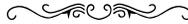


Introduction

“A Great, Oppressive, Suffocating Blasphemy”¹

Sexualized Violence as an Insidious Trauma



And none of these [gestures] hurt her terribly, but at the end it's the cumulative amount that threatens to kill her.

—Nano Shabtai²

In honor of International Women's Day in 2016, Nechama Rivlin, wife of Israeli president Reuven Rivlin, hosted survivors of sexual violence at Beit HaNassi, the official residence of the president of Israel. The event received wide media coverage, and was of great importance in relation to the Israeli public discourse on sexual violence. Because of the dominance of the military ethos in Israeli culture, Israeli media gives precedence mainly to men's traumas, especially those related to war. In rare cases where public visibility is given to the sexual abuse of women and girls, their trauma is not perceived as a national trauma but is structured as a private (and usually secretive) matter. To use Judith Lewis Herman's words, "The most common trauma of women remains confined to the sphere of private life, without formal recognition or restitution from the community. There is no public monument for rape survivors."³ In light of this, the significance of the 2016 presidential event becomes clear. Beit HaNassi is a public space, a civic symbol of statehood and nationalism, and the fact that survivors of sexual abuse were invited there shows that sexual violence is a national matter.

Moreover, Rivlin's presidency shared the same administration as that chaired by President Moshe Katsav, who in 2010 was convicted of rape, committing an indecent act, and sexually harassing women who were subordinate to him. In this context, Nechama Rivlin's hosting the 2016 event may be seen as a kind of *tikkun*, or repair. The national space that had been headed by a rapist was now occupied by women telling their stories of enduring sexual violence. In the concluding chapter of the book, I will return to that state of "repair," and will examine it in light of the spectrum of voices presented throughout this book, but for now I will focus on the act at hand, namely on the message the president's wife conveyed on this special occasion.

In the speech Nechama Rivlin delivered at the event, she alluded to an excerpt from Nano Shabtai's novel *The Book of Men* (Sefer hagvarim, 2015), which refers to Pina Bausch's dance piece *1980*. Addressing the novel's description, Nechama Rivlin portrays Bausch's dance as follows: "A female dancer stands in a simple and childish dress, surrounded by men in suits. Each of them touches her in a series of repetitive small gestures. One repeatedly pinches her nose, one caress her head, a third touches her belly, her foot, her hand. No one blatantly harms her with unequivocal and jarring harm, but the repetition of these small, dubiously legitimate touches, in the face of her submissive and confused passivity, makes this dance an unbearably difficult artistic moment. A cumulative load of small injuries that has become a great, oppressive, suffocating blasphemy."⁴

When Nechama Rivlin sought a way to talk with the survivors and the public about sexual violence, she turned to a literary text. Moreover, she did not quote, for example, Shaul Tchernichovsky's prominent 1936 poem "Parashat Dinah" (The Dinah Affair or The Dinah Portion), which deals with the biblical narrative of the rape of Dinah; nor did she quote the well-known scene in which Hannah, the heroine of Amos Oz's 1968 novel *My Michael* (*Michael Sheli*), fantasizes about being raped by Arab twins. Rivlin did not cite isolated rape scenes but rather dealt with the "cumulative load of small injuries."

She referred her audience to Nano Shabtai's novel, which features the main protagonist's long sequence of emotional and sexual encounters with different men in her life. The book, which one critic called "an injuring erotic journey,"⁵ presents a wide range of men—some kind and sensitive, others pathetic or miserable—who all end up not just being aggressive in one way or another but also taking advantage of social privileges related to their own gender, race, and professional position. Despite its title, *The Book of Men* is told from the perspective of the female character, and is

more about women than about men. It describes women's experiences, and presents women and girls as constantly exposed to a wide spectrum of harassment and gender-based violence. Thus, Nechama Rivlin did not refer to sexual abuse as an incident "outside the range of human experience" but rather she addressed a lurking, quotidian, and continuing trauma that women and girls experience as part of an ongoing wounding social reality.

In effect, Nechama Rivlin thus used her position within the presidential institution to make a three-part statement: first, by inviting survivors of sexual violence to the presidential hall she called on Israeli society to listen to them seriously; second, by quoting a novel, she reminded the nation of the political and social influence of literature; and third, by referring specifically to *The Book of Men* she exposed the repetitive and insidious nature of sexualized trauma.

In those statements, Nechama Rivlin actually touched on all of the main modes of representing sexual violence in Modern Hebrew literature. Modern Hebrew literature is saturated with various forms of sexual violence, such as male and female prostitution, incest, the rape of girls and women, and verbal assault. It locates sexual aggression in various historical contexts (such as the Holocaust, Israel's wars, and religious rituals), as well as in different social and institutional contexts (such as sexual harassment in the army). At times, sexual violence stands at the center of the literary representation, and at others, it dwells in the margins of the narrative; sometimes it is explicit, and sometimes it is implicit. Although it is difficult to organize such an abundance of representation within historical or ideological coordinates, *Flesh of My Flesh* argues that the key position that characterizes most of the representations of sexual violence in Hebrew literature is that sexual violence is not perceived as a *personal* trauma but rather as an *insidious* trauma.

In its initial formulation in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, a traumatic event was conceptualized as a catastrophic stressor that was outside the range of usual human experience,⁶ and the trauma was situated "as an essential category of human existence, rooted in individual rather than social dynamics."⁷ This dehistoricizing universalism created and perpetuated a context in which victims of trauma were approached not as historical actors but rather as "victims in general: universal man, universal woman, universal child."⁸ The term "insidious trauma," on the other hand, reflects current approaches to trauma that locate specific traumatic events in a larger context of societal oppression. "Insidious trauma" thus refers to daily incidents of marginalization, objectification, discrimination, intimidation, et cetera, that

are experienced by members of groups targeted by heterosexism, racism, ableism, and other forms of oppression. Insidious trauma, explains Maria P. P. Root, “is characterized by repetitive and cumulative experiences. It is perpetrated by persons who have power over one’s access to resources and one’s destiny, and directed towards persons who have a lower status on some important social variable. The types of experiences that form insidious traumas are repeated oppression, violence, genocide, or femicide—both historical and contemporary.”⁹ In other words, in contrast to “personal” or “extreme” trauma—that is, trauma as an experience that is outside the typical range of human experience or that occurred in the past and then ended—the term “insidious trauma” refers to trauma as an experience that takes place as a result of ongoing conditions of oppression (such as chauvinism, homophobia, racism, and ableism) that occur within normative reality. Unlike the definition of “posttrauma,” which is based on the fact that the event that has engendered such pain is over, the stubbornness of insidious trauma exists as the product of an ongoing and cumulative traumatic social reality.¹⁰

Flesh of My Flesh claims that Modern Hebrew literature, from its early stages until recently, refuses to adhere to the decontextualization in regard to sexual trauma.¹¹ It disaffirms the universalization and depoliticization of sexual trauma, and—without ever using the term—refers to it as an “insidious trauma.” Hebrew literature emphasizes the social context of sexual trauma, often referring to the victims as members of various oppressed groups (women, girls, Palestinians, Mizrahi, poor). It thus highlights the importance of examining the overlap between individual and cultural oppression, and therefore exposes the social norms and mechanisms that enable (and at times encourage) sexual violence. Though each story of gender-based violence is singular and unique, Hebrew literature insists on framing and understanding sexualized violence as collectively emblematic. Hebrew literature, then, not only provides a platform for the articulation of sexual violence but, since it takes into account the cultural, social, and poetic matrix of trauma, also becomes a political act by exposing the social roots of gender-based trauma.

The Trope of Sexual Violence

Hosting the survivors in the president’s house, as mentioned, was a public statement of enormous importance. However, while the media covered

Nechama Rivlin's speech, it did not broadcast the victims' voices. Their stories were mediated through Nechama Rivlin's speech, which, while addressed to them, was at the same time also a public (and as such, official) speech delivered to the nation. In other words, their stories of sexual violence were presented in order to serve a cause, in this case, a feminist-national one. Without getting into the various motivations embodied in this presidential event, what is important to me is the fact that the story of sexual violence was mediated—and articulated—in order to serve a purpose.

Flesh of My Flesh explores a variety of social interests embodied not in the act of sexual violence itself but in its cultural mediation, namely, in its articulation. Even though sexual violence is, first and foremost, a severe act of violence, especially (but not only) against women and girls, the representations of sexual violence that are discussed in this book are literary ones; they are a construct that articulates social reality while taking part in shaping its social power relations. The book thus examines the trope of sexual violence in Hebrew literature, and then asks how it participates in, encourages, or resists concurrent ideologies in Hebrew and Israeli culture.

Representations of sexual violence in Hebrew literature serve a variety of social interests, at times incompatible with actual victims' experiences or interests. While survivors' stories are central to the discussion of sexual violence, they are not the main narratives that appear in literature. In fact, in Hebrew literature the introduction of sexual violence into poetic and narrative settings is more often than not a literary device, meant not only to move the plot forward in particular ways but more importantly to cultivate ideological positions related to gender, ethnicity, national identity, and disability in Israeli society. This book thus presents various roles of sexual violence tropes, some of which destabilize hegemonic notions while others reinforce norms or modes of conduct.

Accordingly, through discussions about Hebrew representations of prostitution, as well as examinations of sexual relations between wounded soldiers and their caregivers, the book shows how sexual violence is used as a rhetorical tool to construct Jewish and Israeli heterosexual masculinity. By attending to Hebrew Sephardi literature, it explores the relationship between sexual violence and the establishment of Mizrahi femininity. And while reading memoirs of incest survivors, this book examines the therapeutic effects of writing, and shows the interests of survivors in a social dialogue, and while reading contemporary poetry it explores the poetic processing of sexual trauma.

Engaging with various sociopolitical intersections in the representation of sexual violence will thus allow us to observe the numerous ways in which sexual aggression intersects with social circumstances and with the literary act. In turn, these moments of intersection inform the discourse(s) on sexual violence in the Israeli culture of the last century, and they are accompanied by nuanced negotiations between the various participants in the construction of literature.

Sexual Violence: Affirming the Status Quo and Challenging It

Feminist scholars and activists have rightly called for a social and legal change in regard to sexual violence. Numerous studies have been dedicated to unveiling social mechanisms of suppression in the domestic, educational, legal, and therapeutic systems, detailing the lack of proper enforcement to protect the victims. These calls are justified, but they stem from a basic assumption that refers to the legal and ethical prohibition of sexual violence as actually opposed to the very real existence of sexual violence. In other words, according to these calls, sexual violence disrupts the social and legal order rather than dwelling within these structures intrinsically.

In contrast to this assumption, Judith Lewis Herman shows that sexual violence does not interfere with patriarchal power dynamics but rather actually conforms to and even authorizes patriarchal norms.¹² Other feminist scholars have also argued that the existence of sexual violence is but a means to train women and children “to regard themselves as inferior objects to be used by men.”¹³ Accordingly, *Flesh of My Flesh* reads the centrality of sexual violence in Hebrew literature (and Israeli society) within this complex framework of cultural doings that are simultaneously permitted and forbidden. The book thus addresses sexual violence in Hebrew literature not only as insidious trauma characterized by repetitive and cumulative experiences but also as a typical function of heteropatriarchy rather than a breach or breakdown of social order. In other words, this book examines the ways in which the literary-social organization not only challenges but also enables (and perhaps even encourages) sexual violence.

Thus, although sexual violence is—at least in some cases—prohibited and legally punishable, I examine its literary depictions in two ways: as an exception to the social order and as a built-in element of patriarchal interest within that same order. Since representations of sexual violence

are at least as much about affirming the status quo as about challenging it, this book shows, on the one hand, how sexual violence stands at the heart of the sociocultural mainstream—in that sexual violence is not just a personal tendency, cultural pathology, or historical oddity¹⁴—and yet, on the other, how writers position themselves in relation to those patriarchal power relations. Hebrew literature manages to represent the varied political contexts of sexual violence and reveal the different interests it serves, while pointing to the various mechanisms that enable it. Hence, this book presents readings about sexual violence that move between adopting or assimilating the patriarchal power relations, and expressions of women’s writings of critical voices that undermine the patriarchal framework and enable what Shira Stav calls the “possibilities of action within a cohesive structure.”¹⁵

“Your Own Private Bed”¹⁶

The unpublished and undated story “Mistake” (Shgaga),¹⁷ written by Rivka Alper, may be the first story in Hebrew literature that addresses rape from the perspective of the raped woman.¹⁸ Alper was born in 1902 in the town of Avitzi in the Vilna Governorate, and she immigrated to Palestine in 1926. With extraordinary sensitivity, the story tells about Dina, a young pioneer from a *kvutza* (a communal settlement in Palestine during prestate Israel), who was raped by a young Jewish Zionist man. The story not only describes the rape itself and the mechanisms of dissociation she experienced during the assault but also the aftermath: her sense of guilt and shame, her social exclusion, and her inability to process or overcome her traumatic experience.

Alper’s story addresses rape as a personal experience while simultaneously locating it within the wider context of the Zionist movement, without attempting to disrupt or undermine it. At the same time, “Mistake” reveals the hidden violent aspects of the Zionist project, which aspired to establish a safe home for the Jewish people but failed to provide emotional or physical safety to its female (and at times, also male) members.

The story depicts the rape as a difficult and unexpected experience that does not actually deviate from the sexual harassment and violence to which Dina and her female pioneer companions are exposed on a regular basis. To use Orian Zakai’s words, “Sexual violence is reproduced rather than repudiated in the Zionist space. The boundaries of the victimized

body are not protected, as hoped, by the constitution of a distinct national identity. Rather, sexual violence is transposed to the national setting and becomes part and parcel of the making of Zionist masculinity.¹⁹ Perhaps this is why the story ends with what we might understand as a call for a fundamental change in the Jewish Zionist world. In the Balfour Declaration (1917), the Zionist request was for the establishment of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine, and Virginia Woolf in her writings calls for “A Room of One’s Own” (1929); Rivka Alper seems to balance these demands by speaking of the desperate desire for “your own private bed”: “Onward mountains again: valleys, communal settlement. [. . .] *Nimas* [I am fed up with it]. Fatigue. . . . There is a desire to have a corner, your own private bed. Homeward, to her collective settlement, she has returned. Again the same life. There was nothing new, nothing was added, kitchen, laundry, yard again . . . and the worm was sucking, sucking over there . . . under the heart.”²⁰ The story does not end with the abandonment of the Zionist dream or with Dina’s departure from the *kvutza*. Rather, it ends with a call for women’s own ownership of their bodies and life. It is a call to protect the female body; it is a desperate plea, deeply aware of its own powerlessness, to create a private and safe space for women.

In a way, this short story is an embodied articulation of that plea: it not only carries a feminist manifesto but becomes, in itself, “a corner,” a literary space to preserve, process, and communicate the traumatic experience. Tsvia Litvsky writes in one of her poems, “Pain is not emotion. Pain is a place,”²¹ which helps to describe the creation of the literary space that manifests as a result of shared pain and violence. It is this space—the location of the poetics of the embodied effects of sexual violence—that stands at the heart of this book. Therefore, *Flesh of My Flesh* explores the poetic possibilities of writing within a patriarchal framework, looking not only at the political dimension of writing itself but also at the way in which the poetics of writing relates to, transmits, and processes sexual violence.

The Illusion of Progress

Rivka Alper’s story “Mistake” (*Shgaga*) was written almost a century before Nechama Rivlin invited the survivors of gender-based sexual violence to Beit HaNassi. Even though Alper’s story is indeed exceptional for her time, it does not stand alone. Despite various mechanisms of silencing,

some stories about the rape and sexual harassment of both Jewish and Palestinian women at the early stages of the Zionist movement found their way into Hebrew writings. One of the central examples is the memoir of the Jewish pioneer Henya Pekelman, *The Life of a Woman Worker in the Homeland* (Hayey po'let ba-aretz),²² which she self-published in Hebrew in 1935. Pekelman was born in 1903 in Bessarabia and emigrated to the British Mandate of Palestine in 1922. Unlike her fellow pioneers, who praised the act of pioneering and glorified their daily woes, Henya Pekelman provided firsthand testimony of her rape at the hands of her former business partner, Yeruham Mirkin, in the fall of 1924 while on a visit to Tel Aviv.²³

While describing the rape itself, Pekelman does not use words but rather attempts to denote this violence with punctuation, using two lines of hyphens: "I wanted to leave the room, but Yeruham held me tightly. A war broke out between us until I hit my head hard and fell to the floor.

 ----- I do not remember anything more."²⁴ The huge gap between Pekelman's two lines of hyphens that (do not) describe the rape and the flow of words in Nano Shabtai's *The Book of Men* quoted in Nechama Rivlin's speech raises questions about the changes that have taken place in Hebrew literature and Israeli culture in relation to sexual violence. Does this difference signify progress, and if so, what is the nature of that progress? Would the reception of Pekelman's autobiography be different if she were to publish it today?

It is difficult to predict how Pekelman's autobiography would be received if were published today, but we do know that it was largely ignored by Hebrew readers until it was reprinted in Israel in 2007.²⁵ We might understand the initial neglect as a typical case of silencing a testimony about sexual violence, and the reprint of the memoir as an example of the recent increase in awareness about sexual assault and rape. However, this narrative of silence about sexual violence in Mandatory Palestine versus openness toward the issue in the State of Israel oversimplifies things. To begin with, the very existence of Pekelman's autobiography, which was self-published in 1935, undermines the claim about silence. Moreover, not only does Pekelman name the rapist but her autobiography also contains her varied attempts to tell her story, and depicts internal and external mechanisms of silencing. Thus it is not only a testimony of her rape but also a poetic and political act of emotionally coping and socially confronting sexual violence. Therefore, Pekelman's memoir challenges the contemporary

popular assumption that until the development of the feminist discourse, victims of sexual violence were silence and silenced. The very existence of Pekelman's memoir raises the question of whether—despite events like Nechama Rivlin's—there is indeed more openness to the subject today, and if there is, what the nature of this openness is.

I argue that despite the immense importance of the feminist movement, and without undermining its enormous contribution to the visibility of gender-based sexual violence and to the creation of support systems for victims of sexualized violence, Hebrew literature does not follow a simple arc of progressive improvement. The contemporary narrative—noticeable in literature, film, social media (including the #GamAni [#MeToo] movement), and public accusations of sexual misconduct—emphasizes progress (attributed mainly to extensive feminist efforts) in changing societal attitudes toward sexual violence. This discourse argues that even though much work remains to be done, significant accomplishments—such as greater awareness and social sensitivity to sexual violence—have been made and additional positive changes are underway. It is a discourse that talks about empowering victims, and that believes that survivors have more and more of a voice in the public discourse.

When I started this project, I was highly influenced by this approach and assumed that I would find nothing but conservatism in Hebrew literature of the beginning of the twentieth century, and nothing but feminist radicalism in the writing of the nineties and beyond. This was quickly complicated by the stories of prostitution written by Gershon Shofman, from the first decade of the twentieth century, which revealed not only compassion and sensitivity to women engaged in the sex industry but also a surprisingly forward-thinking awareness around questions of agency and choice. When I was exposed to the work of Shoshana Shababo—to her direct and decisive descriptions of gender-based violence and her evaluations of the complexity of female sexuality in the thirties and forties—I felt awash in a sea of confusion; these texts blatantly contradicted my presumed knowledge of the early years of Modern Hebrew literature. Similarly, as I ventured into work on memoirs of incest survivors of the last two decades, I expected to find texts rooted in revolutionary feminism and psychoanalysis but instead discovered, to my surprise, that it was a genre torn between expressive, poetic innovation and often clichéd narratives of overcoming trauma. The more I ventured into reading these representations of sexual violence in Modern Hebrew literature, the less

was I able to map them out onto concrete ideological or historical trajectories of change and social awareness.

In view of that, by looking at representations of sexual violence in Hebrew literature from the turn of the century to the present, *Flesh of My Flesh* challenges the narrative of progress, and argues that the very idea of “progress” in regard to sexual violence in Hebrew literature—from lack of concern about sexual violence to thoughtfulness, for instance, or from a sexist approach to a feminist one—is not only an illusion but has become a form of oppression in the current Israeli discourses around sexual violence. In other words, while the narrative of progress may be true in certain cases, I would argue that first, this narrative overshadows various experiences that do not conform to this model, and second, it is a partial narrative that does not represent Hebrew literature as a whole. What can actually be found in Hebrew literature is a complex and productive chaos of a variety of attitudes toward sexual violence that still tells us something coherent and important when seen this way.

While there may be fewer representations of sexual violence in the prestate period and the first decades of the new Jewish state that was established in 1948, this topic blossomed within women’s writing in Israel in the 1990s and 2000s, gaining both presence and visibility. Issues of voice, agency, the female body, wounded subjectivities and bodies, victimhood, and vulnerabilities characterize many of the current Israeli representations of sexual violence. This body of work is of enormous importance, and the study of it has long-reaching implications for the representation of sexual exploitation and abuse, but it is crucial to realize that the supposedly silent period is of no less consequence. These texts—as in the case of Rivka Alper’s “Mistake” and Henya Pekelman’s autobiography, for instance—bring out particular intersections where a few forms of oppression come together and capture the way experiences of sexual violence at the beginning of the twentieth century in Jewish Europe and Palestine were hidden and marginalized.

Whereas current representations are, to some extent, informed by academic discourses such as trauma studies, psychoanalysis, and especially women, gender, and sexuality studies, *Flesh of My Flesh* also explores the seemingly prediscursive stage of sexual violence in Hebrew culture. By examining the underlying ideologies that spawned these representations and addressing their sociopoetic conditions, the book offers a depiction of some of the “raw” poetic moments in which Hebrew literature and

culture encounters its own prohibitions and violence. By identifying the ways in which violence—usually, though not always, against women and girls—becomes a trope representative of power relations, this study highlights “unrefined” representations of sexual assault as a major component of the social construction of gender, ethnicity, and national Jewish-Hebrew identity.

Book Structure

Since the notion of a universally experienced rape culture flattens out the very different hierarchies of power that contribute to sexual violence, I present two (not necessarily binary) movements in the book. While some chapters focus on literature written by marginalized or disempowered groups affected by insidious trauma, other chapters center on texts written from a more privileged position. In other words, on the one hand, I look at how women and survivors write about sexual violence and how they relate to the gendered and ethnic oppression they experience, and on the other I also explore representations of sexual violence written from a gendered and racialized privileged position, and I ask what kind of interests they serve.

Although the book is organized chronologically, in view of the fact that sexualized violence is always rooted in the intersection of various types of oppression, the book's structure is also starlike: the key concept is sexualized violence, and each of the five chapters indicates a different branch related to it. Each chapter thus examines a different aspect of the intersectionality that is inherent to sexual trauma, and addresses a different kind of cultural utilization.

The book opens with a *fin de siècle* European space that uses the experience of sexual violence and female prostitution as a means to negotiate questions of strength and weakness in the masculine Jewish world. The first chapter explores the juxtaposition of prostitution, masculinity, and nationalism in the works of the Hebrew writers David Vogel (1891–1944), Gershon Shofman (1889–1971), and Hayim Nahman Bialik (1873–1934) at the beginning of the twentieth century. The second chapter, while close chronologically, addresses an altogether differently gendered and geographical space. It focuses on the literary work of the oft-overlooked Sepharadi Hebrew writer Shoshana Shababo (1910–1992) during the *Yishuv* period (the prestate Jewish community in the Land of Israel/

Palestine). This chapter reveals the way Shababo's literary depictions of gender-based violence challenge ethnicity itself, as well as Zionist perceptions and utilizations of sexual violence. The third chapter focuses the discussion about Zionist masculinity on issues related to sexual violence and disability. More specifically, it explores the role of sexual harassment in the construction of heterosexual, able-bodied Israeliness in the late sixties and early seventies. By focusing on writers such as Yoram Kaniuk (1930–2013), Dan Ben-Amotz (1923–1989), Yaacov Haelyon (b. 1937), and Shalom Babayoff (year of birth unknown), this chapter explores the national ableist motivation of linking representations of disability with sexual aggression.

Moving from a focus on writing about sexual violence by authors who do not indicate any autobiographical experience of such in their works, to the survivor's perspective, the fourth chapter centers on memoirs of incest victims published in Israel over the last two decades. It focuses on the emotional and social needs of the writers, as well as on the challenges and barriers of the readers, and explores the ways the memoirs generate creative spaces that enable the survivors to communicate their reality and to have a lasting social impact. The fifth chapter addresses the writings of Tsvia Litevsky (b. 1949), an Israeli incest survivor and poet. It centers on Litevsky's poetic and expository writing on parental abuse, while exploring the complex relationship between creative writing and emotional distress.

The chapters as a whole thus embody the intersectionality that the book examines.²⁶ In other words, while the book looks at poetic and social possibilities of action in relation to sexual violence, it also exposes the Gordian knot of gender-based violence and the interests of patriarchy, heteronormativity, nationalism, ableism, and the like. Such critical analysis of both canonical and lesser-known texts uncovers the complex power dynamics, ideologies, and anxieties entwined in the constructions of the Hebrew cultural imagination.