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„Daniel was very fond of Rina. She was a mate, a friend, over-excitabile but genuine. He could confide in her and she made him laugh. He was a virgin and when he thought of women they were different from Rina. He imagined them soft-skinned and perfumed. He wanted them dressed in frills and ruffles and the girls he grew up with were handsome and well-built but he was too familiar with them. Their skin had the quality of his own and their legs and underarms were hairy.” (DS, 60)

## Or ‘The Others’ in Yael Dayans’ Prose

Viktoria Pötzl

University of Vienna

Department for Jewish Studies

### Abstract:

This lecture shall outline how the interactions of gender and various kinds of ‘otherness’ - intrinsic to the literary work of Yael Dayan - can promote particular performances and conceptions of Jewish as well as national (Israeli) constructions of identity. Furthermore the planned lecture shall define the scope of “the others” in Yael Dayan’s prose. On the one hand the construction of the Non-Jews and on the other hand the construction of women within the Jewish Community and also the construction of the woman by way of an exception and Non-Jewish women, will be brought and thought together. However, they are not investigated separately. Instead, mutual conditions and interdependencies will be examined closely. Additionally an example of a solidary figure will be given, as a diverse concept of Identification.

Close reading will be the method deployed for the analytical part. In the course of close reading, “hidden” or subversive elements, which critics as well as science treated only marginally, will be discerned. Mostly, primary sources will be analyzed on the basis of reader-response criticism and work-immanent readings. Yet, political, historical, cultural, social, sociological or structural aspects cannot be ignored.

Discourse analysis, deconstruction, decolonization as well as poststructuralist and feminist theories will function as methods of literary analysis.

### Key words:

Gender, Jewish, Identity, Yael Dayan, Narrative

### Introduction:

Based on Gudrun Perkos’ theory about the subject construction of the other, the following presentation will analyse the way in which the author and politician Yael Dayan constructs her literary presentation of “exceptional women” and their “antagonists” and what these constructions evoke.

“Firstly, I refer back to the autonomous subject as something imaginary, which is involved in the social-historical imaginary, and therefore I essentially oppose the postmodern these of the death of the subject [...] secondly, I make use of the term *the other* to define the subject as something being equal, different and unlike in itself and towards others - this is to say, to define the subject in its particular uniqueness and in its radical differences and <not>-identities.” (Perko 2005, 43)

Perko does not understand the term as it might emerge in political and scientific discourse, namely as a term that reproduces structures of exclusion. “In this way, my usage of the term *the subject as the other* diverges from the denomination of *the other* as someone not accepted – as a negative construction -, which is stigmatized, excluded, discriminated – without classifying this usage as incorrect.” (Perko 2005, 44) She uses the term as a designation for every subject and as a novelty. If we apply this subject constitution to the literary representation of exceptional women in Yael Dayan’s prose, these females can also be understood as being *the other*. With this term, the protagonists can be defined without getting into discriminating structures. In their being different, unequal and also equal, they constitute the subject of *the other*.

Furthermore, it will be outlined in how far the construction of “exceptional women” in some of the author’s works serve clichés of masculinity and femininity and why it needs exactly a construction of femininity that is a necessary one in an androcentric worldview, in order to distinguish these women from all the other women and to continue placing sexist and stereotypical images of women in a normative way. Following identity and difference along Trinh T. Minh-Ha’s concept of *infinite layers* and analysing Yael Dayan’s texts according to the following questions is a way to partially escape this reproduction of an androcentric worldview:

„Difference as uniqueness or special identity is both limiting and deceiving.[...] Can identity, indeed, be viewed other than as a by-product of a “manhandling” of life, one that, in fact, refers no more to a consistent “pattern of sameness” than to an inconsequential process of otherness? How am I to lose, maintain, or gain an (fe/male) identity when it is impossible to me to take up a position outside this identity from which I presumably reach in and feel for it?” (T. Minh-Ha 1989, 95)

Based on that, the postcolonial theorist argues that: „Difference in such an insituable context is *that which undermines the very idea of identity*, deferring to infinity the layers whose totality forms “I.” It subverts the foundations of any affirmation or vindication of value and cannot, thereby, ever bear in itself an absolute value.”(T. Minh-Ha 1989, 96)

## But who is Yael Dayan anyway?

Yael Dayan was born on December, 2nd, 1939 in Nahalal. She is not only known as an author, she also is a politician and a political activist. Texts analyzed in this lecture are: *Envy the Frightened* (EF), *Dust* (D) and *Death had Two Sons* (DS), *New Face in the Mirror* (NF) and *Three Weeks in October* (TW).

As a politician she was a member of the Knesset from 1992 – 2003. Yael Dayan is also known as a Peace Activist for Peace Now, Bat Shalom, International Center for Peace and The Council for Peace and Security, as a LGBT Activist and a Women Rights Activist. Her parents were Moshe Dayan (1915 – 1981) and Ruth Dayan (1917). She has two younger brothers, Assi and Ehud Dayan, was married to Dov Sion (1924 – 2003), with whom she has two children.

## *New Face in the Mirror: Ariel Ron – The exceptional woman*

Ariel Ron is 17 years old and daughter of a famous Israeli general. We get to know in very much detail how Ariel experiences and describes the days of her military service. In the course of the novel, Ariel undergoes several developments. In the beginning, she loves the power games she plays with men as well as with women. She is also busy with several projects. After completing the military service, Ariel travels to France, has changed and thinks to have come to know what love is.

At page 7, we experience the sexual fixation of the protagonist. The narrator is described as the daughter of the colonel – by others. At the same page, some lines later, she says: “I’m Ariel Ron and nothing else.” (NF, 7) The implication that evolves is an obvious one, however, that doesn’t make it less worth being considered. The name Ariel is used mostly, yet not exclusively, for men. The subsequent analysis will reveal that the protagonist also describes herself with numerous attributes that are assigned to “the male”. In the text passage cited above, she remarks that she is Ariel Ron and not, or nothing, more. Yet, this sexual ambiguity which is reflected by the name Ariel, is in diametral opposition to her statement.

Whenever “male” and “female” are mentioned in this text, it is not about constructing binary oppositions and an alleged two-gender system, but about highlighting perceptions of “masculinity” and “femininity” which arose from androcentric discourse. In further consequence, it is about deconstructing gender identities by means of the irregularities in these depictions. The structuralistic approach of constructing oppositions and contrasting them in pairs functions in as far as that two fundamental oppositions are detected to which further dichotomies can be assigned. The advantage of this kind of analysis is the resulting comparability of texts. (Dahlerup 1998, 33) Derrida strongly criticises this possibility of approaching a text, as he assumes that some hierarchy evolves every time two terms are contrasted. In this way, one term dominates the other. Derrida argues

“that the structure of oppositions would be a hierarchy of violence which could only be sustained if the side classified as inferior is marginalised, sometimes in as far as that the excluded disappears entirely, is un-thought or at least made un-thinkable.”(Dahlerup 1998, 38)

However, *New face in the mirror* is conceived in a way that the protagonist is in opposition to all the other women, which should be highlighted by quotations, in order to dissolve these oppositions in the next step: A deconstruction of the opposition is to subvert the hierarchy at a certain moment. (Derrida 1986, 88)

The first instance of our protagonist’s self-definition is realized through others – just like the external definition is carried out through the others. This way, she writes: „Instead I got into an army truck with twenty or thirty other girls [...]“ (NF, 7) Consequently, the term “other” is a marker of gender as well as of differentiation from all the other women. This cannot only be seen in this quotation but is also an identity-establishing criterion for Ariel Ron for the whole text. Stereotypically, the narrator quotes her colleagues and so tries to implicate that the world of other young women revolves only around men or anxieties: „Then we kissed goodbye, and he held me tightly and said, “Be a good girl“ [...] I’m terrified of shooting.“ (NF, 8-9) As we can see in this as well as in the following examples, setting oneself in opposition is carried out through discrediting the others: „Everything seemed so ugly: all these half-women, half-children...If they would only stop talking for a few weeks.“(NF, 9) She does not only deny the others “holism” but she does also use the stereotype of constantly talking women. Furthermore, she says: „I avoided taking an interest in ‘them’-the rest of the Company.“(NF, 12) The word “them” is in inverted commas, which makes a differentiation – in addition to textual differences – visible and which produces misogynistic depictions as a consequence:

„Why do girls shout so much? What a noise they made in that big room, singing and crying and gossiping, a spiraling whirl of more or less human voices, fading away, coming back, voices attacking or defending, voices that separated themselves from the speakers and flowed automatically into the whirl on their own. And always, shamelessly reading aloud their letters.“(NF, 14-15)

As a matter of fact, this is not about “half-women“ or “half-children“ anymore – here women do not have a voice, by all means not a really human one – it is a voice that is distanced from the speaking. This androcentric tradition is served yet another time, when male soldiers are compared to female ones: „This was no longer a capricious game. This was the army at its cold, hard routine work, not a pack of helpless women with problems, but trained men, responsible and severe.“ (NF, 126) So men are trained, responsible and severe, in opposite to the pack of helpless

women with problems. Not surprisingly, having such a perception of women, the protagonist has to differentiate herself from women and depict herself as an exceptional woman. But let's leave Ariel Ron her voice and let's close this chapter about her with her own words: „[...] I don't much like women.“(NF, 98) and: „I never had used make-up. I smiled with satisfaction when I glanced at myself in the looking-glass. The woman looking back at me was the woman I wanted to be, and none the worse for the natural twinkle in her eye and the slight curl to her upper lip.“(NF, 70)

## Rina (EF) „unfeminine“?!

Envy the frightened tells the story about Nimrod, who constituted the *new type*. His father Ivri raises him like this, and Gideon, the Rock, who is his friend, serves as a role model. Lamech, who had been a rabbi in former times, and Miriam, Nimrod's mother, are the antagonists in the beginning of the text. Lamech dies and Nimrod gets to know Elli, a Hungarian immigrant and Shoah survivor, who marries him later. Elli's and Nimrod's son is called Gideon and starts playing 'who is strong' just like his father did when he was young. One day Nimrod sees him nearly drowning and rescues him out of the water. In this moment, he feels anxiety and fear again for the first time. In this text, it is striking that women are strongly invisible, unless they are mothers (Miriam) or serve as potential wives (Elli). It seems as if there were only men in this country, except for some "girls" who play no more than minor roles. The following quotation shows how Nimrod perceives women and it makes clear that the text cannot exist without women, who are constructed as "the other", even though only in minor roles.

„Nimrod didn't care much for girls, mainly because there weren't many in the village. But he thought he knew how to deal with them, having watched Ivri and Miriam. And having a girlfriend and marrying eventually were all more or less natural expected things, leading to the having of a son or sons. He never thought of girls as women, or as creatures that differed very much from him. They were companions, but slightly weaker and in need of defense. If they were clever you could talk to them, but this seldom happened.“(EF, 83)

At this point, a secondary character is introduced, which is Rina. In the next chapter, when we will talk about a text called *Death had two sons*, a quite similarly constructed Rina can be found. Elli and Rina are the antagonists in the story. The text needs both, in order to be able to re/produce something like "femininity". (Gideon calls Elli a woman, to which Rina replies):

„Woman! Since when do you use terms like this? She is no more woman than we girls, and if being a woman means being frightened at night, wearing pretty dresses and keeping your hands delicate and perfumed, I'm not a woman, and I'm glad of it.“(EF, 108)

So this is the way in which Rina defines women. Gideon's way to do it becomes clear when he talks with Rina about Elli: „No, Rina, you are not a woman and you never will be. You'll be a good wife and mother, true. You'll cook chickens and potatoes, and bake heavy cakes and make omelets, but you lack the sensitivity and will to understand and to give of yourself.“(EF, 108)

„He [Gideon] studied Rina, finding all the ugly details in her, her thick ankles, her red hands and uncombed – and burnt at the ends – hair, a stain on her blouse which grew and grew until it looked large and dirty. The new type, thought he, the hair on her legs grew darker and longer.“ (EF, 109)

In short, it can be said that Rina is defined through strongly stereotyped, androcentric images of non-femininity. All her "non-feminine" attributes are connoted negatively, with one exception:

„Yoram loved Rina; this massive figure of hers, and the direct eyes, the strong hands, and her utter sincerity appealed to him. She was going to marry Udi, they said. [...] He [Yoram] found that Rina possessed all that the city girls lacked, and was charmed. Being fed up with exhibitionistic, artificial womanhood, he saw in the girl an ideal, the housewife, the mother, the fruitful creature.“(EF, 111)

## Rina (DS), also „unfeminine“?!

Daniel is the protagonist in *Death had two sons* and the tragic story is told quickly. In WWII, the Nazis force Haim Kalinsky to decide between his two sons. He decides for Shmuel, but it is Daniel who survives and whose life starts anew in Israel. He has two good friends, Yoram and Rina. These two would like to marry, but Yoram dies. At Rina's insistence, Daniel finds his father Haim, who lives with his wife Dora and her daughter Miriam in Warsaw. They have been writing letters for nine years before the Kalinskies immigrate to Israel.

Rina is introduced through Daniel who describes her as „vivacious woman“(DS, 25) and goes on as follows:

„If there was anything Rina did not contribute to the little flat, it was femininity. Her high dusty boots seemed to catch his eye wherever he looked though there were only two of them. A rucksack lay open in the middle of the room spilling out a collection of pottery sherds and the shirts she washed and hung to dry were old army shirts. She was barefooted and wore khaki shorts which emphasized long thin legs covered with light hairs and bruises. Her T-shirt, clean and white, outlined tiny breasts but her long tanned hands ended in delicate thin fingers. She was two years younger than he was but moved with the swift gaiety of a teen-ager. Her face was covered with freckles which matched her red short-cropped hair – a crown of fire.“(DS, 25)

Further in the text, Rina is not simply described in the way that Daniel is, but she is described by him, how she is seen by him:

„Daniel was very fond of Rina. She was a mate, a friend, over-excitable but genuine. He could confide in her and she made him laugh. He was a virgin and when he thought of women they were different from Rina. He imagined them soft-skinned and perfumed. He wanted them dressed in frills and ruffles and the girls he grew up with were handsome and well-built but he was too familiar with them. Their skin had the quality of his own and their legs and underarms were hairy.”(DS, 60)

In sum, it can be said that both Rinas are similarly „unfeminine“: at least they are both hairy, while Rina (DS) is more thoroughly characterized. An explanation for their “non-femininity” can be found in Lesley Hazleton’s texts, when she writes about the inequality of male and female pioneers. In comparison to men, women were not paid for their work. In the kibbutzim, they were forced to do housework rather than work in the fields. Lots of them came to Palestine having a socialistic world view, in which men and women were equal. Soon, they had to realize that the male dictation was hard to break through. As a consequence, identification with “male” attributes occasionally constitutes an attempt to gain equality. (Hazleton 1983, 67-68)

## Julie Goldin the non-Jew - *Three Weeks in October*:

*Three weeks in October* tells Amalia and Daniel’s story during the Yom Kippur war in Israel. The text is separated into three parts, in which also the narrative perspectives change. Amalia and Daniel are married and have two children. They got to know and love each other during the Six-Day War. Amalia volunteers in hospital during the Yom Kippur war. There, she meets various persons and describes them. There is Avi, for example, who was her best friend when she was a child, who lives in America and who came to Israel to fight in the war. There is also his wife Julie and many more.

Julie Goldin’s parents are called the Rowes. The Rowes are not Jewish, they go to church on Sundays, they read the New York Times and the New Yorker. Julie and Avi live separate. Julie and their daughter come to Israel to visit Avi in hospital. In TW, we can see quite clearly, that Jewish identity does not have to be national identity at the same time. Avi as well as Leibowitz, a volunteering doctor, live in Diaspora and yet they feel the need to come to Israel and offer their help. As Amalie talks to Julie, we get to know how Jewish identity can be construed:

„You are all too involved with something that means little to me. A destiny. It’s like masturbation. You analyze yourselves, you relieve your history, you talk in big words of fate and identity and you dig into your collective souls every moment of the day. It may be heroic and commendable and noble. To me it’s just frightening, inhuman. [...] It’s in him [Avi] too. He doesn’t talk much of heritage and sources, and he is less pompous about being chosen people. So he takes a Valium a day and acts like a regular boy, but his bearded ancestors with their sense of mission are trailing him hopelessly.” (TW, 94)

In this text, Jewish identity is mostly described from the outside - in this case it is a non-Jew. In addition, it is often defined according to men. However, the following passage is an exception in as far as the latter is concerned:

„It’s the ‘waiting’ mentality. You, Shula, your mother, all the women I met. You don’t live a life, you are waiting, vigilant, lingering. [...] Waiting for your men to go and waiting for them to return. First you waited for the fathers, hoping to reach adulthood with both parents alive, then you got married and waited for the husbands to do their turn and come back safely alive, or in one piece. Then the sons watching them grow, counting the years till they are eighteen and it’s their time to go and return, and by then other young women are also waiting for them and preparing to bear their children and wait for them.”(TW, 102)

This is about the depiction of a Jewish woman in opposition to non-Jewish women:

„If the Jew is bound to the non-Jew as a condition of Jewish life, then the Jew and the non-Jew are not separable: the Jew, at least, cannot be thought without the non-Jew, though we do not know if the reciprocal relation also holds true. To be a Jew, though, means living in relation to the non-Jew, finding a way to refuse identitarian closure.” (Butler, 38)

## A figure, which represents Solidarity – Yardena:

The narrator in *Dust* is Yardena, whose gender or sex is not fixed until page 45 when Daniel describes her as a “daughter” (D, 45). Yardena is always defined by men, even her gender and her sex is fixed by David. Only Rita, the only female character, doesn’t do this. It is also David who names her for the first time. ‘Yardena’, he shouts in his dream and names her along with the dead – along with his family. Yardena dies whether from her broken heart or because of the Shoah, or out of solidarity? She cannot bear David’s coldness, his past. She starts seeing his family – the ghosts - and changes. She gets ill. She cannot define what she suffers from but she doesn’t sleep well, has nightmares, is depressive, has headaches and weak limbs. Towards the end of the text, the character of David changes. The character is partly getting more overt but Yardena has troubles distinguishing reality from dreams, and past things from the present. She can be read as a paramount example of a solidary character constellation. Solidary until death, which can be compared to an absolute self-abandonment:

“My love was burning and strong and hopeless, and as long as he was there – my enemy, my lord, my friend-nothing mattered. No, it was not identification with him; it went beyond that. I lived his past, but not his present. Every nightmare I had, meant one less for him. [...] He understood what was happening, and he treated me like a patient. [...] food had no taste-what right had I to eat? Beauty made no sense-what right had I to beauty? I cut my hair short one day [...] David kept my hair among his things, together with his mother’s ring and some family photos.”(D, 133-134)

From this passage, it becomes clear how solidarity can work. Here, solidarity does not imply identification – according to the narrator, it is more than that. She does not identify with David or his current life, but she lives his past in her present and does somehow take the fear from the Shoah of David. People can be solidary with a person without necessarily identifying with him or her. Talking about the Shoah in the present, the concept of solidarity might well be more adequate than the concept of identification. The latter might also appear presumptuous, if a person attempts to identify with Shoah survivors. We can raise criticism in as far as that one must not talk about things one has not experienced oneself. But if we treat the concept of solidarity we don't talk for the victims as personalised identifications and act as if we would experience equal pain, humiliations or would suffer from the same traumata. Instead, we recognise these horrifying experiences as something unique that we cannot comprehend and sympathise with. Yardena describes as well that it is not about identification. She doesn't experience the same but she is solidary. David is of another opinion and when Yardena goes through a phase of recovery, he says:

“You see, you made it. You are much better now. You don't know how difficult it was for me, what an imposition other people's emotions are, how difficult it is to be loved. [...] when I imposed my suffering on you, it was real. You almost helped me to return to life... But when you suffered, there was something artificial about it. After all, you didn't really go through it. You don't really know what it was like. It was a way of identifying yourself with me.”(D, 137)

David understands Yardena's solidarity as identification and has to interpret it accordingly. She didn't experience the Shoah, she doesn't know how it was, she only tried to identify with him. That's why her suffering was artificial. If David would take the concept of solidarity into account, he would probably be able to interpret Yardena's suffering as something 'real'. In fact, for Yardena, her feelings and perceptions are 'real' which also makes her suffering 'real' and which finally kills her.

## Conclusions:

In conclusion, an analysis of selected texts by Yael Dayan shows how identities can be constructed discursively – mostly by differentiation from others and further subversive elements that a text contains. The fact that norms are reproduced as well as questioned opens up the possibility to read a text in a way that affirms “femininity” and challenges binary constructions of gender. It is illustrated through textual and linguistic analysis that constructions of binary conceptions of gender are exposed. At the same time, this analysis shows elements of deviance and resistance, which are included due to the construction of explicit models of identity. In this case, Yael Dayan is an architect in the Foucault sense as she makes sure that norms are preserved, repeated and applied.

“[...] one would rather have to intend to define the various ways of not saying something, the ways of distribution of those who can talk about it and those who cannot, the type of discourse which is authorised and the form of discretion which is required. There are numerous ways of not saying anything and they are integrative elements of the strategies that carry and disrupt discourse.” (Foucault, 33)

According to Foucault, the construction of norms always requires the simultaneous construction of “deviations”, as norms can only be conceived and sustained in a binary opposition. Consequently, Yael Dayan cannot (re)construct norms in her text without constructing deviation at the same time. Judith Butler describes alterity in a similar way when she refers to Levinas:

„The Levinasian position assumes the asymmetry of the relation between the subject and the Other; it also assumes that this other is already me, not assimilated as a “part“ of me, but inassimilable as that which interrupts my own continuity and makes impossible an “autonomous” self at some distance from an “autonomous” other.” (Butler, 83)

Viktoria Pözl is currently working on her PhD Thesis at the Jewish Department at the University of Vienna/Austria. The topic of the dissertation is *gendered fixations and disruptions within the literary representation of Israeli historical narratives and national as well as Jewish identity constructions on the example of Yael Dayan*.

Due to her interest in contemporary Gender Studies, Decolonial Studies, Queer Theory and Literature Studies, Ms. Pözl also works as a lecturer at the Jewish Department in Vienna and holds a course on Jewish Gender Studies.

[Viktoria.poetzl@oeh.univie.ac.at](mailto:Viktoria.poetzl@oeh.univie.ac.at)

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