactions with Yehiel and Yuval reveals, however, that what she calls a ברית מוזרה ורעה

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[193] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 43.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Banan Al-Daraiseh (2007), "The Journey Narrative: The Trope of Women's Mobility and Travel in Contemporary Arab Women's Literary Narratives" PhD diss., p. 2.
[196] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 44.
[197] Savyon Liebrecht, "The Road to Cedar City," *Apples from the Desert*, Marganit Weinberger-Rotman, p. 121.

(“malicious alliance”)might be the welcome discovery by father and soon-to-be-adult son of common ground, the mockery she deems זדוני (“invidious”) may be playful, and her sense of vulnerability (“טרף לעיני כל”) may be wildly anti-feminist self-pity arising from an unreasonable sense of abandonment.

Frustrated by Hassida’s slow pace, Yuval shouts, “So what is it now, Mom? You’ve already made us carry your suitcase, so you have no more excuses. What’s the problem now? Why do we have to stand and wait? Don’t you see, you’re holding us up all the time!” (”אז מה עכשיו, אמא? אז אנחנו כבר סוחבים גם את המזוודה שלך ועכשיו נגמרו לך כבר תירוצים. אז מה העניין עכשיו? למה צריך לעמוד כאן ולחכות? את רואה שאת מעכבת אותנו בלי סוף!“).[198] The repetition of the word עכשיו (“now”) three times in Yuval’s chiding emphasizes his impatience, but the reader does not sense an unusual tone of aggression. It is unexceptional for a teenager to be irritated by his mother for walking too slowly. When Hassida responds to him that she will rest and then catch up, the narrator qualifies Yuval’s retort, “Sure you will” (“בטח שתמצאי”), as “taunting” (בלגלוג).[199] Perhaps there are notes of mockery in this exchange, but to call it “invidious” is clearly extreme. So too, the “malicious alliance,” between husband and son might be viewed, under less exhausting conditions, as a long dreamed of rapprochement.

Hassida admits that she is distressed by the realization that she should be happy with the new intimacy between the two men she loves. “Did she not pray at night that the two would find a way back to each other? Did she not make vows impossible to keep?” (והרי לפנים בלילות היתה מתפללת שימצאו דרכם זה אל זה, נודרת נדרים שאין בכוח איש לקיימם).[200]

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[198] סביון ליברכט, ”בדרך לסידר סיטי,“ 43.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid., p. 45.

Hassida clearly feels excluded when Yehiel and Yuval walk shoulder to shoulder and roar with laughter, but she infuses their newfound bond with an excessive albeit undemonstrated hostility. Given their antagonistic past—Yehiel evicting Yuval from home when he failed his electronics course in school, refusing to speak to him for a year; quarreling bitterly on the day of Yehiel's bar mitzvah[201]—the reader might expect Hassida to accept the trade-off between interceding, cajoling, scolding, mitigating the animosity, and containing the raging storm between them (כאילו נמחקו כל השנים שהיו שניהם ניצים והיא היתה באה ביניהם במילות פיוס או נזיפה, מרככת את האיבה וממעיטה את הסערות),[202] and serving as the target of their chauvinist humor. Clearly, however, neither position is desirable, and the reader commiserates with Hassida on her challenging familial dynamic. It is easier to be loved by two men who hate each other than to absorb their shared derision, but Hassida amplifies her sense of victimization to an absurd degree.

Hassida pictures herself "prey to the gazes of strangers" after she notices two schoolchildren staring at her and snickering. She compares herself to "a snail wrenched out of its shell, entrusting herself to the mercy of her husband and son, expecting them to protect her," (הנה היא חשופה אל העולם כשבלול שנעקר משריונו, נותנת עצמה לחסדי בעלה ובנה, מצפה שיגוננו עליה).[203] Why is Hassida so vulnerable? In Israel, she is a veteran of the Israeli army, and a mother and wife who stands her ground between two headstrong men. Now, in the United States, she is helpless like a snail, depending on the "mercies" (חסדי בעלה ובנה) of her husband and son. Liebrecht's play on words is intentional. Hassida's old-world, diasporic name, which means "stork," evokes the image of a gliding bird with

[201] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 44, 47.
[202] Ibid., p. 44.
[203] Ibid.

a baby in its bill, a flying avatar of motherhood. The name Hassida also evokes notions of *hesed*, "mercy" or "loving-kindness," and *hassid*, a pious person. Hassida's incessant depictions of herself as a martyr and victim convert her name into another joke at her expense. She is too self-sacrificing, too defenseless. The woman who planned her family's trip in detail for several years until the travel agent dreaded her visits, becomes as burdensome to her family as an extra piece of luggage.[204]

Hassida's loneliness is more pronounced than that of the Builder and Victoria Abravanel. On the surface, the Builder appears content and socially nurtured – a husband, a new baby, and a project to keep her busy. So too, Victoria Abravanel comes from a close-knit community in Jerusalem where families share weekly Shabbat meals and gather for prayer. Her agenda in Neve Midbar is driven by a strong sense of connectedness and obligation. The loneliness of both these protagonists manifests itself in their erratic emotional states, in their paranoid daydreams, and in their bleak expectations around social interaction. The research of psychology experts Cacioppo and Hawkley substantiates these characters' symptoms as reflective of perceived social isolation: they seek out negative social information, they view their world as punitive, and they focus excessively on themselves, their needs, and their preservation in negative circumstances.[205] But neither the Builder nor Victoria Abravanel ever acknowledges her loneliness. Fromm-Reichmann explains, "Most people who are alone try to keep the mere fact of their aloneness a secret from others, and even try to keep its conscious realization

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[204] הרי שנים תכננה את המסע הזה לפרטים, עד שעייף ממנה סוכן הנסיעות שאת משרדו היתה פוקדת בראשית כל עונה, והחל מזעיף לה פנים. סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 44.

[205] John T. Cacioppo and Louise C. Hawkley, "Perceived Social Isolation and Cognition," *Trends in Cognitive Science*, pp. 447-54.

hidden from themselves."[206] As a result, the dramatic irony in "Heder al Ha-Gag" and "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar" is more pronounced. Readers detect the symptoms of the protagonists' loneliness in their interactions with "the Other" while the women themselves remain unaware.[207]

In "B'Derech L'Cedar City," in contrast, Hassida's consciousness of her social exclusion makes the dramatic irony more subtle, complex, and difficult to ascertain. She believes that Yuval and Yehiel intentionally block her from their male bonding. On an afternoon near Jackson, Wyoming when Hassida takes a nap in their motel room, Yehiel and Yuval drive to a lassoing contest. When she wakes up, alone and with no car parked outside, her heart rages as if an ill prophecy has been fulfilled (לבה נטרף כאילו נתגשמה נבואתו הרעה).[208] The dread of "ill prophecy" is a characteristic reflection of a world that is threatening; Hassida is chronically anxious, certain that the ground will fall out from beneath her. She expects that her husband and son have abandoned her in the middle of nowhere and cries with relief when she finds their suitcases in the closet.

When Yehiel and Yuval return from their outing in the late afternoon, Hassida's behavior transforms from a sympathy-inducing sense of neglect, to outright madness. She knows they have not deserted her because she sees their suitcases, but she runs toward the car as if the ransom has just been paid to their kidnappers, sobbing and flailing her arms. "'I thought something terrible had happened to you' she shouted, realizing that she could not tell them the truth…I was going out of my mind here. I wasn't sure who to

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[206] Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, "Loneliness," *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, p. 314.
[207] The four Arab laborers in "Heder al Ha-Gag" and Dubi, the Ashkenazi soldier, in "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar.
[208] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 45.

call first, the police, the hospital, or the consulate"' (חסידה רצה לקראתם כמתאבדת, בוכה ומניפה זרועותיה ורגליה כושלות כאילו נשברו ברכיה. "חשבתי שקרה לכם אסון," צעקה, יודעת כי את האמת לא תוכל לומר להם..."אני כבר משתגעת כאן. לא יודעת אם להתקשר למשטרה או לבית–חולים או לקונסוליה").[209]

After Yehiel assures Hassida that they had discussed their plans to attend a lassoing contest the day prior, and that she declined to go along, the wheels come off. Rejecting Yehiel's explanation she feels certain that her husband and son are mocking her, and lying. "I know where you went!" she shrieks, and staring down her son she proclaims, "You went to hookers!" ("אני יודעת לאן הלכתם!...לזונות!").[210] In this exchange, Hassida's paranoia and mistrust are laid bare. Yehiel diminishes Hassida's distress by insisting she knew about their plans, so she invents the story to justify her anguish. Unfortunately, her hysterical behavior makes her untrustworthy; she is immediately parodied by her family. "Yehiel and Yuval exchanged glances, restraining themselves for one moment, watching the grins creep into each other's faces, then burst out in yelps of delighted. From that moment on, whenever the question, 'Where have you been?' was asked, the answer came right away, with a laughing snort, 'With hookers!'" (יחיאל ויובל החליפו מבטים, הבליגו לרגע אחד, רואים זה את זה החיוך המטפס על פני זה, ופרצו באנקות שמחה. מכאן ואילך, כאשר תעלה, דרך מקום, השאלה: "איפה היית?" יבוא מיד המענה, מלווה נחרת צחוק: "אצל הזונות!").[211] Hassida's response is so outlandish that she shatters any credibility she had with her family.

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[209] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 46.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Ibid.

Liebrecht's use of the phrase נבואתו רעה brings to mind the Greek goddess Cassandra, the princess of Troy, who was cursed by Apollo to speak true prophecies that no one believed.[212] Hassida also compares herself to Samson the Nazirite, who lost his power when his hair was cut off.

> כבר שבועות לא נתבקשה להציג החלטה עבור עצמה. בעידן אחר, בארץ אחרת המצויה באוויר אחר, היתה מוכשרת בהחלטות מהירות. אנשים היו מתפעלים מיכולתה, באים לבקש עצמה. כאן כמו אבד כוחה, כאיש לא מאומן. כשמשון לאחר שנגזז...[213]

> For the last couple of weeks she had not been required to make any decision regarding herself. In another era, in another country, in another atmosphere, she was capable of quick decisions. People were impressed with her ability, would come to seek her advice. Here, she seemed to have lost her powers; she was totally unskilled. Like Samson after his hair was shorn…[214]

At home in Israel, Hassida is sought out for her wisdom, but as a traveler on foreign soil, her power is curtailed or misunderstood.[215] She can speak, but like Cassandra, no one will believe her.

Hassida's confusion at her uncharacteristic indecisiveness reflects the gender dynamics of travel. Translation theorist and scholar of comparative literature Susan Bassnett contends that the essence of adventure lies in risk-taking and exploring the unknown. The great sagas of Western literature (i.e. *The Odyssey*, *The Norse Sagas* and *The Arthurian Cycle*) are male narratives that depict women not as co-travelers, but as

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[212] *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, M.C. Howatson, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/jeffers/classical.htm.
[213] Ibid., p. 50.
[214] Savyon Liebrecht, "The Road to Cedar City," *Apples from the Desert*, Marganit Weinberger-Rotman, pp. 127-8.
[215] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 50.

objects of desire or destination points.[216] Bassnett writes that adventure quests of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in which "men journeyed in search of fortune and renown to the new worlds that were opening up beyond the frontiers of Europe, [were] explicitly gendered, since the idea of man as heroic risk-taking traveler underpinned not only the great travel narratives of the next centuries, but much of the travel writing of the twentieth century also."[217] Hassida feels unmoored in place, time and atmosphere. At home, once upon a time, she saw herself as a local guru. Transplanted to a foreign context she is neither heroic nor adventurous, but merely a naked snail who longs to hide inside of her shell.

What is it that so cripples Hassida when she leaves Israel? Perhaps she is deprived of the one key resource—nurturing relationships—that sustains her at home. While loneliness may be an inevitable part of the female experience, it can be overcome by meaningful connection. Examining the role of loneliness in weakening one's capacity to fight disease, Judith Shulevitz asks, "Did God want us to die when we got stressed?" Clearly no. But she does believe that what God wanted "is for us not to be alone. Or rather, natural selection favored people who needed people." She cites Cacioppo, "who thinks we're hardwired to find life unpleasant outside the safety of trusted friends and family."[218] In the United States, Hassida is wrenched out of the safety net of home; she

[216] Susan Bassnett, "Travel writing and gender," *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, Peter Hulme & Tim Youngs, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 225-241.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Judith Shulevitz, "The Lethality of Loneliness," *New Republic*, 13 May 2013.

becomes powerless like Samson, a victim of her own loneliness: moody, self-doubting, angry, pessimistic, shy, and hypersensitive to criticism.[219]

Hassida's accusing outburst is hardly prophetic; there is no proof that her husband and son visited a brothel in the middle of Wyoming. Her outlandish claim is drawn from a narrative she spins in her own head about Yehiel and Yuval's nefarious agenda against her:

> זוממים להוציא אותה מדעתה, לכלוא אותה בבית–משוגעים בארץ הזרה הזאת ולחזור הביתה חופשיים ממנה. כאשר לא תעמוד בדרכם יוכל יובל להביא אל חדרו את נערתו לא רק בערבי שבת אלא לצמיתות. ויחיאל ייפטר ממנה בקלות, בפתק אחד מאת הרבנים, ויישא את המזכירה...[220]

> They are conspiring to drive her out of her mind, to have her locked up in prison in a strange country so they can be rid of her and go home without her. With her out of the way, Yuval will be able to bring his girlfriend to his room not only on Friday nights but at all times. And Yehiel will get rid of her very easily; one little note from the rabbis and he is free to marry his secretary…[221]

Hassida is so clearly unwound by her vulnerability that her fear pushes her to extremes. Yehiel and Yuval will intentionally provoke her so they have cause to admit Hassida to an institution where they can wipe their hands of her and move on to the promiscuous lives they crave. Like the Builder, whose fear renders the Arabs as potential terrorists, and Victoria, who envisions Rivka's boyfriend raising a hand to strike her, Hassida's anxiety distorts her perception of her loved ones, reducing them to libidos without conscience or compassion.

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[219] Judith Shulevitz, "The Lethality of Loneliness," *New Republic*, 13 May 2013.
[220] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 47.
[221] Savyon Liebrecht, "The Road to Cedar City," *Apples from the Desert*, Marganit Weinberger-Rotman, p. 125.

Unlike the Builder and Victoria, who never articulate their fears to their loved ones, Hassida's creep out in spite of herself. She makes up the story about calling the police or the hospital, "realizing she could not tell them the truth" (יודעת כי את האמת לא תוכל לומר להם)[222], but her truth is ultimately unmasked when she accuses Yehiel and Yuval of visiting whores. Hassida is the only protagonist who confronts the symptoms of her loneliness, and, therefore, she is the only character who must contend with the outright rejection of her lived experience. Yoel, the Builder's husband, confirms her unspoken fear of the Arab "Other" when he returns from his trip. "They behaved all right? They didn't make any trouble?" ("התנהגו אלייך יפה, לא עשו בעיות?").[223] And Victoria's mistrust of Dubi evaporates when she learns that he is actually somewhat traditional and wants to marry Rivka. Only Hassida is mocked for her panic, treated like an insolent child, and made to appear unreliable as a narrator. How can she be trusted if her objectivity is so easily torpedoed? How can any woman?

Such is Liebrecht's challenge to her readers and to the gender paradigms that nurture the cycles of social isolation that consign women to homes and motel rooms where they are alone, disempowered, and forced into the misogynistic stereotype of female hysterics in order to convey their truth. The female voice, Liebrecht suggests, is itself a paradox. Hassida's outburst toward her family and the drama of abandonment she contrives, reflect the reality of her fear, even if they diverge radically from the realities of her husband and son. She worries that Yehiel will leave her and that Yuval will behave with licentiousness. She wonders if she is as burdensome to them as she feels. She is

[222] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 46.
[223] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," *תפוחים מן המדבר*, 61.

Cassandra, sharing the raw psychological upheaval of her gendered experience; but no one believes her.

And as if the challenge of speaking as a female is not enough, Hassida's family affirms her sense of vulnerability by treating her as though she is the snail wrenched out of its shell; a being who is handicapped by her exposure to the world. As she watches Yehiel and Yuval outpace her, she sobs inwardly, "inaudibly, her spirit giving way to her physical frailty (מרירה בתוכה ללא קול, רפיון גופה כובש את רוחה).[224] Hassida is easily hijacked by her menopause and by her sense that she exceedingly feeble. When a hot flash strikes, she "succumbs" to it (להכניע אותה), is if overpowered by her own body.

Yehiel reinforces Hassida's sense of debility by telling he she is depressed, comparing her to a baby, and insisting on the weakness of her constitution. When she rages at him and Yuval for leaving her alone in the motel outside Jackson, he defends himself, "You were sleeping so peacefully, like a baby, we didn't want to wake you up" ("ישנת כל–כך טוב, כמו תינוקת קטנה, אז החלטנו לא להעיר אותך").[225] Yehiel's reasoning makes it seem as if Hassida is better served by a nap than by a fun excursion with her family. She does not just sleep like a baby, they treat her as one.

When Hassida shows her frustration at the travel agency—"with a dash of her old spunk creeping into her voice" (שמץ מן העוז הישן מסתנן לקולה)[226]—Yehiel responds: "Hassidale, you're becoming too cynical...The air here is unsuitable for your delicate respiratory system" (חסידה'לה, את נעשית צינית...האוויר כאן לא מתאים למערכת הנשימה העדינה

[224] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 44.
[225] Ibid., p. 46.
[226] Ibid., p. 49.

שלך).[227] Hassida, Yehiel suggests, is too fragile even for the air. Her attitude, and the spark of her female autonomy, are ugly to Yehiel who calls her ציונית. Even the hint of a backbone is reason enough to justify keeping Hassida locked inside where the dangerous air cannot reach her.

And Yehiel's treatment of Hassida in the United States is consistent with her position in Israel. While the change in context enables Hassida to recognize her sense of powerlessness, Liebrecht indicates that her situation at home is no different. A year prior to their trip to America, the Harari family took a Passover hike in Wadi Amud and Hassida had become nervous about another eruption between Yehiel and Yuval. She had awoken in the morning to Yehiel claiming: "You're depressed all the time Hassida. You even sigh in your sleep. Let's take you to a doctor to prescribe some medication" ("את כל הזמן מדוכאת, חסידה. אפילו מתוך שינה את נאנחת. אולי ניקח אותך לאיזה רופא שיתן לך תרופה").[228] He and Yuval are blind to the impact of their constant fighting on Hassida. She has lived in their minefield of relational instability, and appropriately, reflects uncertainty when they suddenly become chums. Yehiel's response is telling: not only is he completely tone deaf to her needs and experience, but he rushes to neutralize them with drugs. He never probes to learn what is wrong; he assumes she is broken and only medical/chemical intervention can fix her.

Yehiel's treatment of Hassida and her own self-perception reinforce a gender paradigm that insists on women as delicate forms that require escorts. Not much has changed since Virginia Woolf's encounter with the beadle a century ago. And in the

[227] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 49.
[228] Ibid., p. 45.

midst of Hassida's hot flashes, Woolf's words strike us with the same power: "Who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught and tangled in a woman's body?"[229] Hassida has the articulate mind of a prophet and a poet, even if she does voice her feelings with exaggerated rhetoric. Liebrecht, however, makes a glaring distinction between the tornado of Hassida's intellect and the muteness of her expression.

Hassida's capacity to recognize her sense of social isolation is interwoven with the overt leitmotif of silence. Before the Harari family begins traveling to St. George to pick up their new rental car, Hassida listens to Yehiel speaking for her to the travel agent. '"The lady is homesick,' he took the liberty to speak for her… 'The lady is homesick for people, mostly,' Yehiel explained seriously, darting a look at his son over his wife's head, to see if he was onto his mockery" ("הגברת מתגעגעת הביתה," נטל חרות לומר דברים בשמה...הגברת מתגעגעת בעיקר לאנשים," הסביר יחיאל ברצינות, מצודד מבט אל בנו מעל לראשה של אשתו, לבדוק אם קלט את הקלס).[230] The narrator imputes mockery to Yehiel, but that is beside the point. In both word and deed, Yehiel denies Hassida's presence in the room by speaking for her and then looking over her head, at Yuval, for confirmation. Hassida remains voiceless and invisible, nothing about her is taken into account by the men in the room, except their own unchecked assumptions.

Hassida is so infuriated by this exchange that she covers her mouth to quiet the onrush of the words, "I hate both of you, hate both of you, hate both of you" (עוצרת בשיניה את המשפט המתחבט בחלל פיה: "אני שונאת שניכם. שונאת את שניכם, שונאת את שניכם, שונאת את שניכם." וחשה את המלים מתהפכות על סף בית–הבליעה, נשאבות אחורנית ונסוגות לתוך גרונה).[231]

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[229] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 48.
[230] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 50.
[231] Ibid.

Swallowing her rage, and noticing the gazes of all three men fixed upon her, Hassida instead apologizes in a submissive voice, "I'm sorry. I'm terribly sorry. I am very tired" (ומול עיניהם השואלות של שלושת הגברים שמעה עצמה מתנצלת בקול דעוך: "אני מצטערת, אני מאוד מצטערת. אני עייפה מאוד").[232] Hassida is party to her own silencing. Perhaps, after the mocking responses to her previous outbursts, she has learned to restrain herself. Better to contain her truth than to have it be discredited. Liebrecht again confronts the reader with the conundrum of the feminine voice: should a woman unleash the heat and violence of her heart, or is she better off swallowing it and withdrawing into passivity? Hassida seems to choose the latter. During the excruciating car ride, while the loose-tongued driver stokes the flames of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in his minivan, both Hassida and the Mrs. Haddad wait silently for their husbands to erupt.

When the Harari family first sits down in the minivan, Hassida, "her unreleased anger turning inside her like a viper trapped in a narrow cage," leans her stiff neck on the soft headrest and closes her eyes, "abandoning herself to the artificial coolness" (הכעס שלא פורק מתהפך בתוכה כצפע הכלוא במקום צר מכפי מידותיו, הניחה עורפה הקשוי כעץ על המסעד הרך ועצמה עיניה, מפקירה עצמה לצינה המלאכותית).[233] As she earlier "surrenders" to her hot flash, in the car she "abandons herself." The phrase מפקירה עצמה captures Hassida's decision to relinquish control, to render the van a no-woman's land. In lieu of demanding an audience for her pain, and a space for her voice among the baseless claims of the Harari men and the driver, she lets the air conditioning rush over her overheated body. The

[232] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 50.
[233] Ibid., p. 51.

reader knows, however, that such pleasant relief can only distract her for so long (nothing is nearby in Utah after all).[234]

Liebrecht makes a subtle but key comparison between Hassida and Mrs. Haddad when the latter and her family board the minivan. As the driver walks beside Mr. Haddad holding his tattered suitcase, Hassida notices, "A step behind them, barely discernible from inside the minivan, taking small, hasty steps, as if trying to catch up with her companions, walked a young woman with a baby in her arms" (מרחק צעד מאחוריהם, סמויה לעתים מעיניהם של יושבי המיניבוס, מתקדמת בפסיעות קטנות וחפוזות, כמתאמצת לתפוס את מקומה לצד בן–זוגה, הלכה אשה צעירה ותינוק בזרועותיה).[235] Women, Liebrecht tells us, are left behind. Unlike Hassida, whose arms are empty, both of the baggage she cannot manage and the child who is now grown, Mrs. Haddad fully embraces her baby. She stands at the beginning of the journey of motherhood, but even with the full arms, she is left to catch up to the men who disregard her pace. Hassida reacts to the sight of the Palestinians with alarm, "My God! Look who's coming!" ("אלוהים! תראו מי בא!")[236] but the sight of Mrs. Haddad trailing behind her husband starts to erode the presumed barriers between Hassida and them.

The narrator describes Hassida's physical response to the Haddad family as "a sensation she remembered from her youth, like a body preparing itself for an adventure, and with the stirring came that special tingle that signals the recognition of danger" (כאשר אירע לה בנעוריה, כגוף המכין עצמו לקראת הרפתקה, ועם ההתעוררות מתחדשת הצטמררות

[234] Antimony to Cedar City, Utah is 96 miles.
[235] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 51–52.
[236] Ibid., p. 51.

מיוחדת הבאה עם ידיעת הסכנה).[237] The Builder too, in "Heder al Ha-Gag," experiences the same feeling when Hassan makes coffee in her kitchen. Taken aback by his delicate choreography, "her eyes drawn to his graceful, fluent movements, knowing danger was latent in what was happening before her" (נמשכת בעיניה אל התנועות הגמישות, החנניות יודעת כי סכנה אצורה בדבר המתרחש מולה).[238] Something about close proximity to Arabs sparks the premonition of danger, even in the most neutral domestic contexts: a minivan and a kitchen.

Hassida begins the car trip suppressing anger at her husband and son, and voicing her distress about sharing the minivan with the Palestinian family. Despite the furious viper lashing about in the narrow cage of her body, Hassida impulsively allies herself with Yehiel and Yuval. As she watches Mrs. Haddad trail behind her husband, one senses, however, that Hassida recognizes herself in the hasty, rushing steps, and that her allegiances may change.

When the talkative driver begins to sense the tension in the car, he tries unsuccessfully to lighten the mood. "'You're all very quiet,' he suddenly boomed at them reproachfully. 'I know from experience that Israelis are not usually very quiet. Just last week I had an Israeli couple who wanted to know the price of everything" ("אתם מאוד שקטים," הרעים לפתע קולו העז במעין טרוניה. "מנסיוני אני יודע שהישראלים לא כל–כך שקטים. לפני שבוע היה לי כאן זוג ישראלים שרק רצו לדעת כמה עולה כל דבר.").[239] Hassida watches Mrs. Haddad recoil from that remark and scrunch her shoulders "as if lashed with a whip"

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[237] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 53.
[238] סביון ליברכט, "חדר על הגג," *תפוחים מן המדבר*, 49.
[239] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 55.

("הצטמצמה במקומה, מכנסת כתפיה, כאילו הצליפו על גבה").[240] Mrs. Haddad's flinching gesture suggests that she is offended to be lumped in with the worst stereotype of Israelis – crass people who only speak of money. Hassida, who feels the mounting tension in the car, also recoils in this moment from the gaze of the driver, who desperately seeks to engage the passengers in conversation (חסידה, חרדה מן הצפוי מול המתיחות הנצברת, העיפה מבט במראה...אך כאשר פגשה את עיניו האורבות של הנהג, סילקה מבטיה מיד).[241]

The minivan is an astonishing container for the silent confrontation between the Harari and Haddad families. The driver, an ignoramus who has no idea what kind of encounter he is provoking, expresses the desperation that the five adults conceal. He wonders aloud why no one is speaking, which though awkward, gives voice to the discomfiting nature of the silence. In his comically reckless obtuseness, the driver appeals to Mr. Haddad for encouragement as he shows off his knowledge of the IDF's military prowess. "It's not just the courage you displayed, it's the planning. Jews have brains…You know better than me how backward those Arabs are…What do you say, Mr. Haddad? I know a lot about Israel, don't I?" ("וזה לא רק האומץ שלכם אלא גם התכנון. ליהודים יש ראש טוב...הערבים פרימטיבים, את זה אתם יודעים יותר טוב ממני...מה אתה אומר, מר חדאד? אני יודע הרבה על ישראל").[242] "No!" the reader wants Mr. Haddad and everyone else in the minivan to scream in unison, "In fact, you know astonishingly little about Israel!" Mr. Haddad continues to hold his tongue but the mounting pressure takes a physical toll on Hassida, whose body aches from trying too hard to relax.

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[240] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 55.
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid., pp. 57-8.

ממקומה בירכתי המכונית, שרירי גופה כואבים מן המאמץ להירגע, צלילי המנגינה המתוקים מכניסים בה אימה, כאות מבשר רע, חשבה חסידה: עכשיו עומד ליפול דבר. אולי תזנק לשון–אש מן המנוע ותצית את המכונית על נוסעיה. אולי תיעצר פתאום המכונית על סף הדשא והנהג יוכה שבץ. אז גם יבוא סוף לפטפוטיו.[243]

> Hassida thought to herself, "Something is going to happen now. Perhaps a tongue of fire will leap from the engine and blow up the car and all its passengers. Perhaps the car will veer into the grassy shoulder and the driver will suffer a stroke. That will certainly put an end to his chattering."[244]

Hassida keeps her prophecy to herself. The phrase לשון–אש appears once in Tanakh in the Book of Isaiah. After the "Song of the Vineyard," (Isa 5:1-7) in which the Judeans are rebuked for failing to blossom into a righteous people. Isaiah continues his condemnation warning:

לכן כאכל קש לשון אש וחשש להבה ירפה שרשם כמק יהיה ופרחם כאבק יעלה כי מאסו את תורת יהוה צבאות ואת אמרת קדוש־ישראל נאצו׃

> Assuredly, as straw is consumed by a tongue of fire and hay shrivels as it burns, their stock shall become like rot, and their buds shall blow away like dust. For they have rejected the instruction of Adonai Tzva'ot, spurned the word of Kadosh-Israel (Isa 5:24).

Hassida's ruminations about the demise of everyone in the car mirror the tropes of Isaiah, likening her to an ancient prophet of doom calling out for righteousness lest the people be consumed by punitive fire and warfare. If the driver continues his ignorant babbling, the tongue of fire will consume them all. Liebrecht here affirms Hassida's prophetic capacity. By internalizing her thoughts, she forgoes the opportunity to warn her fellow passengers of the possible doom that awaits them, but she in turn avoids being taunted.

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[243] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 59.

[244] Savyon Liebrecht, "The Road to Cedar City," *Apples from the Desert*, Marganit Weinberger-Rotman, p. 137.

Silence, Liebrecht suggests can be a weapon, if it is claimed by a woman and not imposed upon her.

A "tongue of fire" does eventually blaze inside of the minivan; it belongs to Mr. Haddad who denies the driver's claims about the supremacy of the IDF and confronts Yehiel about his work as a military prosecutor in the occupied territories. Their volatile argument sparks after Hassida and Mrs. Haddad have already begun forming an alliance. When the baby throws up in the car, Hassida offers moist towelettes to Mrs. Haddad, who nods in gratitude. Immediately, Yuval mocks his mother's generosity, "A real Hassid is our Hassida," ("חסידת אומות עולם, לא סתם חסידה") to his father.[245]

A sudden shift has clearly taken place. Hassida does not respond to her son's ridicule; her focus has moved beyond herself. In silence, a camaraderie burgeons between Hassida and Mrs. Haddad born out of their shared concern for the baby's needs and well-being. In contradistinction to the destructiveness of politics and war both women see themselves as entrusted with the task of preserving life.[246] As Yehiel and Mr. Haddad spit fire, Hassida believes Mrs. Haddad appeals to her for help. "The young woman threw a glance at Hassida as if forming a secret pact with her, entreating, 'My lips are sealed, please act for both of us'" (מעבר לכתפה העיפה האשה הצעירה מבט בחסידה, כקושרת עמה ברית, מבקשת לומר: אני, שפתי חתומות. עשי את למען שתינו).[247] The plea that Hassida reads into Mrs. Haddad's glance may only exist in her mind, an image born out of her desperation to connect, and to find an ally. Convinced by the desperation she imposes on

[245] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 60.
[246] David C. Jacobson, "Intimate Relations Between Israelis and Palestinians in Fiction by Israeli Women Writers," *Shofar*, p. 23.
[247] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 65.

Mrs. Haddad, Hassida tries, to no avail, to extinguish the blaze flaming between their husbands. Only the intervention of the driver, who turns up the radio, shuts down the argument between the "Jerusalemites." It is a liberating silence that prompts in Hassida's body an orgasmic kind of relief:

> והיא – מעין רפיון נעים ירד עליה, לאחר שפורקה הדריכות מגופה ושרירי גופה נחו – כנעימות היורדת לאחר רגע השיא. מנסה להבין את הדבר ולא מוצאת פירוש אמרה בלבה: במקומות זרים יפלו דברים שההגיון הישן כבר אינו טוב להסבירם. כאן יש לגייס הגיון ממין אחר. שכן הכול כבר אינו כשהיה: האנשים ומחשבותיהם.[248]

> "A pleasant lassitude descended on her—her body eased of its tension, her muscles relaxed—like the pleasurable glow after a climax. Trying in vain to account for that sensation, she said to herself, 'Things happen in foreign parts that the old logic cannot account for. Here one needs to muster a new kind of logic. Nothing is as it used to be, neither people nor their thoughts.'"[249]

It is not the end of the short story, but it very well could be. In her physical and psychological relief, Hassida also releases her prejudice. As she relishes her sudden unburdening, Hassida reminds readers of Victoria Abravanel headed home to Jerusalem clutching her miracle apples. Something about that strange desert land made her daughter bloom, ushering a rebirth of their relationship and crystallizing Rivka's character and beauty. So too, Hassida experiences a wondrous florescence in her newfound alliance with Mrs. Haddad and her baby. The logic of home will not work in America, where a Haddad and a Harari are indistinguishable. Through their silent *brit*, Hassida and Mrs. Haddad leave the warzone of the minivan and take steps toward peace. It is a quiet revolution, the very first step, and it begins with companionship – the antidote

[248] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 66.
[249] Savyon Liebrecht, "The Road to Cedar City," *Apples from the Desert*, Marganit Weinberger-Rotman, p. 146.

to loneliness.

The Other

In "B'Derech L'Cedar City," Liebrecht first invokes the trope of "the Other" to further augment Hassida's sense of isolation. Yehiel and Yuval are familiar and Hassida is conscious of their contribution to her emotional and psychological ferment. But there is a layer of fear that the narrator sees, which Hassida, the virtuous stork mother, does not. Waiting alone at the motel outside Jackson, for Yehiel and Yuval to return, Hassida paces back and forth on the porch. But she is not alone. There is a black man raking leaves nearby, staring at Hassida discreetly.

> לפתע, בהיותו סמוך אליה, שמט מידו המגרפה, שלף מכיסו חפץ מתכתי והושיט לה כפו ובה סוכריות בקופסת פח קטנה. היא פלטה צווחה ודילגה לאחור ואחר סירבה בתקיפות ולבסוף, למראה פניו העלובים, התנצלה.[250]

> Suddenly, when he was close to her, he dropped the rake and took out a metallic object from his pocket. He stretched his hand and offered her candy in a small tin box. Recoiling, she cried out, then declined vehemently, and then, seeing the miserable expression on his face, she apologized.[251]

Hassida's encounter with the black man betrays the ingrained prejudice she holds toward him. If he approaches her, he must be dangerous. Hassida does not consider that her behavior – pacing on the porch for five hours (!)[252]—might elicit a stranger's concern; she assumes this man will hurt her. The black man serves as the local representation of

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[250] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 50.

[251] Savyon Liebrecht, "The Road to Cedar City," *Apples from the Desert*, Marganit Weinberger-Rotman, pp. 122-3.

[252] חמש שעות התהלכה וצעדיה מהדהדים לאורך האכסדרה שבפתח המוטל. סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 45.

"the Other." At home in Israel, "the Other" is the Arab. The Arab is the person whose motivations are suspect, who might pull a weapon out of his pocket. In America, Hassida projects that fear onto the black man, and she recognizes her bias with violent shame. Liebrecht paints the revelation vividly: Hassida reacts to the man physically by recoiling (דילגה לאחור) and vocally, by crying out (פלטה צווחה); she then articulates her rejection (סירבה בתקיפות) and finally, taking note of the man's wretched or offensive appearance (למראה פניו העלובים), apologizes (התנכלה). Hassida recognizes her radical over-reaction to this man's quiet act of sympathy. And for a moment, seeing the wretchedness in his face, she is confronted with her bias.

Hassida's fear exists on numerous levels. She relies on Yehiel and Yuval to guard her from the unwanted gaze of strangers, to steer her through unfamiliar territory, and to protect her from some imminent violence directed toward her body. Hassida, like the Builder and Victoria Abravanel, explicitly fears physical aggression at the hands of "the male Other." The Builder expresses relief that her son isn't slaughtered, that she is left unharmed, and she fears that the Arab laborers are plotting to kidnap her and Udi. Victoria agonizes over what she will do if her daughter's boyfriend strikes her. Hassida follows this pattern and assumes the black man will target her with a weapon. The same scenario repeats itself in the minivan with the Palestinian passenger Mr. Haddad when she sees the glint of his wedding band and assumes he has a knife in his hand.[253]

Hassida's encounter with the black man is the first of two moments when her gaze and her prejudice are directed toward African Americans. Before the Harari family

[253] להרף רגע אחד דימתה חסידה לזהות נצנוץ סכין בידו, והיתה זו טבעת נישואים על קמיצת האגרוף. סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 63.

boards the minivan bound for St. George, they eat lunch at a Chinese restaurant. When Yuval eats off of Hassida's plate repeatedly without asking her, she grows frustrated. She fantasizes about yelling at him, "Take the whole plate!" ("קח לך את הכול!")[254] but instead quells the impulse by fixing her gaze on "an extremely obese black woman in overalls who peered at the plastic food displayed in the restaurant window under the menu" (לתקוע מבטה באשה כושית שמנה להדהים הלבושה סרבל פועלים, שהיתה מעיינת בריכוז במנות הפלסטיק המוצגות בחלון המסעדה מתחת לתפריט).[255] In contrast to Hassida's interaction with the black man back in Jackson, she is more controlled now. Liebrecht depicts her, distracted from her tantrum like a child at the zoo, peering intently at the "animal" on the other side of the glass. She does not make eye contact with this woman, but watches her body, judging her insatiable appetite from her interest in the food display. Hassida need not speak or act; the reader knows what she is thinking. She reduces this "Other" like the black man before her, to a savage beast hunting for its next meal.

The two black people that appear before the car ride are the "indigenous American Other."[256] Hassida's reactions to them—unwarranted terror and perverse objectification—reiterate the deeply entrenched (Ashkenazi) Israeli bias against non-white people. Hassida learns quickly to conceal her mistrust and judgement but those behaviors follow her into the minivan.

When she first sees that the "Jerusalemites" sharing the minivan ride with them are Arab, Hassida reacts with alarm, "My God! Look who's coming!" ("אלוהים! תראו מי

[254] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 50.
[255] Ibid.
[256] "Indigenous" is used to reflect the contemporary understanding of the local "Other" in the United States. Of course, given the story's physical setting in Utah, the American Indians are the true "indigenous" people, but they do not appear in this story.

"!בא).[257] Momentarily disregarding her anger toward Yehiel and Yuval, she appeals to them as allies to confirm her disgust and disbelief. She mimics their behavior toward her—"the Other," "the female" excluded from their male bond—and seeks to unite together as Israelis, against the Palestinians. Yehiel is unsurprisingly negative in his response to this bid for camaraderie:

> "ישראלים מירושלים – מיי פוט!...ערבים הביאו לנו!" אמר בתדהמה וזיוות ראשו והביט בעיני בנו. "לנסוע עד אמריקה – שמונה מאות שישים וחמישה דולר לפני מס נסיעות – בשביל הכבוד לשבת באוטו אחד עם ערבים!"[258]

> "Israelis from Jerusalem, my foot!...They brought us Arabs!" he said in disbelief, and tilted his head to look at his son. "To come all the way to America, spend eight hundred sixty-seven dollars before travel tax, all for the honor of sharing a cab with Arabs!"
> "Nuclear engineer!" Yuval burst out laughing, throwing his head back.
> "Intelligent, and from Jerusalem—and an Arab to boot!" Yehiel added incredulously.[259]

Yehiel accepts Hassida's invitation to racist exasperation, but he directs his response to Yuval, ignoring her completely. The American reader shudders at Yehiel's disgust at sharing a car with Arabs, which evokes images of segregated busing during Jim Crow. Liebrecht comments on three facets of Yehiel's character through this outburst: first, he is a crass Israeli focused on money, using the cost of their vacation as some justification for an "Arab-free" getaway; second, even when he can relate to Hassida through their shared bigotry, he excludes her, speaking only to Yuval; third, he assertively (and nauseatingly, for the reader) nurtures racism in his son, who disparages the notion that the Arab man could practice a highly regarded profession.

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[257] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 51.
[258] Ibid., p. 52.
[259] Savyon Liebrecht, "The Road to Cedar City," *Apples from the Desert*, Marganit Weinberger-Rotman, p. 130.

Liebrecht breaks up Yehiel and Yuval's bigoted rant by inserting the comically ignorant driver who introduces the two families as if they are long lost relatives, "Here is the Harari family, and this is the Haddad family…They told me at the office that both families are from Israel" ("זאת משפחה הררי וזאת משפחה חדאד...במשרד אמרו לי ששתי המשפחות מישראל").[260] As the Haddad family takes their seats, the Harari men "their mirth now tinged with embarrassment," smile at each other and sit tautly, waiting to see how things will turn out, "the mockery gone from their eyes" (הגבר והנער מאחור, מבוכה מסתננת אל צהלתם, מחייכים זה אל זה כמעודדים, יושבים דרוכים במקומם, מצפים לראות איך ייפול דבר ועיניהם ריקות מלצון).[261] The chagrin of Yehiel and Yuval reminds the reader of Hassida's earlier confrontation with the black man outside her motel. Every member of the Harari family has enough conscience to know that their behavior is objectionable. Hassida's victim confronts her directly with his miserable expression. Yehiel and Yuval cease their jeering before the Haddads can hear them, but the sight of the father's tired, wrinkled face and his chivalrous treatment of his wife as they enter the car, immediately contradict their dehumanizing assumptions about him.

As the road trip begins, a blanket of silence covers the car, and traces of enmity are suppressed in all but the averted gazes and the tense postures of the passengers. Hassida notices the unusual stillness of Mrs. Haddad and her husband, whose "neck looked nailed to his shoulders" (צווארו כממוסמר אל כתפיו).[262] The driver, unaware of the encounter taking place in his van, tries to make small talk about a beloved radio host. His gaiety and laughter augment rather than diffuse "the mounting estrangement, as if he

[260] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 52.
[261] Ibid., p. 53.
[262] Ibid.

were attempting to divert attention from an impending disaster" (רק, באופן מוזר, הגבירו את הדריכות הנאספת, כאילו בכוח מנסים כאן לעקור את תשומת–הלב מאסון מתרגש").[263] The narrator's explicit foreshadowing alerts readers to the inevitable erosion of this seemingly respectful silence. But the heated debate that will ensue between Yehiel Harari and Mr. Haddad is more than provoked, it is practically dragged out of their mouths by the driver who belabors the topic of the Israeli military in order to get someone to chat with him.

After her vain attempt to connect with Yehiel and Yuval over the presence of Arabs in their car, Hassida knows she is on her own. They snub her yet again with their cliquishness, making it clear that at the start of her journey, she has no allies in the car. Hassida, the hyperbolic depiction of self-sacrificing mother, is most like the driver, who "hosts" both families in his car and tries with painful desperation to connect with everyone. Hassida is annoyed by the driver but secretly sympathetic to his efforts to engage them all. Her compassion leads her to nod ever so slightly when the driver, increasingly disconcerted by their silence, asks if they understand English.[264]

Not until the Haddad baby vomits is there a word spoken in the minivan by a passenger. Liebrecht crafts an unbridled moment of upheaval that hinges on the universal experience of having a baby puke on his parent. This is the moment when the balance of power shifts. Until the baby throws up, the Israelis are divided and the Haddads are nervously silent. Witnessing Mrs. Haddad care for her son, Hassida realizes how young she is (Yuval's age) and starts to relate to her as a daughter. When Yehiel turns away from the odor, clearly expressing disgust, Hassida winces at his impatience and makes a

[263] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 55.
[264] Ibid., p. 56.

subtle but radical choice, offering a moist towelette from her purse. Rejected by her own family, the Israeli mother finds common cause with her Palestinian counterpart. The bond of motherhood and the experience of victimhood unite them.

Literary scholar Lily Rattok reads the political dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict directly onto Hassida's changing perceptions of Haddad family. Rattok argues that Yehiel and Yuval's "callousness leaves [Hassida] with an overwhelming sense of helplessness which in turn gives rise to a profound empathy with the Arab minority that feels equally helpless and weak in relation to the Israeli occupier."[265] Not until the innocent baby is "victimized" by Yehiel's insensitivity does Hassida see herself the Haddad family's otherness. "The Other" is no longer defined by difference, but by a shared feeling of defenselessness in the face of Yehiel's uncontested power. Hassida realizes that she, too, is "Other" in the eyes of her family.

With Hassida's nascent change in allegiance and in her increasing self-awareness, Liebrecht hints at the complexities of intersectionality for Israeli women, who are simultaneously occupier and occupied, the dominant culture and the subjugated sex. Rabbi Rebecca T. Alpert names the many strands of identity present in Jewish feminism, including categories of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and religion.[266] Political scientist Marla Brettschneider asserts that, "One role of Jewish feminism is to make gender a conscious category, to unthink patriarchal presumptions regarding gender, to do new Jewish studies projects in which feminist experiences, methodologies, and insights are

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[265] Lily Rattok, "Introduction: The Healing Power of Storytelling," *Apples from the Desert*, pp. 23-4.
[266] Rebecca T. Alpert, "Jewish Feminism and Intersectionality," *Hypatia Reviews Online: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 2017. Accessed 19 Jan 2018. http://hypatiareviews.org/reviews/content/10.

the motor force."[267] All of Liebrecht's short stories feature female gender consciousness that confronts male hegemony. "Heder al Ha-Gag" and "B'Derech L'Cedar City," which explicitly deal with the encounter between two "Others"—the Israeli woman and the Arab—, acknowledge the pricklier territory where feminism ignores or conflicts with racism. Brettschneider explicitly criticizes the failure of feminist intersectionality experts who unconsciously assume a "position of whiteness" without interrogating its racial assumptions. Liebrecht's willingness to depict encounters between these differing "Others" over the past thirty years suggests that fiction is miles ahead of academic scholarship in exploring Jewish feminism's conversation with race.

Once Hassida connects to the Haddad family as victims of her husband's arrogant insensitivity, she also relates to them as a parent. As the Haddads scramble to clean up a mess that cannot be contained, Hassida decodes their Arabic and retrieves a moist compress from her purse so Mrs. Haddad can wipe the baby's face. Liebrecht humorously marks this wipe with the El Al logo. Thus, Hassida changes her allegiance in a ritual whereby she uses an object branded with the quintessential symbol of Zionism to clean up the vomit of a Palestinian child.

While the moment with the towelette denotes Hassida's clear switch from team Harari team to team Haddad, Liebrecht foreshadows her sympathies from the very beginning of the story. In the very first paragraph, Yehiel and Yuval walk through the shady avenues of Antimony, Utah crushing "fingerlike leaves" (נעלי הספורט הלבנות שקנו במרתף המציאות שב"מייסיז" בשלושה דולרים הזוג, מרסקות את העלים המאוצבעים) under their

[267] Marla Brettschneider, *Jewish Feminism and Intersectionality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), p. 131.

bargain basement Macy's sneakers.[268] Hinting at their indifference to violence, Liebrecht portrays Hassida as the radical opposite, so empathetic to these leaves, which appear to her as "severed hands," that she strains to tiptoe, as if in a cemetery of unburied limbs (לא הצליחה להביא עצמה לידי דריכה על–פני העלים המונחים על האדמה ככפות–ידים כרותות, והחלה חותרת דרכה לאט, מפלסת בחרטום נעלה איים בתוך משטוחי העלים, טורחת וטורחת וכמעט לא נעה ממקומה).[269] That Hassida sees the leaves and changes her stride to accommodate them suggests that she is aware of those who are ignored and crushed. Those same leaves are also Hassida's companions are Yehiel and Yuval who leave her behind to suffer through another hot flash. Sitting a on white bench, the gold and copper hand-shaped leaves lay at her feet while she sobs inwardly, watching the backs of her husband and son receding the distance (כפות הזהב והנחושת של עלי הדולב היו מונחות לרגליה והיא הביטה בגביהם המתרחקים של בעלה ושל בנה ומררה בתוכה ללא קול).[270] These leaves, the color of Arab skin, bear witness to her loneliness. Liebrecht plants the hand-shaped leaves, the first victims of Yehiel and Yuval's callousness, as comrades of Hassida. The Haddad family is the subsequent incarnation of those leaves in her journey.

Hassida's switch of allegiance is the first shot fired. The war breaks out. Yuval disparages his mother's act of generosity "A real Hassid is our Hassida" ("חסידת אומות עולם, לא סתם חסידה) using the Hebrew phrase *chasidat umot ha'olam* ("righteous gentile"), typically reserved for non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during World War II. Yuval ridicules his mother's act of generosity by "awarding" her this revered status, the Holocaust reference only serving to highlight her exaggerated, unwarranted behavior.

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[268] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 43.
[269] Ibid.
[270] Ibid., p. 44.

Yuval, of course, sees Hassida's generous act as traitorous and could care less if she helps Mrs. Haddad clean her child's face. Yehiel also engages for battle, rubbing his hands together like he's itching to throw the first punch, and inviting the driver to continue talk about war.[271] So delighted is he by the invitation to engage with his passenger, and so relieved by Yehiel's approval, the driver pivots to Mr. Haddad, insisting, "Where praise is due, learn to accept it….Am I right about the quick wars you guys fight?" (כשמגיעים שבחים – אז צריך לדעת לקבל אותם...האם אני צודק בעניין הלחמות המהירות שלכם?).[272] Liebrecht does not narrate from the perspective of Mr. Haddad, but his immediate response to the driver's appeal for agreement suggests that he too has been radicalized by Hassida's peace offering. "I don't think you're correct," he responds to the driver, "In the final analysis, nobody won yet. Whatever looks like a victory is only temporary" ("אני חושש שאתה לא בדיוק צודק...בסופו של דבר אף אחד עוד לא ניצח. כל מה שנראה נצחון הוא דבר זמני").[273]

Perplexed by Mr. Haddad's incongruous diffidence about the Israeli army's accomplishments, the driver pushes him to proclaim victory. Mr. Haddad, refusing to make eye contact with the driver or to provide greater context for his opinions, looks out the window and replies, "In the final analysis, everybody loses…Israel loses soldiers in the fighting and achieves less that it would at the negotiation table" ("בסיכום סופי כולם מפסידים...ישראל מאבדת אנשים בקרבות ומשיגה פחות ממה שיכלה ליד שולחן הדיונים").[274] His diagnosis of the IDF's shortcomings is the last straw for Yehiel, who leaps forward, and

[271] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 60.
[272] Ibid., p. 61.
[273] Ibid., p. 62.
[274] Ibid., p. 63.

with his neck turning red, insists, “I will not allow you to spread Arab propaganda here” (“יחיאל נהדף קדימה וצווארו האדים. ”אני לא אתן לך לעשות כאן תעמולה פרו–ערבית”).[275] Yehiel tries assert the uncontested power of an occupier in the minivan--“אני לא אתן לך”—assuming his usual role as the arbiter of what can and cannot be said (he is a military prosecutor, after all). But the authority he wields in Israel and in the occupied territories is not recognized in America. Mr. Haddad, who knows Colonel Harari from his post in Israel, is all too eager to remind him of this fact: “You had better realize right now that here you are a very small matter. You are in a truly free country…. Here the law is the same for everyone…Here there’s one law for an Arab like me and a colonel like you, Colonel Harari” (כאן אתה אדון קטן מאוד, כדאי שיהיה לך ברור כבר עכשיו. אתה נמצא בארץ חופשית באמת...כאן יש חוק אחד לכולם...כאן יש חוק אחד לערבי כמוני וגם לאלוף משנה כמוך, אלוף משנה הררי).[276]

As Mr. Haddad shoots words out of his mouth with unrestrained animosity (ואיזו משטמה עצורה במלים המוטחות כירי),[277] Hassida shudders at the menacing tone of her surname on his lips. The reader remembers that just moments before she allied herself to his family, she imagined a knife in his hand.[278] Switching loyalty, Liebrecht suggests, is a fearsome process. Hassida remembers that her new allies are just as capable of violence as her family if not more capable, even if she personally has not yet fallen victim to it. And Mr. Haddad, Hassida learns, is not amenable to her sympathy. When Mrs. Haddad silently begs her to intervene in this war of words, Hassida prevails unsuccessfully upon

[275] סביון ליברכט, ”בדרך לסידר סיטי,“ 63.
[276] Ibid.
[277] Ibid.
[278] See footnote 235.

Yehiel before turning to Mr. Haddad, "You're on a trip with your wife and baby. Don't spoil it" ("אתה בטיול עם האשה והתינוק שלך, אל תקלקל לך את הטיול").[279] Infuriated by her assumption that he and his family are in America by choice, Mr. Haddad responds that his family is, in fact, in exile. He has no need for her feigned respect. "They used to talk of the 'Wandering Jew'—today we have Wandering Arabs" ("אני לא בטיול, גברת...אני לא יודע מה זה טיולים. אמרו יהודי נודד–היום יש ערבים נודדים").[280] Whereas Hassida feels a sense of kinship with the Arabs because of their shared victimization, Mr. Haddad is unable to reciprocate. He can only see Hassida's privilege as an Israeli, and, as a man, fails to recognize her experience of otherness as a woman. Mr. Haddad's unwillingness to accept Hassida as an ally speaks to the stunted progress of this short story.

"Can more than one people wander or feel exiled?" Liebrecht challenges her readers. Hassida feels exiled from her family and from the Israeli role as occupier. She cannot step on innocent finger-like leaves; the violence inherent in the Zionist project is abhorrent to her. Mrs. Haddad, a young mother who knows otherness as both a woman and a Palestinian, is responsive to Hassida's gentle overture, recognizing in her El Al compress a peace offering between mothers. But Mr. Haddad is unwilling to share the badge of victimhood. There is only room for one race of "wanderers." Even though Hassida resolves to travel to St. George in the minivan with the Haddad family, the reader knows that her burgeoning camaraderie with Mrs. Haddad will not endure. Hassida will return to her family and, ultimately, to Israel. The Haddad family with their ragged luggage, must remain in America. If they cannot share Israel, they cannot share

[279] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 65.
[280] Ibid.

anything. Thus, the Israeli woman, the Palestinian man and the Palestinian woman, each the victim of a confluence of stigmas, fail to forge bonds across the shared experience of otherness, and remain lonely.

Setting

The shared detour of the Harari and Haddad families takes place in Utah near Zion National Park. Both in name and in topography, the setting for their journey is simultaneously familiar and foreign. The terrain near Zion National Park is rocky, hilly and arid, much like the climate and land in Israel. Cedar City evokes the cedars of Lebanon (ארזים מן הלבנון), which King Solomon used to build his Temple.[281] Photos of Bryce Canyon, just east of Cedar City (northeast of Zion National Park) reveal scenery of otherworldly quality, suggesting that the only place that Israelis and Palestinians can truly confront one another as equals might be in a galaxy far, far away.

Bryce Amphitheater at Sunset, US Department of Interior

According to *Business Insider* in 2017, Moab, Utah ranked twentieth on the list of most popular travel destinations in the United States (no other locations in Utah made the

[281] I Kings 5:20

list).[282] Moab[283] is 280 miles from Cedar City, almost the distance of the length of the State of Israel (290 miles). Liebrecht chooses an unconventional location for a Jewish Israeli family to vacation in the US. Given Hassida's years of planning, one might expect New York City, Miami, Las Vegas or Los Angeles, the most popular tourist destinations. Equally peculiar is the presence of an exiled Palestinian family in Utah as opposed to California, Michigan, New York, Texas or Florida– states with largest Palestinian populations.[284] The Harari and Haddad families are actively seeking out a place that looks like home and is otherworldly at the same time. A mutual love of Israel and its environs could be the scaffolding upon which to open a dialogue about hope and peace, especially outside of Israel's politically charged atmosphere. And while the two mothers demonstrate the capacity to connect in spite of their many differences, the men remain entrenched in the sanctimoniousness and prejudice they carry from home.

Mr. Haddad names America, a "truly free country" (ארץ חופשית באמת), as a great equalizer where there is one law for Arab and colonel alike. He implies, of course, that at home in Israel no one is truly free because Arabs are subject to a different law than Israeli Jews. The unchecked power that Colonel Harari wields in his military tribunal counts for

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[282] Marc Hanbury, "The 25 most popular travel destinations in the US," *Business Insider,* 21 Mar 2017. Accessed 21 Jan 2018. http://www.businessinsider.com/most-popular-us-travel-destinations-2017-3/#25-aspen-colorado-1

[283] Moab was a legendary adversary of the Israelites, with whom they were forbidden to intermarry (Deut 23:4). Ironically, Ruth the Moabite, the exemplary convert, is the progenitor of King David, himself a forebear of the Messiah. Ruth, the ultimate outsider as a Moabite becomes the consummate insider as an ancestor of the Messiah, proving that the resolution of enmity and the bridging of boundaries is not only possible, but righteous. Liebrecht does not set her story in Moab because that would convey a different message. "B'Derech L'Cedar City" does not foretell a destiny for Hassida that is as bright or as clear as Ruth's, hence Liebrecht's choice of lesser known locations.

[284] "Demographics," *Arab American Institute Foundation,* 2014. Accessed 22 Jan 2018. http://www.aaiusa.org/demographics.

nothing in America. Mr. Haddad reminds Yehiel of this fact to goad him on, invoking equality under the law like an obscenity. In writing about "Heder al Ha-Gag," David Jacobson attributes the failure of relationship across lines of Israeli and Palestinian identity to the "fact that the Palestinian character suffers some humiliation, hurt or loss for which he or she presumably holds the Israeli character responsible."[285] Jacobson's contention holds true for Mr. Haddad, who names the humiliation, hurt and loss of being exiled from his homeland, and left "a wandering Arab" (ערבי נודד). Mrs. Haddad appears to contradict Jacobson's thesis in her willingness to accept help from Hassida and later, a toy for her child. She is not fixated on the conflict between their nations back in Israel; she focuses squarely on nurturing the child in her arms. Rattok contends that women in Liebrecht's fiction have a sacred responsibility as the guardians of life.[286] Mrs. Haddad recognizes in Hassida an ally in this task. She is able to look toward her child's future whereas her husband dwells on the past.

Liebrecht employs Utah like a stage manager would commission a backdrop. Readers know it is not Israel, but it looks similar. By depicting a moment of head-on confrontation between an IDF colonel and a Palestinian he once imprisoned, Liebrecht again invokes Ruth Ronen's "Possible Worlds" theory. Such a raw collision of enemy cultures cannot take place just anywhere. Liebrecht creates an environment recognizable enough for both families to feel comfortable laying claim to it. Colonel Harari feels compelled to protect the minivan from Palestinian propaganda and Mr. Haddad can

[285] David C. Jacobson, "Intimate Relations Between Israelis and Palestinians in Fiction by Israeli Women Writers," *Shofar*, p. 43.
[286] Lily Rattok, "Introduction: The Healing Power of Storytelling," *Apples from the Desert*, p. 24.

muster the courage to confront the judge who incarcerated him (אתה לא יכול להזמין משטרה ולזרוק אותי לחודש לבית–מעצר בלי להודיע לאף אחד).[287] Such an eruption of two deeply held truths would not be possible driving along the Las Vegas strip or through Times Square. In another context, the scenery would be a distraction from the conflict rather than a painful reminder of its unrelenting grip on both men.

While Mr. Haddad paints America, hyperbolically (and incorrectly, we know), as a truly free country where there is one law for everyone, Liebrecht trivializes America as a paragon of vapid materialism. Radio is prominent in the collective memory of Israelis. Virtually the whole population was glued to radio sets awaiting news of the United Nations vote on the partition of Palestine in 1947, as well as the declaration of Israel's independence. Even today, radio is used to call up troops during national emergencies.[288] Radio is personified in Israeli culture as *kol Yisrael*, the "voice of Israel" (also the official radio station broadcasting since 1948). The radio is always on the Egged inter-city buses, and therefore function as a kind of auditory glue for the nation. If the communal voice of Israel is concerned with war and independence, the voice of America is concerned with individualism and consumerism, with discount jewelry and watches.

When the minivan driver is not babbling about Israel and starting wars between the Harari and Haddad families, he turns on the radio to hear about the opening of a shopping center. With pride, he announces, "This program is heard all the way to Arizona. It's all they've talked about here all month" ("את התוכנית הזאת שומעים היום עד

[287] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 63.
[288] "Israel Society & Culture: History of Radio in Israel," *Jewish Virtual Library*. Accessed 22 Jan 2018. http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/history-of-radio-in-israel

"אריזונה. כבר חודש לא מדברים כאן על שום נושא אחר").[289] What a luxury in a free country to speak only of shopping malls and antique or knick-knack road-shows! One can imagine the disdain with which Liebrecht writes the minivan driver, a person so out of touch with the concept of life under siege that a shock-resistant, silver-plated Mickey Mouse watch for $19.97 constitutes news.[290]

While the landscape and climate of Utah resemble Israel, the existential feeling of tranquility is dissimilar. The frenetic chaos of war that all too often hijacks life in Israel, finds its counterpart in the rush of customers to a mall opening. In "B'Derech L'Cedar City" it is "the deafening commercialism and superficiality of America blaring out from the radio that foregrounds the profound hostility between the protagonists in the car."[291] Both families are "in exile" from Israel in this story. The light tone of the radio content invites readers to consider a life unburdened by ethnic conflict, where discounts are worth reporting. Hassida and Mrs. Haddad are willing to experiment with the simplicity of America, making a subtle connection through their role as caretakers. Yehiel Harari and Mr. Haddad have no interest in the abatement of the antagonism that has defined their lives. Trying to make sense of their clash in his car, and eager to reclaim the peace he takes for granted, the driver smiles, "I hope no war breaks out in my van" ("אני מקווה שלא תפרוץ שום מלחמה במכונית שלי").[292] He is, after all, employed by Liebrecht's imagined "Merchant Trail of Utah Travel Agency," a tourism company that roots itself in

[289] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 53–4.
[290] Ibid., p. 54.
[291] Tamara Levine, "Liebrecht, Savyon," *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Jewish Writers in the Twentieth Century*, Sorrel Kerbel, ed., Fitzroy Dearborn (New York: 2003), p. 618.
[292] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 65.

America's legacy of trade and commerce. History for this American would be better narrated with receipts than wars.

The faceoff between Colonel Harari and Mr. Haddad, "two Israeli soldiers" (כי "מלחמה בין שני אנשי–צבא ישראלים זה דבר מסוכן), makes the driver uncomfortable; their display of raw emotion and impassioned conviction, even in a language he cannot decipher, is "dangerous" to him (מסוכן).[293] Embedded in Liebrecht's depiction of America, the land of peace in plenty, is a scathing critique. Like the driver, America is a place of polite ignorance that cannot countenance debate or trauma. The price of "one law for all" (חוק אחד לכולם)[294] is a lifestyle bereft of depth, where the cacophony of souls yoked together in a millennia-long battle for home can be drowned out by a visit to the jewelry department.[295]

Story Structure

"B'Derech L'Cedar City" transpires over the course of a detour. The possibilities for progress are delimited, therefore, by the fact that we have no arrival – the story ends at a rest stop. Liebrecht's title, synonymous with "Road to Nowhere,"[296] and her story structure, convey the liminality of the characters' experience. The degree of their transformation will likely remain unresolved.

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[293] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 65.
[294] Ibid., p. 63.
[295] בדיוק ברגע ההוא הכריזה השדרנית על ביקור במחלקת התכשיטים והנהג מיהר להגביר את קול מקלט והקשיב בריכוז. Ibid., p. 66.
[296] Cedar City, Utah, home to 30,000 people, calls itself "Festival City USA" anchoring its identity in the events that merely pass through its perimeter, rather than any feature of the place itself. https://www.cedarcity.org/.

In “Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar,” Victoria Abravanel returns home from her trip to the desert, transformed by the encounter with her daughter. She carries with her the miracle apples and the hope that Rivka will find happiness and fulfillment, an accomplishment that eludes Victoria. “Apples from the Desert” is a story of progress that emerges out of a willingness to explore the unfamiliar. “Heder al Ha-Gag,” in contrast, is a story of stasis or even regression. The narrator relates the Builder’s story in retrospect, tinged with regret. Her ambitious experiment in Arab-Israeli partnership, with all the trappings of a promising tale of cooperation, ends abruptly with the disappearance of the workers and a sense that the Builder flirted with danger and barely survived. “A Room on the Roof” is about the subconscious wiring that makes peace impossible, and the inertia that leads to re-entrenchment in bias. A room is built at the cost of hope; the tyranny of the status quo is surfaced and suffered.

“The Road to Cedar City” opens in a place of literal brokenness—the axle of the Hararis’ rental car malfunctions—and ends before we learn about the next stop on their itinerary. The conflict that erupts between Colonel Yehiel Harari and Mr. Haddad provokes a change in Hassida. She experiments with autonomy and assertiveness when she breaks away from her family and chooses to finish the car trip in the minivan with the Haddads, but this step is too small for the reader to extrapolate larger implications. Will Hassida return to Israel with a new outlook on Palestinians? Will she overcome her base fear of Blacks and Arabs? Given how ingrained her bias is (as reflected in her interactions with the two African Americans), such growth is unlikely. Might she feel empowered, however, to defend herself from the mockery and callousness of her husband

and son? Quite possibly. "B'Derech L'Cedar City" exposes the fits and starts of transformation without determining any degree of progress or regress.

By denying readers the details of the Hararis' intended destination, Liebrecht invites them to focus on the parts of travelogues we usually gloss over. Tourists returning from vacation regale listeners with tales of sights they photographed, people they met, and souvenirs they purchased. We spend little if any time describing the gas station where we filled our tank, the line at customs where we waited to enter the country, or the daylong trek to replace a rental car. These are the expunged hours of tourism, the liminal moments when we just could not arrive at our next stop soon enough. Such chronic impatience makes us all permanent exiles, never at home where we are. Comedian Jerry Seinfeld gets it: "Wherever you are in life, it's my feeling, you've got to go."[297]

The trip that the Harari family takes results from the generosity of the travel agency, who releases them from financial accountability when they break their contract. "The company will collect the car from the place where it broke down. I hope you appreciate it, because you were not supposed to drive on a dirt road. It says so specifically in the contract that you, Mr. Harari, signed. But the head office decided not to hold you liable" (החברה תדאג לקחת את המכונית מן המקום שהתקלקלה. אני מקווה שאתם מעריכים זאת מכיוון שאסור היה לכם לעלות על דרך עפר וכך כתוב במפורש בחוזה שאתה חתמה עליו, מיסטר הררי. אבל הוחלט במשרד הראשי לא לחייב אתכם על כך").[298] The Harari family's release from liability,

[297] Jason Zinoman, "On Stage, a Comic's Still at Home," *The New York Times*, 14 Oct 2012. Accessed 23 Jan 2018. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/15/arts/jerry-seinfeld-is-still-at-home-doing-stand-up.html.
[298] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 48.

even in the face of glaring evidence that they broke their contract, speaks to a much larger issue of accountability and even memory.

Author Suzanne Ruta, in her review of Liebrecht's English language collection, asserts that Colonel Harari is the only figure in Liebrecht's entire English-translation essay collection *Apples from the Desert* who lacks memory. "He seems sprung from the soil like dragon's teeth, to battle every obstacle. How can this man, all anger and aggression, coexist with Liebrecht's other characters, who are all sadness and searching? He can't. His long-suffering wife in effect defects to his enemies."[299] Memory of the past, whether signing a contract to avoid dirt roads, or the unsavory task of administering "justice" in the occupied territories, is essential to the accuracy of a moral compass. If Yehiel Harari does not have to pay for the damage to his rental car, if he never has to face the Palestinians he puts in prison, he can walk through the world without acknowledging the victims of his "anger and aggression." In "The Road to Cedar City," however, there are consequences to his actions. America attributes no currency to Yehiel's rank in the IDF. He might lack a memory, but outside of the courtroom where he yields unquestioned power, Yehiel can be *reminded.* Mr. Williams in the travel agency can show him the signed contract committing to stay on paved roads. And even if Mr. Williams does not demand compensation for breach of that agreement, he nonetheless charges the entire Harari family a day of their vacation in order to replace their car. The minivan ride is, therefore, a radical moment of accountability for Yehiel, which makes possible his confrontation with a Palestinian he once incarcerated.

[299] Suzanne Ruta, "Bridges in the Sand," *The New York Times,* 13 Sept 1998. Accessed 5 Jan 2017.

Ruta highlights an important ingredient in the recipe for reconciliation: memory. Jewish tradition harps on memory. God's refrain that Israelites "were strangers in the land of Egypt" is the most frequently invoked rationale for their humane treatment of others, for their worship, and for their embryonic justice system. Remembering a past of suffering propels a present of gratitude and a future of fairness. At home in Israel where Yehiel Harari wields unquestioned authority, he does not remember. In America, where Yehiel is reminded of his past actions, Mr. Haddad is finally granted his "fair" hearing. And contrary to Yehiel, Mr. Haddad, the "wandering Arab" feels cursed with memory. "This could only happen in a story. To find you at this remote place! You, of all people. To be reminded of things I thought I was beginning to forget. It's better to forget" (רק" בסיפורים זה יכול להיות. למצוא אותך בסוף העולם הזה – דווקא אותך. ולזכור דברים שכבר חשבתי שאני מתחיל לשכוח. יותר טוב לשכוח").[300]

In a sly nod to her readers (and to Ronen's "Possible Worlds" theory) Liebrecht has Mr. Haddad speak what we are all thinking: "What are the chances?!" But we go along for the ride as Mr. Haddad does, seizing the opportunity to confront his jailor. Yes, it is better to forget. Or at least easier. Yehiel Harari has built a life and an identity by forgetting the pain he has caused others. And it is no wonder then that Hassida, if only temporarily, allies herself with the Haddad family. She too is cursed with memory: the memory of rupture between her husband and son, the memory of being needed by them both, and the memory of wishing for their reconciliation only to suffer in isolation as they exclude her from their newfound bond. Hassida's sense of fellowship with the Haddad family grows out of their shared victimization by Yehiel. He once threw Mr. Haddad in

[300] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 65.

prison. Hassida worries he will throw her in an asylum. Yehiel attempts to silence Mr. Haddad by forbidding his "Palestinian propaganda," and he tries to mute Hassida's emotional expression by recommending prescription medication. Yehiel looks over and away, never making eye contact with either person. Hassida longs to be acknowledged. And even though Mr. Haddad is not receptive to her sympathy, she recognizes herself in his pain and feels less alone because of his brave denunciation.

And, of course, all of this intense unburdening occurs during a detour, the part of the story that people leave out when they return home. Thus, Liebrecht implies, Yehiel Harari (and probably Yuval, too) will return to Israel having struck this encounter from the record. And Hassida, who yearns for companionship and connection, will resume her journey in St. George with her family, forced yet again to bear in silence the pain of feeling burdensome and alone. Even in Utah, where everything is far apart and there are no easy arrivals, the in betweenness of a journey marks it for erasure. We simply do not confer value where we face inconvenience. No matter how revelatory the encounter between the Haddad and Harari families, the effect is negligible.

As Hassida drags her suitcase toward the Haddads at the rest stop informing Yehiel and Yuval that she will meet them in St. George, Yuval reacts with genuine alarm. "Mom, you can't travel alone with Arabs!" ("אמא, את לא יכולה לנסוע לבד עם ערבים!").[301] Without skipping a beat, Hassida replies, "I traveled alone with you two. I'll be fine with them" ("אם נסעתי לבד עם שניכם, אני אסתדר גם אתם").[302] While readers applaud Hassida's long-awaited act of defiance, it is superficial. She'll rejoin her family in a few hours. The

[301] סביון ליברכט, "בדרך לסידר סיטי," 70.
[302] Ibid.

Arab family, who did nothing to Hassida, is lumped together with her husband and son, who alienate and mock her. She has already forgotten her connection with them, categorizing them as aggressors instead of victims. Her car ride to St. George is a vindictive act against Yehiel and Yuval, and the Haddad family becomes a pawn for her selfish retaliation. Her evanescent bond with Mrs. Haddad and her baby is itself a detour from the narrative of otherness that defines the Israeli relationship to the Arab. For a brief moment she veers off of the traditional itinerary, but the moment vanishes, like the journey to a rental car, too insignificant to be remembered.

CONCLUSION

In a semi-autobiographical essay from 2007 debunking myths about women in Israel, Savyon Liebrecht recalls an image from her elementary school classroom:

> Israel was then my age, a ten-year-old state; most of its inhabitants had immigrated from the four corners of the world, and our teacher seemed to think her most urgent task was to give us a sense of belonging and national identity. So she hung large pieces of cardboard on the classroom walls…One of these cardboard panels hung on the wall facing my chair, so that for many hours, in fact for the whole of that year I gazed at the profiles of men and women, secular and religious, light and dark—a large and heterogeneous group.
>
> From all these photos, I remember three women….an Orthodox Jewish woman covered in a lace veil looked at me with soft eyes; she sat in a room furnished with heavy furniture and her arms were folded on her bosom…Next to it, a female kibbutznik looked at me. She stood with her legs apart, wearing work clothes and heavy boots, and holding a hoe. The beautiful girl soldier next to her looked to the side, pointing a machine gun at a target that was hidden from view.[303]

The three women who gazed back at Savyon Liebrecht during what was presumably the fourth grade, made their way into the three short stories examined in this paper. That young student, the same age as the State of Israel, knew that these women were more than images; they were each an entire universe with voices that would shape the identity of the state growing up around her. The Orthodox woman with the soft eyes like Leah our matriarch[304], is a model for Victoria Abravanel, who ventures beyond the safety and familiarity of her religiously traditional neighborhood to rediscover her daughter, and herself. The female kibbutznik is Victoria's daughter, Rivka, who blossoms in the desert as she receives the respect and admiration that were withheld by her family and her

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[303] Savyon Liebrecht, "Women in Israel: The Stated Truth and the Hidden Truth," *Modern Hebrew Literature* No. 4, New Series, Autumn/Winter 2007/8 (Israel: The Institute for Translation of Hebrew Literature, 2007), pp. 145-6.
[304] Genesis 29:17

Orthodox community. The beautiful girl soldier might be Private First Class Hassida Harari as a young woman before the challenges of parenting, partnership and menopause took their toll on her mind and body. That soldier might also be the Builder who dons her husband's army jacket when she serves tea on precious china to the Arab laborers on her roof.

Savyon Liebrecht posits that these women implanted themselves in her memory as a result of her teacher's mission to provide students with a "sense of belonging and national identity." Liebrecht employs this phrase as a hendiadys, imputing to her teacher the notion that belonging generates national identity or vice-versa. As a contemporary voice defining Israel's identity, Liebrecht has spent significant ink disabusing the notion that belonging is so easily begotten. While no protagonist examined in this paper questions her Israeliness, all three of them struggle to belong, or more specifically they struggle with the implications of not belonging.

The nation that was born alongside Savyon Liebrecht gave women equal rights in name—suffrage, the military draft—but not in experience. Orthodox women were relegated to "the humble space between the kitchen and the bedroom," female soldiers served coffee to their commanders, and radical kibbutzniks who spurned the traditionalism of their religious compatriots, ended up in the kitchen or the sewing workshop, or taking care of children.[305] "Because Israel has been in a state of war from the day it was born," Liebrecht explains, "and its existence is fragile, the male world was the center of life's intensity and the heart of artistic expression."[306] Women in Israel, like

[305] Savyon Liebrecht, "Women in Israel: The Stated Truth and the Hidden Truth," pp. 147-8.
[306] Ibid, p. 149.

the State itself, have no sustained peace nor have they gained acceptance as equals. For decades, they were silenced and sidelined in a culture so consumed by physical survival that it never paused to consider the spiritual and psychological costs of ignoring half of its population. Even art was an exclusively male domain.

Savyon Liebrecht has spent decades writing women out of the shadows and into the chronicles of Israeli history. While there is nothing monolithic about her oeuvre, the theme of loneliness is pervasive. Women in Israel know fear and uncertainty, panic and suspicion, isolation and rejection. Their endemic exclusion from public life and their relegation to intensely circumscribed spheres of domesticity have engendered deep-seated vulnerability to, paranoia of and prejudice against those deemed as "Other." The Builder in "Heder al Ha-Gag," Victoria Abravanel in "Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar," and Hassida Harari in "B'Derech L'Cedar City," represent Sephardim and Ashkenazim, religious and secular Jews, young and old women, rootedness and exile. Despite their variegated experiences, all three exhibit incontrovertible symptoms of loneliness, which is most pronounced in their fear of the male "Other." Each protagonist envisions a scenario in which she is harmed by an Arab man, an Ashkenazi man or a black man.

By illustrating scenes of notably different women anticipating violence at the hands of men, Liebrecht suggests that loneliness and its concomitant symptoms of vulnerability and fear are part of the female condition. She is not writing short stories of women who are lonely; she is writing short stories about women. And women, who are subject everywhere to aggressive patriarchal hierarchies that intimidate, relegate and subdue them, will inevitably suffer perceived social isolation.

Given *Eretz Yisrael's* feminization as "the motherland" of the Jewish People, readers can easily extrapolate the condition of loneliness onto the nation itself. How might a country behave if it suffers from perceived social isolation? That state would likely exhibit symptoms of vulnerability and fear, invoking extreme tropes of existential threat to justify defensive acts of aggression. That nation would be paranoid, seeing the world as threatening and punitive, and expecting violence at every turn. And most frightening of all, a lonely country would be hard pressed to build meaningful relationships with others, having little faith in its allies and perpetuating a cycle of isolation that would deter others' deepening commitment. Cacioppo and Hawkley warn that loneliness is contagious:

> Driving away those who are lonely functions to keep the contagion in check, leading people who feel socially isolated to become objectively more isolated. Loneliness not only spreads from person to person within a social network, but it reduces the ties of these individuals to others within the network. The collective rejection of isolates observed in humans and other primates may therefore serve to protect the structural integrity of the social entities necessary for humans to survive and prosper.[307]

The increasing isolation of the lonely by their larger network is a mechanism for containment, akin to quarantine, that protects the larger social entity from contamination. Human beings are wired for intimacy and connection. So too must nations rely on alliances and diplomacy. The research is unequivocal: loneliness hastens death and emotional isolation is ranked as high a risk factor for morality as smoking.[308] As W.H. Auden wrote, "We must love one another or die."[309]

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[307] John T. Cacioppo and Louise C. Hawkley, "Perceived Social Isolation and Cognition."
[308] Judith Shulevitz, "The Lethality of Loneliness."
[309] Ibid. and W.H. Auden, "September 1, 1939." Accessed 25 Jan 2018. https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/september-1-1939.

Victoria Abravanel is the only character examined in this paper who begins to overcome her loneliness. Her cure is utterly mundane: she reconnects with the daughter she once dismissed and discovers a wellspring of pride, love and hope for the next generation that also allows her to reattach to her sister Sarah in a new, meaningful way, and to devise a way of re-approaching her husband. To accomplish this, however, she does what scares her most: she ventures beyond the confines of her small Orthodox neighborhood to the middle of the desert. The radical change in perspective gives her the soft eyes essential to uncovering new truths.

Liebrecht leaves readers pondering whether Victoria is the exception or the rule. Can all women overcome their loneliness by softening their gaze and making space for meaningful connection? Can Israel? In Liebrecht's essay about the three women looking at her from the cardboard panels, she concludes:

> In literature, maybe more than other areas, the voice of the Israeli woman writer (if one can make such a generalization) is fresh, clear and determined. Women write about the emotional and sexual life of women with a courage and sometimes a bluntness that men's writing does not seem to be familiar with. The old myth of women crossing boundaries, which in the past had no place in real life, is becoming a reality today through art.[310]

Art might just be the answer. In claiming their voice as authors and artists, women can cross the boundaries of their isolation like Victoria Abravanel and connect with courage and bluntness. A country hospitable to the self-expression and salvation of women can reshape its national identity and nurture an authentic ethos of belonging.

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[310] Savyon Liebrecht, "Women in Israel: The Stated Truth and the Hidden Truth," pp. 149-50.

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