Dan Ben Amotz’s novel *To Remember, To Forget* should be discussed against the background of literature that deals with the encounter between Holocaust survivors and Israeli reality. Some works in this category (for example, Abba Kovner’s novel *Face to Face*,\(^1\) Shlomo Kalo’s novel *Crypts in Jaffa*,\(^2\) and Dan Ben Amotz’s short story “One Who Arrived” [1948–1949]) preserved the Zionist narrative homogeneously and built the survivors’ identity on the model of the male sabra, the native-born Hebrew who fights for his land, controls it with his movements and gaze, and integrates into its historical continuum. Other texts in the Israeli culture of the time—films, plays, children’s stories, and the like—also followed this line.\(^3\) In other literary works of the 1940s and 1950s, the Zionist narrative continued to function as a skeleton, but the other narrative, that of the Holocaust-survivor Jew, was stationed alongside it as an alternative.\(^4\) In certain works, such as Shlomo Nitsan’s *Tsevat betsevat*,\(^5\) it is a side

---

narrative. In other works, such as Hanoch Bartov's novels *Each Had Six Wings* and *Growing Wounds*, Uri Orlev's *By Tomorrow*, and Yehudit Hendel's short story "They Are Others," it dictates, to a greater or lesser extent, the ambivalence of the heroes who oscillate between their Diaspora-Jewish and Israeli identities and between the Zionist discourse and that steeped in the traditions of Diaspora Jewry. Ben Amotz's novel *To Remember, To Forget* is one such work. In this novel, as in the others in this category, the Zionist discourse dominates and ultimately determines the structure of the plot and the characters. However, other discourses are present from beginning to end, in the form of other points of view, concrete details that shatter the national generalizations, and alternative interpretations, repetitions, and other elements that enfeeble the generality of the hegemonic narrative and portray Israeli culture as a collection of identities and cultures in motion.

In all these works the shattering of the narrative corresponds to the shattering of the boundaries of the heroes' identities and, with them, the boundaries of space and time. To understand this phenomenon, it is useful to consult postmodern theories that dismantle identity and treat it as a performative process, an entity repeatedly re-created by the praxis of discourse. This point of view allows us to examine how early Zionist propaganda texts constructed Hebrew identity by subjecting other identities to various degrees of rejection, obliteration, and silencing and to

---

7 Hanoch Bartov, *Growing Wounds* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1965).
8 Uri Orlev, *By Tomorrow* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1958).
10 Dan Ben Amotz, *To Remember, To Forget*, trans. Zeva Shapiro (Tel Aviv: Metziuth, 1979); idem, *To Remember, To Forget* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Amikam, 1968). All page references are to the original Hebrew version.
observe how literary works show this identity to be a mere imitation and transform it into one component of a broader multicultural identity that includes what has been previously rejected. This multicultural identity is based on broken geographical and historical boundaries that now include both Israel and the Diaspora, the present and various past continua, that is, the Holocaust and what preceded it.

In these literary works, the breaching of boundaries of identity, time, and space is closely associated with the breaching of gender boundaries. Masculine identity, so strong and safe in propaganda works expressing the Zionist narrative, is broken here, and behind it Jewish feminine identity is revealed. This process ruptures the boundaries of time when, repeatedly, it returns the protagonist to the pre-Oedipal past, which, in the historical context, corresponds to the past that precedes the Zionist Israeli order, and it ruptures the boundaries of masculine identity when it returns the protagonist to the mother figure.

Thus, the literary works that deal with these fantasies destabilize gender identity and breach the borders of the symbolic social and Zionist order. In all of these cases the search for the mother shatters the protagonists' confident masculinity and stresses the feminine components of their identities. As Anne Golomb Hoffman explains, "We tend to associate masculinity with a more bounded sense of self and femininity with more flexible or permeable ego boundaries." The retrogression to relations with the fluid, borderless, pre-Oedipal mother blurs the limits of masculine identity and shatters the male national image that

14 Freud draws a connection between the pre-Oedipal phase and early stages in history, e.g., the Minoan-Mican civilization that preceded that of Greece. See Sigmund Freud, "Female Sexuality," in vol. 21 of The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1974 [1931]). Julia Kristeva develops this theme in a different direction in her account of the displacement by monotheism not only of paganism but also of part of its agrarian civilization of women and mothers (see Julia Kristeva, "About Chinese Women," in Toril Moi, ed., The Kristeva Reader [New York: Columbia University Press, 1986], 145). In the survivors' literature, the early past of the protagonist, at the mother's bosom, occurs in Europe, in the culture of the Diaspora. Thus, the reconstruction of the son-mother relationship is connected with the reconstruction of this culture.

15 David Schitz, White Rose, Red Rose [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Keter, 1988); Aharon Appelfeld, Searing Light [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1980); Uri Orlev, By Tomorrow [Hebrew].

dominated the early Zionist texts. It returns the protagonist to the feminine Jewish identity that masculine Hebrew identity had shunted aside. Even in cases where protagonists seek a relationship with a father figure, as in By Tomorrow or White Rose, Red Rose, the relationship is overshadowed by relations with the mother.

The shattering of identities in the survivor literature is part of a broader phenomenon of the undermining of identities in Hebrew literature prompted, according to Band, by the collapse of the Zionist narrative. It has made a substantive contribution to the dismantling of the images and spatial and temporal settings of male Zionist nationalism, as reflected in early Zionist texts, because its heroes attempt to repair their dissociation from another identity, another geography, and another time, and reveal the Jewish feminine traits behind the masculine Zionist ones. Their return to their prior identity, time, and space ruptures the borders of Zionist culture and identity. Their wish to reconstruct the symbiosis with the mother makes all borders fluid and permeable. This literature has helped undermine the Israeli nationhood that was based on clear boundaries between masculine and feminine, Israel and Diaspora, and “Israeli time” and “Jewish time.” Ben Amotz’s novel To Remember, To Forget is a pronounced example of such literature.

Oscillating between Identities

Ben Amotz was brought to Israel as a child survivor of the Holocaust. His early short stories give no evidence of this experience. Israeli culture in those years was not inclined to deal with the personal reminiscences of Holocaust survivors, and Ben Amotz, like many others, repressed his memories. Like his hero in To Remember, To Forget, he adopted a sabra identity, even changing his name and place of birth in his identification card for this purpose. In the 1960s, after the trial of Adolf Eichmann, as the survivors’ personal recollections increasingly became a part of public cultural memory in Israel, Ben Amotz also told the story that he had repressed until then. In his novel To Remember, To Forget, he confronts his past by means of the portrayal of his main protagonist. In so doing, he not only examines the sabra Israeli identity in which his hero has draped


himself but also "reincarnates" it in a series of changing and shattering identities: the warrior Israeli, raised and schooled in Israel; the Israeli who has become bourgeois in the 1960s; the random cosmopolitan tourist; the Jew raised in Frankfurt; the German who has become wealthy in the 1960s; and the German Nazi. In this fashion, Israeli identity is dismantled and exposed to a phalanx of other identities, fluid and changing, some familiar and mainstream, others rejected and marginal, some tempting and others (such as Nazi identity) threatening. The flow of events, encounters, and happenings in the novel subjects each to thorough examination.

The hero and narrator of the novel—an Israeli who reached the country as a child refugee, was integrated into Israel, and became a full-fledged native—returns to Germany to accept reparations. He lands in Europe as a tourist and hopes to enjoy the pleasures of the universal culture that the continent offers him. The first chapter of the book, analyzed here, deals with this first encounter with Europe.

The main question one asks upon reading this chapter is: Who is the narrator-hero? We seem to know everything about him because he is articulate, almost loquacious, but in fact he is largely a mystery to us, and the little we know changes with each paragraph and page. At first glance, the narrator-hero is absolutely sure of his identity. At the beginning of the book, after his ship has anchored in Genoa and he is about to head for town, he looks into a mirror and smiles at himself in self-satisfaction: "Catching sight of myself in a mirror set in one of the columns, I could not repress a smile" (4). At whom, however, is he smiling? Who is peering back at him in the mirror? The answer is not clear. "Here I was, a young man in a black raincoat with turned-up collar, set for adventure, this young man about to conquer Europe was me" (4). He is mistaken. The man in the mirror is not him; it is an image that he has seen in the movies, about to stroll through Italian scenes that he has seen in paintings. ("I already wanted to stand in the vestibule of the train as I often had seen in films, in a black raincoat with turned-up collar" [9].) This is the universal tourist who feels at home in Western capitals, a self-styled man of the world who discards his national identity, be it Israeli or Diaspora-Jewish. However, this cosmopolitan image is but a fiction, a cinematic reflection of artistic scenes.

Thus, the hero stares in the mirror and sees in it, as in the mirror phase of childhood, a complete and cohesive image. This image, however, masks a fissured, shattered ego. The mask is exposed later on, and so, with it, is the distance between the image and the subject:

I longed to walk through the streets of Rome, guarding my secret jealously: the gentleman in the black raincoat, addressing himself in
Hebrew, a tongue foreign to this region—this gentleman is me, anonymous, known to no one. I longed to leave the port, to knock on Aunt Anna’s door in San Castello, and shout, “it’s me.” (4)

At first glance, the hero’s national identity, that of a Hebrew-speaking Israeli, lurks behind the cinematic image of the universal man. However, even this identity is problematic and intermingles with his identity as a Diaspora Jew, a Holocaust survivor. In the Hebrew original of this segment, the narrator proclaims his identity three times—“It’s me.” However, it is a different “me” each time: first the tourist in the black raincoat with the turned-up collar, then the Hebrew-speaking Israeli (“This gentleman is me, anonymous, known to no one, and not just any Italian like everyone” [10]), and finally the survivor who, years later, returns to his Aunt Anna who concealed him in her home during the Holocaust, and tells her, “It’s me.”

These identities commingle and dismantle each other throughout the novel. This characteristic of the plot becomes clear early on, in the continuation of the first chapter, when customs guards arrest the hero on suspicion of smuggling. At that moment he stares at the mirror again to search for the cohesive image that he saw there before (“I glanced at the elongated mirror. No, I didn’t look suspicious” [11]). Now he expects the mirror to confirm his innocence, but at this phase even his fantasies confirm his guilt; until then, these fantasies, set in parentheses, dealt with masculine conquest; now they focus on accusing voices. Furthermore, even he finds suspicious the dissimilarity between his passport photograph and his actual features. He now undergoes an acute, insulting experience of exchange of identities; his own identity is replaced by that of a fugitive smuggler. The identity now attached to him, however, is not only that of a criminal but also that of a Holocaust-era Jew. Now, as in the Holocaust, he is separated, displaced, excluded, and isolated from the crowd. He himself regards the entire incident as evidence of anti-Semitism on the part of the customs people. Thus, his identity as a tourist gives way to that of a criminal, and the Jewish identity of the Diaspora and the Holocaust is exposed as well.

To counter this, the hero stresses the very identity that he attempts to silence and repress throughout the plot, that of the proud Israeli. To his mind, the customs people are fascists, collaborators, and “lowly boot-lickers” (15); in contrast to them, he emphasizes his pride and indomitability, values that Zionist ideology posited as contrasts to the passivity and submissiveness of Diaspora Jewry. These values are displayed in a comic fashion when the hero “let[s] out a splendid fart—rich and mellow with sentiments of national pride and independence” (9). However, they also dictate his attitude at this occasion, the very opposite of the Diaspora-Jewish attitude, with which he also identifies throughout the chapter.
This ambiguous identity extends to the hero’s maleness. When he fantasizes about being a tourist in Italy, he imagines himself surrounded by women who are entranced by his personality and his cosmopolitan affectations. However, just as his imaginary character is mere fiction, so are his masculine conquests, which consist of imaginary conversations with imaginary women. Now that he has been identified as a smuggler, his masculinity also withers. Women vanish from his fantasies, and he makes a homosexual allusion of sorts when he asks the clerk to examine his rectum:

“That will be all,” [the clerk] mumbled, turning to go.
“What about the rectum?” I said, positioning myself between him and the door. “You forgot to check my rectum.” (9)

At this moment, when he is instructed to undress, the mirror, which might reveal him in a complete and cohesive form, has vanished. He steps into the dressing room and is surprised by the absence of a “large wall mirror” (15). Now he is torn between three pairs of identities: universal and national, Israeli and Diaspora-Jewish, and masculine and nonmasculine.

These dichotomies reflect dichotomies of geography and history. The Europe that the hero has reached is a cultural center, but it reminds him of the other Europe, the one he had left after the Holocaust and the one he had inhabited before it (10). These three continents erase and obliterate each other throughout the plot: the Europe of the past is banished from memory and succumbs to the Europe of the present, which, in turn, is purged of some of its immanence by memories of the erstwhile Europe. Although all these continents are portrayed as distant from Israel, they are also connected with this country, which seems like both a dream and a reality:

We boarded the boat and set off for a warm, distant land, a land of golden beaches, palm trees, orange groves, whitewashed houses—far from the black pitch roofs of home. (5)

Thus, the hero’s split identity is set within a fissured space in which he has no real home. Every location in which he finds himself is threatened by other places, his confidence in each particular time is challenged by other times, and the identity that he carries at any given moment is repeatedly fissured by other identities.

The manifestations of split identity analyzed thus far on the basis of the first chapter recur throughout the novel. Two of the main identities between which the hero continues to oscillate are the Jewish and the Israeli identities. Ostensibly, the hero considers himself part of the Western cultural world and disdains the national narrative on which he
was raised. The plot portrays this narrative as a parody on events of war and heroism, a collection of Holocaust-and-redemption clichés, a myth that has come unraveled and that provides justification for a bourgeois life of hedonism and permissiveness. Nevertheless, the hero immediately translates every clash with his surroundings into national terms that guide his thoughts and actions. When customs officials search his belongings at the airport, as stated, he considers this an anti-Semitic act, and when his German lover and future wife, Barbara, insults him in one of their quarrels, he blames this on her German nationality:

Just what does she have in mind? Does she think I'll take it from her, bow my head like ... a poor submissive Jew? She does not know me very well. I don't take that sort of thing lying down. I am an Israeli and nobody, especially not a Germ...—nobody can tell me what to do. The nerve! (337)

Here the hero's national identity is defined by the national narrative, the one manufactured as a counterweight to the Diaspora-Jewish identity that it has repressed. Indeed, the hero admits that he is always proud when people praise the bold, beautiful, audacious, honest, complex-free Israelis. He is insulted when Barbara tells him that, for her, he is a Jew; in response, he tells her that he is not a Jew but an Israeli and that the two are not synonymous. During the first part of his visit to Germany he masks his Jewishness, conceals the fact that he was born and raised in Germany and can speak German, and depicts himself as a native-born Israeli.

The progression of the plot is actually a progression of exposure, in which the Diaspora-Jewish identity concealed behind the Israeli one is revealed. This Israeli identity is shown to be an imitation and a masquerade from the outset, when the hero invents an autobiography in which he was born in Tel Aviv. As his stay in Germany lengthens and the eruptive force of his memories mounts, he slowly learns to acknowledge and accept the Jewish identity that he has concealed thus far. This process reaches its climax when the hero learns to identify with the Jews of the Holocaust era, those in Dachau and those in the ghetto. As the novel draws to a close, he goes to a masquerade ball in the costume of a Jew with a yellow star and, to the fury of all those in attendance, asks someone to write a number on his arm. The act of donning a costume, positioned near the end of the plot, is the final phase in the hero's return to his childhood memories and his parents' home—the final phase in the expansion of the focus of his identity: identification with the Jewish victim of the Holocaust.

As stated, the novel not only reveals Israeli identity to be a fiction but also questions the authenticity of other identities. Its episodic structure—a chain of episodes, most of which have a comic punchline related to
change of identity—contributes to this. For example, the hero notices Germans on the train, identifies them as Nazis, and eventually discovers that they are Jews. He befriends a young German, deems him to be a Nazi soldier, and finds out that he is a homosexual and a sworn anti-Nazi. He heads into the street drunk and bellows, “Nazis … Damned Nazis … Gestapo” (89, 90). Three Germans pounce on him and release him only when he tells them he is Jewish. He goes into the street as an Israeli national who has come to avenge the Jews and turns out to be a Jewish victim of German violence. In such a chain of episodes no identity is safe. A widow whom the hero encounters at a cemetery proves to be a prostitute whose widow’s attire is meant to help her attract clients, and a German woman he encounters in an elevator turns out to have human, non-national characteristics.

Indeed, the main identities between which the hero oscillates—the Diaspora-Jewish and the Israeli identities—are packaged with additional identities: the universal identity of the tourist who has distanced himself from his national origins and considers Europe a non-national space, and the identity of a member of the bourgeoisie who disdains the bourgeois way of life and institutions, even though he benefits from them. He feels guilty about the reparations he is about to receive from Germany; nevertheless, he goes there to receive them. He wishes to return to Israel but is tantalized by the possibility of staying in Germany, finding a job there, and making a lot of money. The identities that define the hero include the possibility of a Nazi identity that threatens him: he repeatedly asks himself what he would have done during the war and compares his behavior with that of the Germans during the Holocaust. To distance himself from this threatening identity, he escapes to his other identities—the Jewish and the Israeli, the cosmopolitan, and the bourgeois—and migrates among them. These migrations are also migrations among various times and places that commingle in the course of random conversations, dreams, fantasies, and associations: the distant past in Europe, the past in the camps, the past in Palestine, the past of Israel’s War of Independence, and so on.

The fluidity of national identities, as stated, corresponds to the fluidity of gender identities. This phenomenon, described in the first chapter, recurs throughout the plot. If we associate masculinity with a more limited, better defined sense of identity, and femininity with fluid, permeable, and flexible borders of the ego, as Hoffman does, we may say that not only does the hero’s national identity become more elastic in the course of the plot but so does his gender identity. Indeed, he slowly abandons the masculine conquest pretensions that motivated him and displays traits that are

---

19 Hoffman, “Bodies and Borders.”
not known to be pronouncedly masculine and Israeli. His masculinity is compromised first when the widow, with whom he spends a night in Italy, turns out to be a prostitute, steals his money, and (so he believes later on) infects him with venereal disease. The dual insult, against his wallet and his body, is perceived as an assault on his masculinity and is linked with an offense to his nationhood. After he discovers he has symptoms of venereal disease, he is gripped with self-disgust and invokes a package of anti-Semitic stereotypes, including a lying Jew, a cheat, and a carrier and spreader of diseases, to define himself.

His entire relationship with Barbara, the German woman whom he meets in the elevator, begins as a masculine and national conquest. He introduces himself to her as an Israeli, does not inform her that he speaks German, and attempts to seduce her as quickly as possible. He even defines relations with German women as acts of nationalism by saying:

Definitely. Screw them, all those Germans. Knock up their women, their wives and daughters. Make them all pregnant. Fill Germany with six million bastard Jews who will suck their blood and bring on them a holocaust from which they will never recover. (131)

In the end, when he has sexual relations with Barbara, he finds himself unable to perform at the climactic moment. Thus, damage is inflicted not only on his masculinity but also on his proud, vengeful Israeli identity.

Later on, his relationship with Barbara allows him to reveal the feminine aspects of his personality. He had been displaced from his parents and surroundings at an early age and had fashioned in Israel a new identity that was threatened by his old memories, including an unconscious recollection of his symbiotic relationship with his mother, who did not survive. Thus, the novel links the shattering of the masculine Israeli identity and its exposure to other identities with the phenomena of homecoming and return to the mother. This return is reconstructed in relationship with Barbara, whom the hero defines as a mother, a home, and a hometown that has adopted and embraced him. He has returned to the familiar and the beloved, something that became alien and threatening *(unheimlich)* upon the advent of the Holocaust. He has returned to recollections of the pre-Oedipal phase, to the stage at which the boundaries of his masculine identity had not yet solidified. Barbara is well suited for the role of the borderless pre-Oedipal mother since she contains both the self and the other, the German identity and its opposite, and because she can place herself in the field of the hero’s gaze, see through his eyes, and see him through hers. In his relationship with Barbara, the limits of his own identity are also breached.
Conclusion

Oscillation between preserving and shattering the Zionist narrative is a major motive in a number of works dealing with Holocaust survivors that were published in the 1950s and 1960s, at a time when the culture still validated this narrative. Gershon Shaked\textsuperscript{20} and Dan Laor\textsuperscript{21} have sketched a taxonomy of literary works concerning Israel’s mass immigration that distinguishes between two models: that of the hosts and that of those hosted, that is, between literature written by the native-born, reflecting the basic ideological assumptions of the host establishment, and that written by newly arrived immigrants. Avner Holtzman takes issue with this dichotomy by attempting to point to the sympathy that the Israeli-born authors bestowed on the survivors.\textsuperscript{22} A comparison of To Remember, To Forget and other works, including some by Holocaust survivors (e.g., Uri Orlev’s By Tomorrow) and others written by Israel-born authors (e.g., Hanoch Bartov’s Growing Wounds), shows that despite the different points of view of immigrant survivors and native Israelis, all these works oscillate similarly between Zionist identity and Diaspora-Jewish identity, between the space and time of the Land of Israel and other spaces and times. They also oscillate between the masculine and feminine images of their protagonists. Thus, they challenge the limits of the male Zionist identity that was generated by the propaganda texts of the early Zionist era and, to some extent, by books written in the 1940s and 1950s, thereby exposing this identity to other possibilities.

\textsuperscript{20} Gershon Shaked, \textit{Wave after Wave in Hebrew Literature} [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Keter, 1985).


\textsuperscript{22} Avner Holtzman, “‘They Are Others’: The Portrayal of Holocaust Survivors in the Palmah Generation Literature,” in \textit{The Jewish People at the End of the Second World War, Proceedings of the Tenth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference} [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: forthcoming).