

Image of the Religious Jewish Woman in Savyon Liebrecht's Story "Apples from the Desert": Form and Content

Dr. Thaier Kizel

Head of the Department of Hebrew Language and Hebrew Literature
Arab Academic College of Education, Haif

INTRODUCTION

Divine missions have always been associated with men. Men were entrusted by God to worship Him and women were men's helpers in the dissemination of the message, although usually their role was restricted to hearth and home. In modern times women began to share men's roles in every aspect of life, in religion, in politics and in society. In fact, women in some cases have pushed men out of some of the latter's former roles in life.

The afore-mentioned facts are also applicable to Judaism, whose founding prophet Moses was a man. Jewish women obeyed the ritual law because of the men. However, as just noted, their role was purely domestic. However, they began to rebel in every domain, including that of religion, even after they immigrated to Israel.

The Jewish religion played an important role in defining the place of women in every aspect of Jewish life, whether in politics, society, religion or any other. Their role at first was marginal, in fact practically non-existent, at the birth of modern Hebrew literature and the emergence of the Zionist movement. It was men who bore the banner of *Haskala* (Hebrew enlightenment) literature and men who championed the cause of women. Thus Yehuda Leib Gordon¹ wrote in defense of women and condemned the way they suffered because of the rabbis because "he was upset at the bad way they were treated".²

Jewish women began to write literature only at the beginning of the Jewish migration to Palestine.³ They played a vital role in colonization⁴ by becoming involved in every kind of activity, including in religion. In fact, they came to play an important role in religious activity in Israel.

¹ Yehuda Leib Gordon was a Jewish writer born in Lithuania in 1830. At first he studied traditional Jewish subjects and later became acquainted with European culture and languages. He was influenced by the styles of the Old Testament, the Mishna and medieval Hebrew literature. His most famous saying was "Be a Jew at home and a man outside", which became the slogan of the *Haskala* movement. Among his best-known works are *Awaken My People (Hakitza Ami)* and *We Shall Go Young and Old (Bi-Ne'areinu Uvi-Zkeneinu Nelekh)*. He died in 1896.

² Nāzik 'Abd al-Fattāh, *al-Shi'r al-'ibrī al-ḥadīth, a'rāḍuhu wa-ṣuwaruhu*, Cairo: no publisher name, 1980, p. 62. See also Jamāl 'Abd al-Samīh al-Shādhilī & Najlā' Ra'fat Sālim, *al-Shi'r al-'ibrī al-ḥadīth, marāḥiluhu wa-qaḍāyāhu*, Cairo: al-Thaqāfa lil-nashr wal-tawzī', 2011.

³ On Jewish immigration see: Malmat, A. et al., *Toldot Am Yisra'el*, ed. Ben Sasson, Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv: Schocken, 1985.

⁴ Jewish women strove to participate actively in the colonization project. According to Yafa Berlowitz this was due to the following factors: A. Jewish women were educated and capable of expressing themselves; B. Jewish women strove to extricate themselves from their historical roles and to promote self-expression; C. Women by nature wished to draw attention to women. See Berlowitz, Yafa, *Le-Hamtzi Eretz Le-Hamtzi Am, Tashtiyot Sifrut Ve-Tarbut Bi-Yetzira Shael Ha-Aliya Ha-Rishona*, Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1983, p. 54.

The present study deals with the image of Orthodox Jewish women in the story "Apples from the Desert" (תפוחים מן המדבר)⁵ by Savyon Liebrecht.⁶ We chose to deal with this topic for the following reasons:

1. To study the situation of the religious woman in this story.
2. To clarify the relationship between religious and secular women.
3. To clarify the positive and negative features of the religious woman in the story.
4. To study how the author put artistic form in the service of the story's content.
5. To study Liebrecht's attitude towards women in general and religion women in particular.⁷
6. To clarify Liebrecht's importance in contemporary Israeli narrative literature, as a prominent member of the "New Voice" community of writers. Her works attained considerable popularity,⁸ while Joseph Oren has described her as "an outstanding talented writer".⁹ She has also garnered praise from literary critics.¹⁰
7. No other study exists on the figure of the religious woman in Israeli short stories in general, nor in the story under discussion here.¹¹

A. Women's role in Judaism

The Jewish faith was disseminated by men, as noted above, with no role for women, who were completely segregated from men, with the result that each gender evolved its own customs and way of life. A woman's adherence to Judaism took the form of subjugation to men, to the father before marriage and to the husband afterwards. The father chose a husband for her and she was not allowed to object or complain. In the the Old Testament infertility was a shameful condition for women; Rachel, Jacob's wife, did not bear children, and when she did become pregnant she said: "God has taken away my disgrace".¹²

In Jewish ritual law it is the man who performs the required religious observances. Women must obey the commandments but cannot perform the observances, being impure by nature.¹³ In the Old Testament women are only rarely presented as positively engaged in activity that has religious significance. Exceptions are, for example, Miriam and Deborah. However, at the same time Jewish canon law raised the social status of women.¹⁴ This fits in with the role of women in Judaism; she is the one mainly responsible for raising the children, because the husband is busy studying the Torah and performing its instructions.

⁵ Lily Ratok (ed.), *Siporet Nashim Ivrit*, Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 2000.

⁶ Liebrecht was born in Germany in 1948 and emigrated to Israel in 1950. She served in the IDF for eighteen months, then studied in London for a year-and-a-half. There she changed her first name from Sabine to Savyon. She studied English and worked as a journalist for the magazine *At* (תא). She regularly participates in the literary salon of Amalia Kahane Karmon. Liebrecht published the following short story collections: *Apples from the Desert (Tapuhim min Ha-Midbar)*, 1986; *Horses (Susim)*, 1988; *I Speak Chinese to You (Sinit Ani Medaberet Elekha)*, 1992; *Need an Ending for a Love Story (Tzarikh Sof Le-Sipur Ahava)*, 1995; *Three Stories (Sheloshah Sipurim)*, 1997; *A Man, a Woman and a Man (Ish Ve-Isha Ve-Ish)*, 1998; *Women from a Catalog (Nashim Mitokh Katalog)*, 2000; *A Good Place for the Night (Makom Tov La-Layla)*, 2002; *Father's Women (Ha-Nashim Shel Aba)*, 2005.

Liebrecht belongs to the fourth and youngest generation of modern Hebrew writers, the "New Voices" (הקולות החדשים).

⁷ Einat, Amalia, "Tzafuy U-Maftia, Savyon Liebrecht, *Tapuhim Min Ha-Midbar*", *Iton* 77 (82-83), Dec. 1998, p. 8.

⁸Yahav, Dan. "Romantika Yetzuka Be-Tavnit Leshon Rashut Ha-Shidur, *Iton* 77 (226), Dec. 1998, p. 8.

⁹ Oren, op.cit., p. 14.

¹⁰ Livnit, Rut, "Shtei Sofrot Tze'irof", *Iton* 77 (103), Oct. 1988, p. 15.

¹¹ Jalā' Idrīs has dealt with the figure of a Jewish religious woman in A.B. Yehoshua's novel *The Lover*.

¹² Genesis 30:23.

¹³ Niditch, Susan. *Women in the Hebrew Bible, Jewish Women, Historical Perspective*. Detroit, Michigan, 1991, p. 31.

¹⁴ Yizre'eli, Dafna et al., *Nashim Be-Milkud*, Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1982, p. 210.

In modern times religious Jewish women have attempted to play a greater role in religion and to extricate themselves from its oppression. It did not take long before most Jewish groups abolished the women's section in the synagogue and women began to fulfill the posts of rabbi, cantor and religious judge.¹⁵

According to the Talmud women are exempt from the performance of a number of religious duties, such as wearing a prayer shawl,¹⁶ putting on phylacteries,¹⁷ reading the *shema* prayer,¹⁸ joining in a quorum for prayer,¹⁹ blowing on the ram's horn, pilgrimage²⁰ and lighting Hanukkah candles.²¹ Women are also exempt from all religious observances that must be performed at certain specified times; this is because according to the Talmudic sages if women are forced to perform religious duties at given times this may interfere with their other duties.²²

B. The religious woman in Liebknecht's "Apples from the Desert": A study of the content

1. A brief summary of the story

"Apples from the Desert" tells the story of an ultra-Orthodox woman from the Shaarei Hessed neighborhood in Jerusalem who makes a journey to a kibbutz in the desert in order to bring her only daughter back into the fold. The story tells of the conflict between a pious Jewish mother and her daughter, who resists her mother's demands with all her might. The father is called Reuven, the mother Victoria and their only daughter Rivka. Rivka's father wants to marry her off against her will to a forty-year-old widower with children, but she refuses and tries to break the religious shackles imposed on her and to live her life as she wants. She wants to learn non-religious subjects, including dancing.

The story tells the story of the religious mother's trip to her daughter in the kibbutz, and her attempts to bring her daughter back into their Orthodox ambience in Jerusalem.

The daughter broke her ties with her family and went to a kibbutz in the Negev to do what she considers "national service". She has a love affair with a young member of the kibbutz. She

¹⁵ Ya'qūb Malakīn, *al-Yahūdiyya, ru'ya fī al-ṣirā' bayn al-ilmāniyya wal-dīn*, trans. By Aḥmad Kāmil Rāwī, ed. by 'Abd al-Wahhāb Wahb Allāh, with an introduction by Zayn al-Ābidīn Maḥmūd Abū Khaḍra, Cairo University, Center for Oriental Studies, Series on Religious and Historical Studies no. 15, 2005, p. 27.

¹⁶ The prayer shawl or *talith* (טלית) is a rectangular piece of cloth, formerly made of flax or wool and today also of cotton and silk. Silken prayer shawls in general heavily embroidered. See Rashshād 'Abdullāh al-Shāmī, *al-Rumūz al-dīniyya fī al-yahūdiyya*, Cairo University, Center for Oriental Studies, Series of Religious and Historical Studies no. 11, 2000, p. 59.

¹⁷ Phylacteries (תפלין) are two small leather boxes, one of which is placed on the forehead (תפלה של ראש) and consists of four compartments (ארבעה בתים) and the other is tied to the left arm (תפלה של יד) with a long leather strip. See al-Shāmī, op.cit., pp. 91-95.

¹⁸ The *shema* (שמע) is the most important part of the prayer. It begins with the first verse announcing God's oneness. Today it consists of nineteen blessings although originally there were eighteen. There exists an abridged version for use when there is no time. On the Sabbath and on holidays another part is added, called *musaf* (מוסף).

¹⁹ Prayer in a quorum (מניין) is a public prayer in which a portion of the Torah is read from a handwritten scroll. See Muḥammad Baḥr 'Abd al-Majīd, *al-Yahūdiyya*, Cairo: Maktabat Sa'īd Ra'fat, 1985, p. 15.

²⁰ The Jewish pilgrimage: Jews are commanded to go on pilgrimage three times a year, on Passover, on Pentecost and on Tabernacles. At first Jews performed the pilgrimage in Shiloh, but after King David captured Jerusalem it became the pilgrimage destination.

²¹ Hanukkah or the "festival of lights" takes place at the end of autumn, on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth Hebrew month. The holiday lasts for eight days. Every evening candles are lit and thanks are given to God for having given victory to the Jews over the Seleucid armies commanded by Antiochus IV during the Hasmonean revolt. The revolt lasted three years (167-165 BCE).

²² Natalie Rein, *Daughters of Rachel: Women in Israel*, London: Penguin Books, 1979, p.45.

resists her mother's attempts to bring her back and marries the young man she loves. Eventually the mother accepts her daughter's decision and takes some apples from the kibbutz back with her. The story was made into a play and performed in the Jerusalem Theater.²³

2. Features of the religious woman in the story

A. Positive features

i. *The religious woman's desire to live in Jerusalem*

Jerusalem is the most important city in Judaism, the most important of the "four holy cities", which include also Safed, Tiberias and Hebron. The Old Testament stresses the city's importance for Israel in numerous places. Thus, for example, in Psalm 137 we read: "If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill".²⁴ The story shows how important living in Jerusalem, the holiest city of the Jews, is for the religious woman, a member of the community known as the "Old Yishuv", who lived off donations by Jews from abroad, known as the *halukka*. These Jews did not covet the Arabs' lands and they lived in mutual respect with their Arab neighbors.²⁵

Jerusalem's Jewish neighborhoods are divided into secular and Orthodox; Orthodox Jews constitute thirty percent of the city's Jewish population.²⁶ In the story we read:

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.

Four times she descended from and ascended the buses coming into and out of the station.²⁷

From this passage we learn that the story's protagonist Victoria Abravanel lives in an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood of Jerusalem, Sha'arei Hesed, one of the most important Jewish Orthodox neighborhoods in the city, where secular Jews are not welcome, and where they can only enter if they dress and behave in accordance with Orthodox norms.

The passage also makes it clear that Victoria does not know any place outside of Jerusalem. While the author does not say so explicitly, her lack of confidence when taking the bus makes it clear that she was not used to leaving the city.

The author reinforces the previous impression with a comparison the mother makes between Jerusalem and the kibbutz:

How could you leave the pure air and beautiful mountains of Jerusalem--and come here?²⁸

This sentence reveals the author's intended meaning, that Jerusalem is as pure as its air, in the sense of ritual purity rather than clean in the physical sense, symbolizing the holiness of the city and all that is in it. At the same time it also implies that all other places are impure. That is why Victoria is so incensed that her daughter left Jerusalem in favor of another place and why

²³ www.jerusalemtheater.

²⁴ Psalm 137:12.

²⁵ For more on the Old Yishuv and its conflict with the "New Yishuv" see Liskov, Moshe, *Toldot Ha-Yishuv Ha-Yehudi Be-Eretz Yisra'el Me'as Ha-Aliya Ha-Rishona, Tekufat Ha-Mandat Ha-Briti*, Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1995; see also Bulard, Reader, *The Middle East*. Oxford University, Royal Institute of International Affairs, third Edition, 1980, p. 285.

²⁶ Hoshen, Maya, *Yerushalayim Al Ha-Mapa, Temunat Matzav U-Megamot Ikariyot*. Teddy Kollek Center for the Study of Jerusalem, Jerusalem Institute for the Study of Israel, 2001, p. 25.

²⁷ Ratok, op.cit., p. 203. The translations into English are taken from Savyon Liebrecht, *Apples from the Desert*, trans. By Barbara Harshav, The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1988.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 204.

she tries to draw her back to the pure air and take her away from the impure air that she breathes outside of Jerusalem.

ii. Religious girls and service in the IDF

The issue of the conscription of Yeshiva students and Orthodox Jewish girls is a bone of contention between secular and religious Israelis in general and in the IDF in particular.²⁹ Statistics show that twenty-six percent of Israeli girls serve in the IDF.³⁰ Jewish women were taken into the armed forces after the establishment of the State of Israel, but the religious establishment pressured the Israeli government into exempting girls from religious homes from service in the IDF, but provided no other service. Women conscripts served for a shorter period than men and they were also released from reserve duty earlier than men. Women did not serve in combat roles. However, girls who learned in religious schools began to be conscripted. In my opinion this new approach by the Jewish religious establishment was aimed at establishing a sectarian presence and at increasing its influence in Israel's most important establishment, the military. This is because every Israeli feels that he is part of the army; as one Israeli said: "The state is the IDF and the IDF is the state, so each of us feels that they are a soldier".³¹ In the IDF there are 225 vocations open to women, in comparison to 709 that are open to men.³² In 1952 Ben-Gurion passed a law that required girls who did not serve in the IDF to do "national service" instead.³³ There were those who believed that women's military service improved the situation of women in the country, because such sacrifice gave women a stronger case in their demand for equal rights.³⁴

The Orthodox influence in the IDF grew after 1967 and more religious Jews entered military service. Students who learned in a Yeshiva were exempted from military service, but then young religious men were permitted to join the IDF if they stopped their religious studies.³⁵

In our story the issue of military service for women also arises:

Her daughter was sixteen when she met him. He was an army officer and was brought in to tell them about military service for Orthodox girls. Later on there was a fuss about letting people from the army come and poison the girls' hearts.³⁶

This passage refers to the service of religious girls in Israel, which was introduced in the 1990s.³⁷ The author here reveals that she has reservations about the service of religious women in the IDF. Many of the ultra-Orthodox in the country view the state as a secular entity. There are those who agree with the call of some rabbis to IDF soldiers to refuse to obey the orders that they are given, because the Israeli government is illegitimate.³⁸

²⁹ Muḥammad Maḥmūd Abū Ghadīr, *al-Ṣirā' al-dīnī al-ilmānī dākhl al-jaysh al-isrā'īlī*, Center for Oriental Studies, Series of Religious and Historical studies no. 14, 2000, p. 11.

³⁰ Aviva Aviv, *Ha-Hevra Ha-Yisre'elit, Metahim U-Ma'avakim*, Israel Ministry of Defense, 1993, p. 70.

³¹ Leibowitz, Yeshaya et al., *Am, Eretz, Medina* (ed. by Orna Levy), Jerusalem: Keter (no date), p. 79.

³² Yizre'eli, op.cit., p. 227.

³³ Peled, Yoav (ed.), *Shas Etgar Ha-Yisre'eliyut*, Tel-Aviv: Sifrei Hemed, 2001, p. 16.

³⁴ Yizre'eli, op.cit., p. 227.

³⁵ Abū Ghadīr, op.cit., p. 36.

³⁶ Ratok, op.cit., p. 203.

³⁷ Levy, Yagil, *Tzava Aher Le-Yisra'el, Militarizm Homrani Be-Yisra'el* (ed. by Rami Tal), Tel-Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2003, p. 338.

³⁸ Hareven, Shulamit, *Otzar Ha-Milim Shel Ha-Shalom, Masot U-Ma'amarim*, Tel-Aviv: Zmora Bitan, 1996, p. 88.

iii. Rejection of non-religious dress

According to Jewish canon law women must wear long clothes and cover their heads.³⁹ The story alludes to this in the following sentence:

She repeatedly untied her Sabbath kerchief that had become entangled by the wind and wrapped it around her head.⁴⁰

This passage shows the importance which this religious woman attaches to her dress. For her religion involves not only an obligatory code of behavior but also an external appearance that is consistent with her inner beliefs.

Elsewhere the author returns to this theme, when Victoria is aghast at Rivka's appearance: "What's this ... what's this ...?" Victoria scratched her nose. "Where are your braids? And those pants ... that's how you dress ... oy vey!" Rivka laughed: "I knew that's what you'd say. I wanted to get dressed but I didn't have time. I thought you'd come on the four o'clock bus."⁴¹

The mother, an Orthodox Jew, is shocked when she sees how her daughter dresses in the kibbutz, as her questions clearly show. Her daughter tries to placate her mother, at least during her stay in the kibbutz; for she has already decided that she will not return with her to Jerusalem and the Orthodox neighborhood in which she lives.

Victoria fears her daughter's reaction and suspects that she will not return with her: ... the pictures in her imagination made her sigh. 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?⁴²

In this passage we feel the mother's fear of the possible reaction of her daughter and her lover, who would perhaps expel her from their home. Clearly these fears indicate that the mother realizes that her daughter is satisfied with her new life and has turned her back on the past. She also senses the gap between her, as an Orthodox woman, and her secular daughter. The mother realizes that her daughter felt oppressed when she lived in their Orthodox neighborhood in Jerusalem and therefore abandoned the past with its restrictions in a search for liberty.

B. Negative features

i. Negative aspects in the life of Orthodox women

The mother could do nothing to help her daughter when her father wanted to marry her off against her wishes, in keeping with Old Testament tradition and women's inferior status:

"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."

"God forbid! Don't say such a thing," Victoria was scared--of the truth.

"He wanted to marry me off to Yekutiel's son. Like I was a widow or a cripple."⁴³

³⁹ Leibman, Charles S., ed. *Religious and Secular: Conflict and Accommodation Between Jews in Israel*, A Project of Avi Chai, 1st edition, Jerusalem: Keter, 1990, xviii, p.238.

⁴⁰ Ratok, op.cit., p. 203.

⁴¹ Ibid., 204.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 205.

This passage highlights a negative characteristic of Orthodox women, namely their subservience to men, in this case to Rivka's father, who wants to marry her off against her will to a much older man. The father is acting in accordance with accepted practice in Judaism, where the daughter is under the control of her father, who can decide her fate and chooses her husband, and later under the control of her husband. This is what drove the daughter to turn her back to her family and move far away. Her father's plans for her marriage were the last straw for her. Until then she had apparently been resigned to her life with her parents and all the religious restrictions that involved. When she was small she did not rebel, but as she grew up and realized that she lived a life that did not suit her at all she left the neighborhood. Her decision was made easier by the fact that she was emotionally attached to a secular youth. She therefore fled to a place where she could be free of the shackles of religion and could live her life as she pleased.

The passage also reveals Victoria's unsatisfactory relationship with her husband, who ignores her wishes and treats her like a puppet. Her daughter feared that she would become dependent like her mother and therefore decided that she would never allow someone else to decide her fate.

In addition, the passage symbolizes the two opposing tendencies found in Israel, one that supports democracy and secularism, as represented by the daughter, and the other that rejects democracy whenever it comes into conflict with religion, as represented by the religious camp that began to attack some of the country's secular strongholds,⁴⁴ and impose its will on the secularists, who oppose these attempts with all their might. However, the secularists at the same time try to accommodate the Orthodox, as exemplified here by the daughter's willingness to wear something more religiously acceptable, even if only temporarily, until the end of her mother's visit. She wants to make it clear that she rejects being coerced, even if on the outside it may appear that she is willing to accept a restriction on her freedom. In this she appears to adopt an approach that is taken by some Israelis, who call for separating religion from the state⁴⁵ so that every Israeli will be able to live as he or she pleases and to decide what to accept and what to reject. The daughter refuses to connect the new reality of the State of Israel with the Judaism that her father wishes to impose on her. The mother tries to bring her daughter back into the religious fold but the latter rejects this. In other words, the daughter adopts the view of some secular Jews that Judaism, unlike other faiths, has a national in addition to a religious aspect.⁴⁶

ii. The religious woman's alienation from the secularists

Alienation is a basic feature of the Jewish personality, which has become used to certain modes of behavior that have caused it to remain aloof from all other societies. A number of factors have contributed to this state of affairs, among them such religious factors as the ideas of salvation and the covenant.⁴⁷ Such alienation in the relations between Jews and others may be understandable, but not when it enters into the relations among fellow Jews. The Zionist movement waxed eloquent about life in the "Promised Land" and convinced Jews that their problems would disappear after they will emigrate to the Land of Israel. However, the truth of

⁴⁴ Rashshād 'Abdullāh al-Shāmī, *Ishkāliyyat al-hawiyya fī Isrā'īl*, Kuwait: National Council for Culture, Art and Literature, 'Ālam al-ma'rifa no. 224, 1979, p. 235.

⁴⁵ Agasi, Joseph, *Mihu Yisra'eli?*, Tel-Aviv: Kivunim, 1991, p. 72.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁴⁷ For more on alienation in modern Hebrew literature see Aḥmad Ḥammād, *Dirāsāt fī al-adab al-'ibrī al-ḥadīth*, Cairo: Cairo University, Center for Oriental Studies, Series of linguistic and literary studies no 25, 2010, pp. 17-33.

the matter is that Jews in Israel live in much greater fear than the Jews abroad. As one Israeli has said, "The primary objective of Zionism was the establishment of an independent sovereign state that would serve as a shelter for the Jews. However, Israel today is the most dangerous place in the world for Jews. They are not killed in such numbers anywhere else".⁴⁸

In the story we encounter one aspect of this alienation, that between Orthodox and secular Jews:

Her body was heavy after sitting for so long and her eyes were blinded by the sun. She put down her baskets next to her feet, stood up and looked at the landscape like someone who comes to a strange land: The yellow, bare plain stretching as far as the eye can see and the faded trees standing in a cloud of dust.⁴⁹

This passage describes the religious Jewish woman's feeling of alienation towards the kibbutz to which her daughter had moved. The mother is attached to Jerusalem and when she is anywhere else she feels alienated, even though she is still in what all Jews consider to be the "Land of Israel", the land that was promised by God to the Jews. However, the fact that this place was populated by secular Jews apparently caused the woman to feel that the place itself was secular and that she did not belong to it. She felt alienated both from the people in the kibbutz and from the place.

iii. The Orthodox woman wants to obliterate her daughter's individual identity

The religious mother wanted to impose the norms of Orthodox Judaism on her daughter, such as observing the Sabbath and wearing "proper" clothes:

"What's this ... what's this ...?" Victoria scratched her nose. "Where are your braids? And those pants ... that's how you dress ... oy vey!" Rivka laughed: "I knew that's what you'd say."⁵⁰

The mother wants to impose her religious norms in dress and comportment. She is thus shocked to see her daughter dressed in a way that shows that she no longer lets religious restrictions influence her new life in the kibbutz. The mother reacts here as if she expected her daughter to continue to be committed to Orthodox norms even after she fled from her home in the Orthodox neighborhood. But the mother's expectations proved futile. Her view is typical of ultra-Orthodox Jews who feel that all religious innovation must be avoided. As one religious Jew said, "There is room for change in religious law with respect to understanding values. But these changes must be cautious and limited, and must be accompanied by various conditions ...

The important thing is that if we find our comfort in improving the Torah every day then we do not need them".⁵¹The mother at first was consumed with a desire to bring back her daughter at any price:

She would attack the boy with her nails, rip off his skin and poke out his eyes for what he had done to this change-of-life daughter of hers. Her daughter would come back to Jerusalem with

⁴⁸ Leibowitz, op.cit., p. 9.

⁴⁹ Ratok, op.cit., p. 204.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Gruenfeld, Tzvia, *Hem Mefakhadim, Ekh Hafakh Ha-Yamin Ha-Dati Veha-Haredi Le-Koakh Movil Be-Yisra'el*, Tel-Aviv: Hemed, p. 212.

her, which was what she promised her sister: "I'll bring her back even if I have to drag her by the hair."⁵²

The mother was thus convinced that she would be able to take her daughter back even against her will. She was clearly thinking from a religious perspective, from a sincere Jewish point of view.

3. The use of form in the service of content

The author uses artistic form in the story to serve its content. Some of the story's artistic elements that highlight features of the Orthodox woman do not overtly appear through its content, as will be clarified below.

A. The opening

The opening of a short story is an important element of its structure. All critics agree that a story's beginning must arouse the reader's interest and desire to read more.⁵³ As one critic has said, a story's first lines are the most important means for drawing the reader into what is being told.⁵⁴

In our case the author enters directly into the story's events, without any preamble:

All the way from the Orthodox quarter of Sha'arei Hessed 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. Four times she descended from and ascended the buses coming into and out of the station. She repeatedly untied her Sabbath kerchief that had become entangled by the wind and wrapped it around her head.⁵⁵

With this introduction the author drags us straight into the story itself, by describing the Orthodox Jewish woman's trip to the kibbutz of Neve Midbar. Her confusion at the bus station, where she entered the wrong bus a number of times, would seem to prove that she was not used to going far from her Orthodox neighborhood, a ghetto-like place populated by a group with a unique way of life and which one did not leave except in cases of extreme necessity. The introduction also tells us that the woman herself is an ultra-Orthodox Jew, who wears the compulsory headscarf and lives in one of Jerusalem's ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods, Sha'arei Hessed. Such an introduction is certain to attract the reader, any reader, and will cause him to continue reading in order to discover what will happen on this journey.

B. The story's characters

A story's characters constitute an important element of a short story, since the events are inseparable from the persons who take part in them.⁵⁶ One thing that we find in "Apples from the Desert" is very few characters. This is in line both with the tendency among writers of the "New Voices" in Israel and in short stories in general. In fact, two characters alone stand at the center of the conflict in the story, in line with what we find in the writings of the "New Voices",

⁵² Ratok, op.cit., p. 203.

⁵³ Graf, harschistoph, *Theorie der Gutzgeschichte*, Stuttgart: Philipp reclalamjum, 2004, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Hudson, W.H., *An Introduction to the Study of Literature*, London: George Harrap and Co., Ltd., 1989, p. 156.

⁵⁵ Ratok, op.cit., p. 203/

⁵⁶ Roland Barthes, *An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative* . Brimingham: University of Birmingham,1966, p.56.

to which Liebrecht belongs.⁵⁷ These are the mother, Victoria Abravanel, and her daughter Rivka, who threw off the shackles of religion. The two characters are presented from two different perspective, both of which are necessary for dealing with the issue of Jewish Orthodox women.

i. The characters' views

The author provides a psychological analysis of both characters through a description of the views they express in their dialogues with each other. Each one of them adheres to her respective position and refuses to change her mind. Here is an example:

"You don't miss the neighborhood?"

"Sometimes. On holidays. I miss the Sabbath table and the songs and Aunt Sara's laugh. But I like it here. I love working outside with the animals ... You, too, I miss you a lot."

"And Papa?" Victoria asked in a whisper into the evening light filtering in.

"Papa doesn't care about anybody."⁵⁸

The previous passage shows the mental struggle between mother and daughter, each of whom insists on adhering to her own life style. The mother tries to convince her daughter to return with her to the Orthodox neighborhood in Jerusalem while the daughter tries to convince her mother that he is happy in her new life despite the fact that she misses some aspects of her former life, such as the Sabbath table. But she refuses to even consider going back, insisting that she loves "working outside with the animals". In other words, she prefers being with the animals to going back to the religious neighborhood. In the face of this opposition the mother is helpless and realizes she cannot succeed in her mission.

ii. The characters' names

"A character's name often reveals its identity".⁵⁹ It is a characteristic feature of the "New Voice" writers that they mix symbolism with realism. In our case, we find a realistic depiction of an ultra-Orthodox Jew in Israel,⁶⁰ next to symbolic elements used by the author in several places:

- i. The mother symbolizes the Orthodox Jews in Israel while the daughter symbolizes secular Zionism,⁶¹ which created a split in Judaism "that the secular Zionist leadership wanted to exploit for their objectives, namely the establishment of a secular state not subject to the clerics".⁶²
- ii. The name of the story is also symbolic, telling us that the Orthodox woman will not be able to change her daughter's mind. The apples in the name are those which the mother takes back with her from the kibbutz after her visit to her daughter, in a sense an admission that she is no longer displeased with the life that her daughter chose. The story itself also shows that the mother accepts what her daughter has done, and accepts the new reality that enjoins even pious Jews to submit to the requirements of the new life in Israel while at the same time she herself still adheres to the religious concepts on which she was raised.

⁵⁷ Oren, Joseph, *Ha-Kol Ha-Nashi Ba-Siporet Ha-Yisre'elit*, Tel-Aviv: Yahdav, 2001, p. 101.

⁵⁸ Ratok, op.cit., p. 205.

⁵⁹ Lamping, dieter. *Der Name in der Erzaehlung, zur Poetic des Personennamens*, Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1999, p. 15.

⁶⁰ Blatt, Avraham, "Mishak Ha-Ahava Be-Tzel Ha-Zikna", *Moznayim* 73:1, October 1988, p. 78.

⁶¹ www.ynet.co.il.htm

⁶² Muḥammad Maḥmūd Abū Ghadīr, *al-Shakhṣiyya al-isrā'īliyya bayna al-ilmāniyya wal-khuṣūsiyya, in 'ikāsātuhā dākhiliyyan wa-iqlīmiyyan*. Cairo: Center for Oriental Studies, Cairo University, Series of Religious and Historical Studies, no. 37, 2008, p. 215.

- iii. The symbolism expressed by the daughter's relationship with her man is that of the harmony between the sexes in Israel, far removed from religious restrictions. The daughter escaped to the kibbutz from the Orthodox environment of her family. This the mother was initially not prepared to countenance, as shown by the fact that she traveled to the kibbutz in order to bring her back. However, when she saw how the daughter and her spouse lived together she realized she could not change anything and went back to Jerusalem.⁶³

The mother symbolically states that being a religious Jew does not necessarily mean that one will not be a part of Israeli society, if participation brings benefits to oneself and to one's society. This is an approach that some Orthodox parties in Israel have adopted in recent years. Thus the Shas party has continually declared, since the year 2002, that it was a "social party".⁶⁴ This self-depiction shows the desire of religious parties in Israel to address socio-economic issues that affect everyone in Israel, whether Orthodox or secular. The author here intends to convey the same message. The mother sees that her daughter is on the right path that fits in with the new reality in Israel. The apples in the story were grown in the kibbutz, and symbolize the mother's attempt to reconcile herself with the new reality and to adapt to the character of Israeli society. However, the story also shows how difficult this reconciliation is for her. In order for her daughter to adapt to the new reality she must give up some aspects of her religious upbringing; for example, she must give up her religious dress in favor of clothes that are consistent with life on the kibbutz.

iii. The events

Contemporary literary experts agree that short stories consist of "a tale, events, actions, characters depicted in an interesting way and a deliberate ending".⁶⁵ Liebrecht in this story enters directly into the narration of the events when she begins the story with a depiction of the mother's bus ride from Jerusalem to the kibbutz in order to bring back her daughter who fled the narrow religious life at home. In this way the author draws the reader into the story. She does not begin the story by describing the place, for example, so as not to bore the reader. She then continues to relate the events in their logical order. The reader follows the mother to the kibbutz and then witnesses the dramatic conflict between the Orthodox mother and the secular daughter. Ultimately the daughter wins out in this conflict and convinces her mother that her way is the best for her. The mother expresses her agreement by agreeing to take with her some apples that grew on the kibbutz, but at the same time does not waver in her own commitment to the religious way of life.

iv. Time and place

Time and place are very basic elements in a story's construction. They affect events and personalities and through them the author informs the reader of the characters' lives and the time and place of the events.⁶⁶ As for the time, the reader understands that it cannot be precisely determined in relation to the place. The first kibbutzim were founded during the second Aliyah (1903-1914) and they still exist to this day. The same is true of the place. The author presents two places, representing the Orthodox and the secular aspect of Israel, the neighborhood of Sha'arei Hesed in Jerusalem and the kibbutz. The conflict between the Orthodox mother and her secular daughter is also the conflict between the Orthodox

⁶³ Ya'oz, Hana, "Kaveret Metzuket", *Moznayim* 62, 1988, p. 61.

⁶⁴ Yishay, Ya'el, *Bein Giyus Le-Piyus, Ha-Hevra Ha-Ezrahit Be-Yisra'el*, Jerusalem: Carmel, 2003, p. 49.

⁶⁵ Aḥmad Abū Sa'da, *Fann al-qīṣṣa*, Part One, Beirut: Dār al-sharq al-jadīd, 4th printing, 2001, p. 8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

neighborhood and the kibbutz. Place this plays an important role in revealing the nature of the two figures, one religious and the other secular.

v. The ending

The story's ending represents the outcome of the events, but not only that. It is the final point of illumination that reveals the essence of the events and the characters. In a monologue at the end of the story the mother says to herself, in resignation:

"We don't have to worry about Rivka. She's happy there, thank God. We'll hear good tidings from her soon. Now, taste that and tell me: apples"⁶⁷

What the author in this passage towards the end of the story shows is that the mother trusts her daughter to have made the right decision for herself and so leaves her to live her life in the kibbutz. She takes apples from the kibbutz, an indication that she is pleased with this institution and its rule in the Jewish colonization, before and after the establishment of the State of Israel. Liebrecht ends the story on this note, with each party remaining where they were: The Orthodox Jewish woman representing all Orthodox Jews from the author's perspective, and the secular daughter representing all secular Jews. The author suggests that all parts of Israeli society must be accepted and respected by all the other parts, otherwise the foundations of that society will collapse.

CONCLUSION

This study has come to the following conclusions:

- iv. Women were relegated to an inferior role in the Jewish religion. Men were entrusted with the performance of the religious rites while women were expected to obey the commandments. Women in the Old Testament appeared only in secondary roles, such as Miriam, Moses' sister, and the Talmud exempted women from religious duties such as wearing the prayer shawl or putting on the phylacteries.
- v. Savyon Liebrecht mentions a number of positive virtues of the Orthodox woman in the story, such as living in the ultra-Orthodox neighborhood Sha'arei Hesed in Jerusalem and the fact that religious women serve in the IDF. The latter is a new development that began only in the 1990s; its purpose is to promote the penetration of religion into the Israeli armed forces, but it has also engendered a dispute within the Israeli military establishment.
- vi. Liebrecht presents the Orthodox woman as being careful to wear modest clothing in keeping with the demands of religion; she is thus not only religious in her outlook, but also in her external appearance.
- vii. The negative aspect of the Orthodox woman appears in the fact that she was unable to properly convey the principles of Judaism to her daughter. In fact, from the story we learn that the mother became resigned to what her daughter had done and left her to live her life in the kibbutz. She even took some apples from there. Another negative aspect of the mother's behavior was that she did not protest at all against the groom which her husband chose for their daughter.
- viii. The story tells of the mother's desire to impose all the restrictions imposed by Judaism on the daughter. But the daughter rejected her please and decided to live her own life as she pleased, far from the restrictive Orthodox neighborhood.

⁶⁷ Ratok, op.cit., p. 209.

- ix. The author used the narrative form to serve the story's content, by drawing the reader into the events at the very beginning, by describing the Orthodox mother's bus ride to the kibbutz.
- x. The author highlighted the Orthodox character by describing both her external appearance and her state of mind. She also described the secular daughter from both these aspects.
- xi. Liebrecht produced a well-plotted story, using a sequence of events that serve the content.