"This Poem is a Token of Love": Expressions of Relationships in the Poetry of Rachel Morpurgo

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When relating mockingly to the first modern Hebrew woman poet Rachel Morpurgo (1790-1870), Dan Miron describes her as a "respectable mother of a family." He furthermore defines her poetry as superficial rhymes written for family and friends, in between a dense social calendar. Miron thus portrays a poet whose mediocre and superficial poetry ("rhymes") was "only" occasional and worthless, serving purely social purposes. This paper will propose a different way to evaluate Morpurgo's "rhymes written for family and friends." Despite being a wife, a housewife, a mother of four children, and related to two of the most respectable families of Jewish Trieste (Luzzatto and Morpurgo), Rachel Morpurgo was a very lonely woman, as she hints in some of her poetry and letters. Her loneliness, I suggest, stemmed from two sources. First, from being estranged from her husband and her sons, who did not appreciate either her intellectual needs or her poetry. Second, from the problematic situation of a learned woman within a 19th-century conservative Jewish society, she was estranged from both most other women (who did not have her education) as well as from most men who did not regard her as equal. One way to overcome this loneliness, I argue, was to express her emotions by writing poems addressed to specific individuals, usually to mark special occasions. These poems allowed her to articulate her love, friendship, or appreciation, as well as to converse with her addressee and create the valuable relationship she was missing. The main part of this article will demonstrate this function of her *Poems for Special Occasions*. The discussion will include three poems that reveal her love and friendship for three women (two cousins named Rachel, and an acquaintance, Flora Randenger), as well as for three men—her cousin Shmuel David Luzzatto, her husband (prior to their marriage), and her friend Yoseph Almanzi.

Introduction

The publication of a small book of Hebrew poems, entitled '*Ugav Raḥel* (*Rachel's Harp*) in Cracow (1890), edited with a short introduction by Vittorio (*Ḥayyim*) Isacco Castiglioni,[1] caused no sensation; the revolution embodied in its very appearance went unacknowledged. *Ugav Raḥel* was the first published book of poems in Hebrew by a Jewish woman poet, Rachel Morpurgo (1790-1871), née Luzzatto, of Trieste, who had died almost twenty years earlier.

This was not the first appearance of Rachel Morpurgo in the public sphere of modern Hebrew literature. Between 1847 and 1860 she had published poems in *Kokhvei Yitsḥaq*, an Enlightenment Hebrew literary journal published in Vienna, making her known to the modern Hebrew literati of central Europe. Nine members of this circle had been so impressed by the

phenomenon of a woman writing poems in Hebrew that they wrote poems of their own in her honor (Klausner 1953 IV: 46-8; Berlovitz 1996: 11-40). Nonetheless, this acknowledgment and adulation had already petered out during her lifetime, perhaps as a consequence of her peripheral location in Trieste – far from the centers of the Hebrew Enlightenment in Central Europe; or due to the image of religious conservatism, generated by her lifestyle and her focus on traditional religious erudition; or because of her gender, which, in keeping with the spirit of her time, set her apart from the overwhelmingly male Hebrew literary community.

The sidelining of Morpurgo's poetry continued into the twentieth century. Few scholars related to it, and if they did, it was only to highlight her novelty as the first woman to write poetry in Hebrew, with barely any discussion of the poetry itself.[2] Joseph Klausner did devote some attention to a few of her poems in a short chapter on Morpurgo in his *History of Modern Hebrew Literature* (1953), but his discussion, in which he belittled both her character and her poems, only compounded her marginalization. From his hegemonic masculine perch, Klausner opined that the weakness (as he saw it) of her poetry ensued from what he saw as its nonconformity to "properly feminine poetry," which (in keeping with the predominantly masculine norms of his time) was supposed to be characterized by its "lightness and tenderness […] passion and emotional outpouring" (IV 1953: 45), which was incompatible with the features of modern Hebrew literature. He also stated: "All this gives the impression that we are still in the Middle Ages" (IV 1953: 49), and that the "occasional" nature of many of her poems made them "of no value" (IV 1953: 43).

Over half a century after Klausner, Dan Miron reiterated his hegemonic tone and even stepped up the criticism, dismissing Morpurgo's image and poetry with an ironic, disparaging generalization: "She was one of the multitudes of Hebrew Enlightenment rhymers […] versifying on the literature of the Enlightenment […], a 'dilettante' […] her poetic talents were negligible" (2004: 12). Like Klausner, he, too, spoke of Morpurgo's works as being trifling "occasional poems," stating: "Between a wedding and a confession she wrote, as one would expect, verses for weddings, births, and deaths, adulations of the poems of others, amusing riddles, and, of course, an epitaph for herself" (Miron 2004: 11).

Miron made it clear that women's creative work was not to be evaluated differently simply because of their gender, and that feminist criticism had not succeeded in establishing an alternative theory to the hegemonic one. At most, according to his opinion, it expanded awareness of "certain aspects of literature, especially when it is written against the background of the consciousness – overt or repressed – of a cultural 'minority'" (2004: 437). It would, therefore, be wrong to see Morpurgo as having paved the way for poetry by women in Hebrew.

That pioneering status was reserved for the next generation of women poets: Rachel Bluwstein (1890-1931), Esther Raab (1894-1981), Elisheva Zhirkova-Bikhovski (1888-1949), and Yocheved Bat-Miriam (1901-1980).

In this article, I wish to offer an alternative critical perspective, a critical approach based on a tradition of women's writings. The feminist literary critic Elaine Showalter proposed a new literary project she called "gynocritics": "To construct a female framework for the analysis of female literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experiences, rather than to adapt male models and theories" (1979: 28). This way of reading assumes that, in order to understand and evaluate texts written by women, the usual methods of analysis must be supplemented by methods uniquely appropriate to women's writing, such as are learned from women's experience and from analyzing earlier texts written by women. That is, indeed, how several scholars of Hebrew literature have looked at Morpurgo's poems in the last two decades. Yaffah Berlovitz (1996; 2009: 142-145), Wendy Zierler (2004), Marina Arbib (2005: 141-50; 2015: 8-20), and my own studies (Cohen 1996: 69-100; 2016) have all endeavored to restore Morpurgo to her rightful place in the history of women's writing, and to elaborate new ways of reading, or rather, to borrow a term coined by Adrienne Rich, to "re-vision" her work.[3] In the present article, too, I will examine Morpurgo's poetry on the basis of two central assumptions ensuing from her own time and gender.

The first assumption rests on the "connectedness'' theory in feminist psychology, based on the studies by Nancy Chodorow (1978) and Carol Gilligan (1982; see also Jordan et al. 1991), which emphasize that female identity is formed, and plays out, as an integral part of the surrounding network of relationships. That network is critical to the development of the individual female ego and self-conception. A woman conceives of herself within a framework of relations, and her identity is largely constructed on a basis of connectedness. Consequently, understanding the place of relationships in the identity of a female poet, even one who placed as much importance on her intellectual identity as Rachel Morpurgo, is integral to understanding her work.

The second assumption considers "occasional poems" as a legitimate poetic genre, rather than a marginal outlet of poetic expression, as one might infer from the critiques of Klausner and Miron. The esteem for such poems, written for a specific event or in honor of a particular individual, significantly depreciated from the end of the nineteenth century, as they were always at risk of deteriorating into superficial versifying. Generalized dismissal of this genre, however, bespeaks an anachronistic misapprehension of its place in the Hebrew poetic tradition of Spain and Italy, in which "talented poets knew well how to breathe a new spirit into many of the poems devised according to this custom" (Schirmann 1961: 35, cited in Govrin 2002: 99). Hebrew poetry in

Morpurgo's time and place, in mid-19th century Italy, was still, to a large extent, written in this poetic tradition (Cohen 2016: 215-59). "From the end of the seventeenth century through the middle of the nineteenth," asserts Dan Pagis, "renowned poets wrote their poems for time-bound social purposes: They wrote wedding songs […] dirges, poems of praise […] and poems […] commemorating events in the life of the community or the individual" (Pagis 1986: 62).

Indeed, a perusal of the books of poetry composed by the male Hebrew poets of Morpurgo's time and place, like her cousin Samuel David Luzzatto (1800-1865), Giuseppe Almanzi (1801-1860), Samuele Vita (*Shemuel Ḥayyim*) Zelman (1808-1895), and Vittorio Castiglioni, and of the poems composed by her forebears in the Luzzatto family, her grandfather Isaac Luzzatto (1729-1792) and her great-uncle Ephraim Luzzatto (1730-1802), reveals the centrality of "occasional poems" in their oeuvre. The very inclusion of such poems in their books demonstrates the regard in which these poets held them (Govrin 2002: 100). The "occasional poem," in its many forms, was a principal vessel for the expression of feelings and of personal relationships, as well as a vehicle of personal and social communication. While letter-writing served mainly for intellectual communication and the transmission of information, poems were used to communicate feelings, and so it was with occasional poems. Faithful expression of a deep and authentic feeling is the mark of a good occasional poem; in the words of Fischel Lachover (referring to an occasional poem by Ḥ. N. Bialik): "In it, the poet is faithful to his inner experience, as he is in most of his poems" (1954:12, cited in Govrin 2002: 101).

As I see it, putting these two assumptions together – the importance of personal interaction to female identity, on the one hand, and the poetic legitimacy of the occasional poem, on the other – explains the importance of this genre in Morpurgo's poetry. If so, we may view her poetry as evolving on two parallel, interrelated tracks: The intellectual poems expressed her identity as a scholarly woman, while the occasional poems gave expression to her personal relationships and, sometimes, to her inner emotional world.

The importance of the intellectual poems in Morpurgo's oeuvre is a consequence of the centrality of erudition and religious inquiry to her identity (Cohen 2018: 245-74). In these poems, the poetic emotion, of both the writer and the reader, is generated by her religious and intellectual experience, by her journey of inquiry into her place in the religious worldn and by her theological speculations. In couplets like "'Tis not of my strength, the House to repair / but justly to judge, and peace tidings to bear" (Cohen 2016: 473), or "The dead are of all commandments freed / As long as life is in me, the Law of Moses I will heed" (Cohen 2016: 419) it was her personal experience, intellect, and erudition that generated a surfeit of feeling. Although scholarship,

religious inquiry, and poetry-writing were hardly expected of a woman, Morpurgo had the pluck not only to write such poems but also to publish them.

As for the second major element of her identity – that of human connectedness and the emotions evolving within relationships – this, I believe, Morpurgo channeled into her second poetic track, that of the occasional poems, written for specific addressees to commemorate particular events. As a respectable, married religious woman in a traditional Jewish community in the 19th century, Morpurgo could not allow herself to express personal feelings in poems published in the public sphere. The very composition of Hebrew poems by a woman represented a pioneering leap over a cultural gender boundary; exposing her emotional world would have meant a further leap beyond the bounds of proper Jewish womanly modesty, and that, it seems, she dared not do.

Already in one of her early published poems, "The Mandrakes Birthed a Poem" (1850), Morpurgo alluded to her awareness of the hegemonic social critique of a poetizing woman's lack of modesty, in describing herself, under the hegemonic gaze, by rhyming "sing out" (*meshoreret*) with "gadabout" (*soreret*): "If with a lyre's tone I will sing out / I will look the brazen gadabout." (Cohen 2016: 425). A further hint at this awareness is to be found in the enigmatic footnote she appended: "Take a lyre, go about the town, harlot long forgotten," an allusion to *Isaiah* 23:16: "Take a lyre, go about the town, harlot long forgotten; sweetly play, make much music, to bring you back to mind."[4] In the eyes of the hegemonic society and culture of her day, Morpurgo hints bitterly that women poets were akin to harlots. No wonder she did not dare go so far as to reveal her emotional world.

The occasional poems so well-accepted in her own society, and in the Italian tradition of Hebrew poetry, were an available remedy for this expressive constraint, a 'legitimate' and proper channel of emotional communication with others. This kind of communication was especially vital for Morpurgo, in that it enabled her to break through the feelings of loneliness and alienation that were her lot throughout most of her life.

1. A Lonesome Poet

It might seem that Rachel Morpurgo could not have been lonely, residing as she did in her parents' large, but crowded, home at 666 Corso Avenue in Trieste, for many years after marriage,[5] along with her husband and four children, and entirely occupied with many household and childcare tasks. No wonder Miron characterized her as "a respectable mother of children" (Miron 2004:11), identifying her with her family and social status. He saw her family and social involvement as the reason why her writing remained merely "occasional" and did not go beyond superficial rhymes, written to commemorate various family and social occasions.

A careful reading of Morpurgo's oeuvre leads, I believe, to a different conclusion: Despite her familial and communal roots, she felt lonesome and even alienated from her surroundings, as she articulated subtly in a number of locutions. For example, in a particularly painful line, she declared: "No one seeks me out, and no one helps me" ("A cry is heard on high" (*kol be-ramah nishma'*) 1855; *Jeremiah* 31:14; Cohen 2016: 440-1). In another poem, she relates to her estrangement from her spouse by referring to him by the name of Laban, who was estranged from his daughters and son-in-law: "I have sojourned with Laban" (*'Im Lavan garti*, "Until I became old," 1861; *Genesis* 32:5; Cohen 2016: 489-90). In an otherwise quotidian letter, she alludes to her alienation from Trieste's mercantile community: "In this city most of the people are inclined to commerce […] and not to the intellect […] and I stay in my house" (letter to Joseph Hacohen, 1856; Cohen 2016: 580). In yet another letter, she describes herself as imprisoned: "I am like Daniel in the lions' den, from which I cannot abscond (*lanus*) but by a wonder (*nes*)" (letter to Hindel Grinwald; Cohen 2016: 593).

Morpurgo's sense of loneliness was surely, primarily, a consequence of the lack of a supportive environment within her home, particularly after her marriage. Until then, she had enjoyed some support and understanding from her family for her singular identity. Her father had allowed her to study together with her brother Isaac, enabling her to acquire a fairly broad Jewish education, as was customary for the sons of elite families. Her uncle David Luzzatto was her and her brother's first teacher, and her cousin Samuel David Luzzatto was her intellectual companion after her formal studies came to an end, studying together with her in the large home library her uncle David had bequeathed to her brother. Luzzatto recalled their study partnership and the importance of the library to their joint inquiry in a letter to Mendel Stern, the editor of *Kokhvei Yitsḥaq:* "I used to go daily to visit my aunt's family, and there was the library of Hebrew books that had belonged to my uncle, the aforementioned R. David, who had bequeathed it to the aforementioned R. Isaac, Rachel's brother. It was from that library that we both, I and Rachel, gained most of our knowledge of Jewish learning, and we spent many hours together discussing and debating matters of Torah and wisdom" (1868: 17).

We may suppose that Rachel Luzzatto hoped that the support for her scholarly and literary pursuits would continue and, perhaps, it was on the basis of that hope that she insisted on marrying the man of her choice, Jacob Morpurgo, in the face of her parents' opposition.[6] In a poem she wrote for her wedding day, she describes not only the fulfillment of her love – "The Lord of Heaven has given me the one I love" (*she'ahavah nafshi*; *Song of Songs* 1:7 and passim) – but also her confidence that in this marital relationship she would not know loneliness or silencing: "No more to be glum (*shomemet*) / I shall cast off all dread / No more to be dumb (*domemet*)" (Cohen 2016: 387).

Spurred, perhaps, by that love and that hope, Rachel now devotedly took upon herself (at least overtly) the roles of the ideal housewife, mother, and spouse, as Castiglioni describes in his foreword to '*Ugav Raḥel*: "All that he asked of her she did for him, and she set herself entirely to caring for her children, whom she adored" (Morpurgo 1890: 7). In the family home, in which, it seems, her mother, Brakhah Luzzatto, continued to devote her time to her business dealings (Cohen 2016: 95-96), Rachel shouldered most of the laborious daily work of the household on her own,[7] along with the care for her four children, born one after the other: Penina/Perla in 1822, David in 1824, Joseph/Giuseppe in 1825, and Isaac/Ignazio in 1826. The family's daily routines left no space for a spiritual life, for which the scholarly poet longed, forcing her to repress that part of her identity. We know of only four poems from the years 1819 to 1847, the first twenty-eight years of her married life, including the one she wrote for her own wedding. Any writing or learning she accomplished was done not in the open, as an accepted pastime in the family arena (as it had been in her youth), but as a clandestine activity that generated a sense of alienation from her surroundings. Only her one daughter, Perla, was aware of this surreptitious late-night writing: "When she couldn't sleep, and lay awake, she would rise from her bed in the night and write a few lines, so as not to forget them" (Morpurgo 1890: 7).

This alienation of Morpurgo's inner world from her daily family life, and her sense of isolation, were surely enhanced by the obliviousness to her spiritual needs and creative talents on the part of her spouse and her sons (but not necessarily of her daughter, who kept all her mother's writings and gave them to Castiglioni). Politely refraining from delving into the family's internal affairs, Castiglioni does not dwell upon this, but his laconic remark attests to an awareness of their inattention: "Her spouse took no pleasure in her scholarship or her compositions, but only in his commercial affairs" (Morpurgo 1890: 7). Luzzatto makes only a brief reference to this state of affairs: "After her marriage, she could hardly concern herself with her studies, due to the burden of childrearing." (1868: 18). It may seem that the family's attitude toward the poet changed as of 1847, when, after twenty-eight years of almost complete silence, her poems began to be published: "When her husband saw the name of his wife published abroad […] she was enhanced also in his own eyes and in the eyes of his sons, who had not realized how great was her worth, or that she traded in goods more valuable than those of moneyed commerce" (Morpurgo1890: 7). But this was not the support that she needed; it was not an understanding of her identity and esteem for her talents, but regard for the external admiration she had attracted.

We may suppose that Morpurgo felt alienation within her social circle as well, estranged from the norms of her contemporary Jewish community. She differed from most of the women of her time and community in her erudition and her proficiency in "masculine" fields of learning, in her

constant aspiration to engage in creative and intellectual endeavors, and later on, in her status as the only published Hebrew woman poet. Of course, she also differed from men by the very fact of being a woman, who had a lowly position in the Jewish hierarchy. Morpurgo, who suffered on account of her exclusion from the masculine world of time-bound commandments, ("As any town-dweller or traveler will certify, the wisdom of a woman in her spindle must lie"; Cohen 2016: 399), keenly felt the loneliness that was dictated by her exclusion from male companionship, which echoed the loneliness she experienced within her home. She concludes her poem "Why does my exalted sir shriek so much" (Cohen 2016: 420) with the verse: "And yours is the lofty *idra rabba*!" These words attest to her awareness that the "*idra rabba*" [in Aramaic: "the big gathering"] – that is, the gathering of scholars, (so Acalled after the name attached to the circle of R. Simeon Bar Yoḥai's disciples) was accessible to her male audience but would never be so for her – a woman.

It is against this background that we should understand Morpurgo's efforts to break through the walls of her isolation. A perusal of her poems and her correspondence demonstrates that she invested a good deal of time creating and maintaining emotional and intellectual ties with members of her extended family, and with friends and readers. For her, I believe, the creation of these bonds was invested with importance in terms of her essential identity. Despite her loneliness and distinction from the men and women around her, she conceived of herself (characteristically for a woman at that time), as part of a web of family and social relations, which she consciously nurtured.

2. Poetry as a Means of Connection

All of Morpurgo's occasional poems are just that – responses to family or social occasions that may be initially categorized by the relevant relationship circle. The inner ring, the family circle, includes poems addressed to members of her family or written for family occasions, while the broader second ring, the social circle, includes poems written for friends and associates, usually marking specific social occasions.[8]

In the following pages, the discussion of the poems in these two circles of affinity is divided according to the nature of the interpersonal relationships that they represent. In the poems of both the family and the social circles, two levels of emotional connectedness may be distinguished. On one level are the classic occasional poems, written – in keeping with the custom among Italian Jews[9] – as offerings to be delivered at or around the relevant family and social events. Their importance lies in their very composition and transmission to the specific audience in the customary way, and they express a familial or social connection, albeit in a ceremonial manner. In some of these occasional poems, however, a further level of self-expression may be

discerned. Such poems go deeper, describing interpersonal bonds. Although they were also composed in response to family or social occasions, the occasions, along with the relationship with its audience, seem to have aroused a more intimate world of emotion and identity, seeking poetic expression.

2.1. Poetry as a Means of Familial Connectedness

All of Morpurgo's known familial occasional poems are addressed to members of her natal family, the Luzzattos. The only poem in which she relates to a member of the Morpurgo family is "The canto sung by Rachel at her wedding," whose subject was her chosen spouse, Jacob Morpurgo. But even this single poem relates less to its addressee than to the speaker's feelings toward him. From the years that followed, we have not a single poem addressed to her husband, to one of her children, or to any other member of the Morpurgo family. The striking absence of any such poem creates an impression of the poet's alienation from the Morpurgo family, in contrast to her constant maintenance of relations with the Luzzatto family. To be sure, there may be technical reasons for this imbalance; perhaps it was only the poems addressed to Luzzatto family members that were preserved, either by the addressees or in copies retained by the poet herself. (Since most of the familial occasional poems were first published in *Ugav Raḥel* without first having been published in *Kokhvei Yitsḥaq*, as were Morpurgo's other poems, we may assume that Castiglioni obtained them from Morpurgo's daughter or even from the addressees themselves). However, it may also be that the Morpurgos, like her husband Jacob, did not appreciate poetry, and therefore she did not write poems for them, or perhaps her relations with them were not important enough for her to do so.

One way or another, the familial occasional poems in *Ugav Raḥel* generate a picture of a bond between the poet and her Luzzatto aunts, uncles, and cousins, who formed a family network, within which she defined her identity.[10] Already in her period of silence, she wrote a long poem in honor of her cousin Samuel David's marriage to Bella Bathsheba Segré ("I will crawl on my belly," 1828), and in the following years she wrote a number of poems marking additional family occasions: a blessing to her cousin Rachel Luzzatto on her marriage to Solomon Sullam, a Passover greeting to her family in Padua, a greeting for Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles) to her cousin Tamar Luzzatto, a poem congratulating her cousin Isaac Luzzatto on the birth of a son, and another celebrating the same boy's bar mitzvah. She also wrote a number of epitaphs, mostly for members of the Luzzatto family.

A careful reading of these poems shows their division into the two groups defined above, essentially distinguished by their language. The first group, the familial "poems of courtesy," is

distinguished by the poetic focus on the addressee her/himself, in the second or third person. For example: “Thanks be to God who is good / for a baby is born, tender and good / under a sign that augurs well” (Cohen 2016: 422-3; *Isaiah* 66:7); or “Be pure of heart, and clean of hands” (Cohen 2016: 492-3; *Genesis* 49:22 and *Psalms* 24:4). If the first person appears in these poems, it is in a quotation from a figure described in the poem (as is the case in the poem lamenting the death of Leah Cohen: “I am Leah; I languished”; Cohen 2016: 434). The voice of the poet herself is not heard in the overt level of the poetic statement. Yet, her identity may be sensed in three poetic features. First, the very composition of a poem for a specific person bespeaks a relationship. Second, unlike the sophisticated, ornate, multi-leveled language that characterizes Morpurgo’s major poems, the language of these “poems of courtesy” is simple, clear, and communicative. Third, these poems are striking for their invocations of the blessings or consolations of God, which seem to ensue not only from the conventions of occasional poems in Italy but also from the poet’s profound religiosity.

The second group of familial occasional poems includes those whose reason for their composition may have been ceremonial, but the poet’s special relationship with the addressee evoked a need for deeper emotional expression. Such a poem becomes an authentic lyrical expression on the part of the poetic speaker, transcending the specific external occasion for which it was written. The differentiation of such a “poem of emotional connection” from the accepted format of the occasional poem is marked, first of all, by the use of the first person singular, manifestly expressing the poetic speaker herself. Besides connecting with the audience, these poems offer a glimpse of the poet’s personal emotional world, rarely revealed in her poetry. This occurs in only two of the familial poems: “This one shall be called: I delight in her” (written in 1847; *Isaiah* 62:4) and “Here is the letter” (written in 1850), which, I suggest, possessed special personal and emotional significance for Rachel.

These two poems of emotional connection were not written for the sake of easy reception in the context of a social occasion, but as sophisticated expressions of the poet’s inner emotional world, assuming the addressee’s willingness to enter into it. Consequently, their language is richer than the more accessible language of the occasional “poems of courtesy.” Their verbal sophistication mode of expression, by way of allusions to canonical texts, was the intellectual avenue chosen by Morpurgo to articulate the world of her inner feelings and personal identity. This creation of a cryptic layer of meaning, to be decoded by deciphering the allusions to canonical texts and comprehending their juxtaposition, was typical of Morpurgo’s intellectual poems, creating a double-layered poetic text (Cohen 2016: 115-18, 216-19).

Two poems were written in 1847 for Morpurgo's cousin Solomon Sullam and his spouse, Rachel (née Luzzatto). These exemplify, respectively, the difference between Morpurgo's poems of courtesy and those of emotional connection. The former ("Ever will we hope", Cohen 2016:401-2) may be read as a typical poem of courtesy, beautifully ornate, which was apparently presented to the couple on the day of their wedding. At the very same time, Morpurgo wrote another poem, addressed specifically to the bride, "This one shall be called: I delight in her" (Cohen 2016: 404-5). The latter is an occasional poem, which was to be given to the bride before her move to Padua, but it is entirely different in its emotional depth, simultaneously making it a poem of emotional connection. The two poems differ from one other not only in their emotional depth and in their lyrical expression of the writer's identity, but also, as may be seen at first glance, in their formal and verbal compositions.

2.2. "Ever will we hope" – A Familial Poem of Courtesy

The relatively simple language of this wedding blessing makes it easily accessible to its addressees and their guests (assuming, of course, a degree of Hebrew literacy). The very brief lines, of two Hebrew words each, and the cadence produced by the succession of verbs, join to create a rhythmic tone of light-heartedness and gaiety, suitable to the occasion. The conclusion of each verse with the same word (Solomon), along with the elegant structure of a double sonnet, enhance the ornate quality, befitting a poem of blessing presented as a gift (Cohen 2016: 401-2):

נְקַוֶּה לְעוֹלָם
לִרְאֹה וְנֶעֱלָם
יְבָרֵךְ לְסֵלָם
בְּבִרְכַּת שְׁלֹמֹה.

לְבוֹרֵא נָיֵחֵל
יְבָרֵךְ לָרָחֵל
תְּמִימָה כְּרָחֵל
וְכַלַּת שְׁלֹמֹה.

וְתָאִיר וְתִזְרַח
וְתָצִיץ וְתִפְרַח
בְּכִסֵּא שְׁלֹמֹה.

וְנָשִׂישׂ וְנָגִיל
כְּזָקֵן וְרָגִיל
בְּמִשְׁתֵּה שְׁלֹמֹה.

בְּכָבוֹד נְצַפֶּה
לְחָכָם וְרוֹפֵא
וְרֹאֶה וְצוֹפֶה
בְּחָכְמַת שְׁלֹמֹה.

בְּלֶכְתּוֹ יְהַרְהֵר
בְּעָמְדוֹ יְפָאֵר

בְּשִׁבְתּוֹ יְבָאֵר
רְפוּאוֹת שְׁלֹמֹה.

בְּשִׁבְתּוֹ יְהַדֵּר
בְּשִׂכְלוֹ יְסַדֵּר
בְּחֻפַּת שְׁלֹמֹה.

נְבָרֵךְ יְדִידִים
לְמוֹשִׁיב יְחִידִים
בְּסֻכַּת שְׁלֹמֹה.

Ever we will hope
for the hidden Seer
Who will bless the ascent [*sulam*– a play on the bridegroom's family name, Sullam]
with the wisdom of Solomon.

Of the Creator, we request
For Rachel to be blessed,
Like a lamb [*raḥel*, a play on the bride's name], she is spotless
and the bride of Solomon.

She will glow and shine out
And blossom and sprout
On the throne of Solomon.

And we will rejoice and thrill
With seasoned skill
At the banquet of Solomon.

We behold with praise
The doctor, wise
Who observes and describes
With the wisdom of Solomon.

He walks and reflects
He stands and projects
He sits and expounds
The cures of Solomon.

Sitting in majesty
He orders all with sagacity
Under the canopy of Solomon.

Dear friends, let us bless
Who seats all as his guests
In the tabernacle of Solomon.

The use of the third person throughout the poem, without any use of the second person to forge a direct connection with the addressee, or of the first person singular to express the speaker's self,[11] emphasizes the social-ceremonial function of the poem. Beyond its overt function as a

wedding song, the poem serves the writer as a vehicle for maintaining a living, warm-hearted relationship with her close social circle – the extended Luzzatto family. At first glance, the poem seems to focus on the bridegroom, Solomon Sullam, whose name is repeated at the end of each stanza. A perspicacious reading, however, reveals that the speaker's emotional affinity is actually with the bride, Rachel, and her family, rather than with the groom. Indeed, both groom and bride receive the speaker's blessings in the first two stanzas. Nevertheless, there is no description of the groom (with whom the speaker was apparently unfamiliar), while the bride receives a descriptive adjective ("a lamb, spotless"), and a special blessing ("She will glow and shine out, and blossom and sprout"), emphasized by its appropriation of Isaiah's description of the blossoming of the People of Israel: "[In days] to come Jacob shall strike root, Israel shall sprout and blossom" (*Isaiah* 27:6).

Morpurgo relates in even greater detail to the bride's brother, Dr. Isaac Luzzatto, from the fifth stanza ("We behold with praise, the doctor, wise") and into the seventh stanza ("Sitting in majesty, he orders all with sagacity"). These lines, extolling her cousin[12] as a doctor and man of learning, are surprising in their length and detail, notably digressing from the expected praises of the groom and bride. Though praise for the family has a place in a wedding song, this degree of detail went beyond custom. (By way of comparison, see the wedding sonnets listed in the index to Bregman 1997: 576; 2006). The centrality of Morpurgo's relations with her cousin Isaac Luzzatto also receives expression in other poems[13] and can be seen, as well, in the dedication that prefaces the poem. After a ceremonial opening invoking the names of the bride and groom, Morpurgo sets out the bride's lineage, emphasizing the distinguished profession of her brother and her late father (Cohen 2016: 401):

> At the sound of the rejoicing of bridegrooms, handsome and pleasant, the esteemed youth, Master Solomon Sullam, with the respectable and modest maiden, Mistress Rachel, daughter of the distinguished and learned doctor, the late R. Raphael Luzzatto, and sister of the altogether learned and revered doctor, Mr. Isaac [Luzzatto], who fills the place of his ancestors, steeped in wisdom.

Thus, it would seem, even a poem of courtesy like this one, written for the sake of ceremony, rather than to express her feelings, was influenced by the writer's inner world.

2.3. "This one shall be called: I delight in her" – A Poem of Emotional Connection

The expression of emotion and connection is much more profound, nevertheless, in the second poem that Morpurgo wrote at the same time, addressed to the bride herself ("Which she wrote to be conveyed to the aforementioned bride upon parting from her, on the day of her departure

from Trieste, to go with her bridegroom to Padua").[14] It seems to be the very first expression in Hebrew poetry of an emotional relationship between two women (Cohen 2016: 404-5):

לְזֹאת יִקָּרֵא חֶפְצִי-בָהּ

רָחֵל עִם רָחֵל נִקְשֶׁרֶת
כְּעָנָק עָלַי נַרְגֶּרֶת,
אַהֲבָתֵךְ לִי תִּפְאֶרֶת
עַל רֹאשִׁי הִנָּךְ כּוֹתֶרֶת.

טוּב טַעְמֵךְ מִכָּל-פַּרְפֶּרֶת
לִי יִנְעַם, אַךְ אַתְּ סוֹתֶרֶת
חַבְרָה, לִהְיוֹת נִבְחֶרֶת
מִסֶּלָּם אֶל עִיר אַחֶרֶת

שִׁירָה זֹאת הִנָּה מַזְכֶּרֶת
אַהֲבָה מִהְיוֹת נֶעְדֶּרֶת
הוֹמִיָּה אֲנִי שׁוֹרֶרֶת.

יוֹם אֶל יוֹם אֶשְׁמַע אִגֶּרֶת
דִּבְרֵי שָׁלוֹם גַּם אוֹגֶרֶת,
לִשְׁלֹמֹה רָחֵל עֲטָרֶת.

This one shall be called: I delight in her

Rachel to Rachel is bound
As a necklace / does the throat surround
Your love for me is brilliance
As a crown upon my head you rest.
Your wisdom more delicious than any dainty
is you to me, yet our society
you shatter, to be picked out by Sullam
for another town.

This poem is a token of love
that should never wane;
yearning for it, I sing.
Daily, I shall await a letter
also bearing greetings gathered
for Rachel is Solomon's garland.

The contrast between this poem and the above poem of courtesy is striking. The speaker, using the first person, refers directly to her inner world and depicts her womanly identity as framed by a deep-seated relationship with the poem's addressee. Unlike the restrained tone of the courtesy poem, here she lets loose her feelings, describing her love for the other Rachel in several variations, as well as the longing she is sure to feel after the other's departure ("More delicious

than any dainty […] This poem is a token of love"). This does not merely state how much she will miss her beloved cousin; she reinforces the description of her anticipated pining with an allusion, evoked by the distinctive verb *homiyah* (moaning, yearning) recalling the verse in *Psalms* 77:4: "I call God to mind, I moan (*ehemayah*), I complain, my spirit fails."

Indeed, in contrast to the wedding song, the language of which is almost devoid of biblical allusions, the emotional dimension of this poem's succinct utterances is enhanced by numerous references to canonical verses saturated with feeling. For example, the poem's title, "This one shall be called: I delight in her [*ḥeftsi bah*]" – first and foremost an intimate, first-person declaration by the speaker – evokes a verse likening the People's redemption to a woman's deliverance: "Nevermore shall you be called 'forsaken', nor shall your land be called 'desolate'; but you shall be called 'I delight in her' [*ḥeftsi bah*], and your land 'espoused'. For the Lord takes delight in you, and your land shall be espoused" (*Isaiah* 62:4). In the poem, the national image is restored to its personal, female source, but it is intensified by the dramatic biblical depictions of powerful redemption and spousal love, on both the national and the personal levels.

Morpurgo's mixed feelings upon parting from her beloved cousin, which are merely suggested in the poem's frugal lines, are developed and strengthened by the contexts of the textual allusions. Thus, the verses describing the relationship between the speaker and the addressee – "Rachel to Rachel is bound, as a necklace does the throat surround" – evoke not one, but two biblical contexts. The one speaks of a man's love for a woman: "You have captured my heart, my own, my bride, you have captured my heart with one [glance] of your eyes, with one coil of your necklace" (*Song of Songs* 4:9); and the other of the bond between parents and offspring: "My son, heed the discipline of your father, and do not forsake the instruction of your mother; for they are a graceful wreath upon your head, a necklace about your throat" (*Proverbs* 1:8-9). The combination of the two allusions expresses the complexity of the speaker's feelings toward the bride: Along with her joy at the creation of the marital bond, she also experiences a sorrow, almost like that of a mother upon parting from a beloved daughter (Morpurgo was 57 when she composed this poem). These mixed feelings are expressed again in the final verse, in the play on the words *igeret* (letter) and *ogeret* (binding up the hair: The poet yearns for letters from the bride after she has gone, but she is also aware that the bride is now the "garland" (*'ateret*) of her husband, and hence in a new relationship around which her life must now revolve.

Unlike "Ever we will hope," which is essentially an ornate occasional poem that does not express complex feelings and simply stresses the importance of maintaining a relationship, "This one shall be called: I delight in her" has an emotional ambivalence at its heart – feelings of intimacy and love, alongside the sorrow of parting. That they were both written at the same time signals the

two communicative functions of Morpurgo's occasional poems. "Ever we will hope," the courtesy poem, embodies the need for connectedness in the very fact of its having been written and transmitted to its addressee, while "This one shall be called: I delight in her" attests to the writer's need to express a profound, intimate connection. To a large extent, it departs from the external occasion of its writing to become a lyrical expression of the writer's identity.

2.4. Poetry as a Vehicle for Social Connectedness

We have already noted that Morpurgo's very positioning as a Hebrew poet and a scholarly woman created a certain social distance, as her education, personality, and abilities did not fit in with the sociocultural norms of her day. She did her best to break through that gap by means of expressions of human connectedness within her social circle, both in Trieste and in the "virtual community" that had formed around the journal *Kokhvei Yitsḥaq*.

That virtual society, consisting of the readers and writers of *Kokhvei Yitsḥaq*, was important to Morpurgo, particularly in the early stage of her emergence as a poet, during the late 1840s and early 1850s. Around this Hebrew Enlightenment journal, published in Vienna from 1845 to 1869, a virtual community of intellectual Hebrew writers was formed, many of whom lived in places that were remote from the centers of the Hebrew Enlightenment. This widespread community's enthusiastic reception of Morpurgo's poems, as expressed in the poems and letters addressed to her in response, was the first external acknowledgment of her work, and gave rise to a sense of belonging to that "fellowship," albeit a virtual one. The intensity of those mostly temporary and fleeting ties, however, should not be overstated. The ten poems written in her honor that were published in *Kokhvei Yitsḥaq* by fellow poets from the Hebrew Enlightenment (*Haskalah*), who were readers of the journal, and the seven poems she published herself in response to their reaction (Cohen 2016: 113), may have contributed to the formation of her image as a well-known poet and increased her family's appreciation of her. Yet, this relational network (Cohen 2016: 129-41) does not seem to have held a special emotional value for the poet herself.

Moreover, I do not believe that those poems, written in response to her intellectual admirers, should be seen as "occasional poems," even though they had an external impetus and were addressed to specific individuals. They did not revolve around specific, defined social events, but rather were related to the kernel of Morpurgo's identity as a poet and a woman of erudition. Her response to a poem addressed to her was to scrutinize her inner world and her place in the world around her, and, consequently, to compose a profound poem exploring her place in society and in the Jewish intellectual world, as well as her ambivalent feelings about all these. The majority of her most central and important poems were of this nature: "And these are the words of

Rachel" (responding to "the favorable mention of her name in the contemporary world of letters" (Cohen 2016: 398-9); "Why does my exalted sir shriek so much" (responding to a poem by Alexander Halevi [Langbank] of Jaroslav; Cohen 2016: 418-20); "The mandrakes begot a poem" (responding to a poem by Adolf Ehrental (Cohen 2016: 425-6); and "See this new thing" (responding to a poem by Leopold Winkler (Cohen 2016: 473-4). In these poems, the specific temporal dimension almost entirely disappears, and the poem to which she responds becomes a catalyst for self-examination. The element of personal connection is also non-existent in these poems, founded as they were upon virtual relationships: Neither of the corresponding poets knew the other, except from their writing.

2.5. A Communal Occasional Poem

Several of the occasional poems that Morpurgo wrote in social contexts do not express any personal connection, nor are they addressed to a specific individual. Their importance lies in the poet's sense of belonging to a community, and so they may be termed "communal," paralleling the familial poems of courtesy. Such were the poems "A lament" [upon the sudden death of Trieste's rabbi, Shabbatai Elḥanan Trèves in 1856 (Cohen 2016: 454-7)]; "Haman is fallen" [upon the death of a "wicked priest" in the same year (Cohen 2016: 451-2)] and "Do not be dismayed by portents in the sky" [upon the passage of a comet through the skies of Trieste in 1855, causing terror in the community (Cohen 2016: 476-7)].

The poem "A lament," overtly fulfilling a communal function, was first published in a booklet of Hebrew lamentations entitled *Kol bokhim: ʻAl hilakaḥ aron ha-Elohim (A Voice of Weeping: For the Taking Away of the Ark of God* (published in Trieste (Carulli et al. 1856) to commemorate the thirtieth day after the passing of R. Trèves. The very inclusion of Morpurgo's poem in that booklet is indicative of her standing in the community, and its communal function is also evident from its content and form. It is not expressive of the writer's personal grief (her voice, in the first person, is not heard), and it follows the then-customary paradigm for laments of a dialogue between the deceased and the living. The poem opens with the voice of the poetic speaker, describing the community's mourning, but this is not a first-person statement, but an "objective" description: "Hark! The outcry of my people from the land far and wide […] for the perishing of a righteous man, mourn and put on sackcloth" (*Jeremiah* 4:8). Later in the poem, three more voices are heard: the "heavenly voice," describing the reception of the deceased into heaven; the "congregation," turning to the rabbi in their grief; and the rabbi himself, who responds to the congregation and calls upon them to repent: "Mend your ways, / I will pray for you / and bless you!" (Cohen 2016: 457)

Similarly, the first-person voice of the speaker is not to be heard in the other two "communal" occasional poems that focus entirely upon the event. The earliest of these three communal poems, "Haman is fallen," was composed upon the sudden death of a priest on the eve of Purim 1856, who, as Morpurgo relates in detail in the poem's preface: "Poured out his wrath upon the Jews and declared: 'Any Christian who takes charity from a Jew is liable to excommunication, for they only do it to glorify themselves.' And a miracle occurred, and he never preached again. And he was buried on Purim at the very hour of the feast"[15] (Cohen 2016: 451). The community's members surely saw in this event a modern Purim miracle, and Morpurgo expressed their rejoicing in a poem of five stanzas that manifests her absolute identification with the community. It may have been written quickly (a circumstance that might explain its imperfect rhymes), to be read aloud at the festive Purim meal (Cohen 2016: 451-2):

הָמָן נָפָל,
הַנֵּס נִכְפָּל,
וּבְיוֹם פּוּרִים-
הָרֹאשׁ נָרִים.

כִּי הַדַּרְשָׁן
כְּדֻמּוּת כּוּשָׁן
דּוֹרֵשׁ רָעָה,
אוֹתָהּ שָׁעָה

רֶשֶׁת טָמַן
אֶל עַם נִבְחָר,
וּכְמוֹ הָמָן
אֶל יוֹם מָחָר

גָּרוֹן נִחַר
חָלָה נִפְגָּר
מָוֶת אָגַר
כָּל רִשְׁעָתוֹ ׃

אֶל אֵל נוֹדֶה
כִּי הוּא פּוֹדֶה
גּוֹאֵל עַמּוֹ

כָּבוֹד לִשְׁמוֹ ׃

Haman is fallen,
the miracle, over again,
And on this Purim day,
Our heads we will raise.

For the preaching man
just like Kushan
bidding foul
in that hour

A snare he set
for God's elect
and like Haman
for the morrow set.

With a choking cry
he dropped and died.
A death deserved
by the evil served.

So, God we will praise
for He doth save,
His people spares
Glory to His name.

The catchy rhymes (AABB, in Hebrew) and the short lines of just two Hebrew words, each give the poem a light, joyful tone, befitting the spirit of Purim and the general rejoicing at the demise of Haman. It is, however, worth noting that even in this light, quick poem, Morpurgo did not simply express gratitude for the miracle, as it might seem at first glance. The poem's allusions to canonical texts are few, and its language is easily accessible. Yet, by calling the priest not only "Haman," as the occasion demanded, but also "Kushan," it points to that name's canonical source: King Kushan-Rish'atayim of Aram-Naharayim, ill-remembered for subjugating the People of Israel (*Judges* 3:8). (The Hebrew connotation '*rish'atayim*' literally means "doubly-wicked"). Moreover, this Kushan is identified in the Talmud with Laban the Aramean and presented as a symbol of the hatred of Israel (Babylonian Talmud *Tractate Sanhedrin* 105a):

> It was taught: He is Be'or [father of Bala'am], he is Kushan-Rish'atayim, he is Laban the Aramean. [He was called] Kushan-Rish'atayim because he committed two evil deeds [*rish*'*iyyot*] against the Jewish People, one during the time of Jacob [the Patriarch], and one during the time when the judges judged.

This was Morpurgo's way of warning her community that even though they had been saved this time by a miracle, the hostility endured, and salvation from it would come only from God, as the final stanza makes clear.

The poem "Haman is fallen" is the poet's contemporaneous response to a specific local event, seemingly devoid of any exposure of her inner world, but rather focusing on the expression of her ties with the community and her desire to convey current events. Nevertheless, even in such a poem, so tightly connected to a specific event, her own philosophical, religious, and national attitudes come through. For her, European society was a locus of danger for the Jews, from which

only God could rescue them: “For He doth save / His People spares” (Cohen 2016: 452). Morpurgo expresses similar attitudes in a short prose piece entitled: “Who can tell the mighty acts of the Lord” (Cohen 2016: 598; echoing *Psalms* 106:2), describing the miraculous rescue of the Jews of Trieste from Christian persecution, and also in her poems “The events of the times” (written in 1848; Cohen 2016: 412-3) and “For malice hath stumbled” (*Jeremiah* 50:32; Cohen 2016: 508-9).

2.6. A Poem of Social Emotional Connection

Morpurgo had a closer personal connection with some of the Hebrew intellectuals in her vicinity. The group that historians have called “the Trieste group of Hebrew poets” (Shulvass 1960: 394-5) formed in the 1820s around a nucleus of S. D. Luzzatto’s disciples, who maintained contact with each other even after their teacher had moved to Padua.[16] This circle included Hebrew book lovers, intellectuals, poets, educators, and also rabbis, friends, and acquaintances of Luzzatto, some of whom saw themselves as his disciples.[17]

The relationship between Morpurgo and Trieste’s Hebrew Enlightenment circle, one may suppose, began with the special relations between her and S. D. Luzzatto (of which his acquaintances were surely aware), and it rested on her reputation as a Hebrew poet. Indeed, Morpurgo’s poems include several that were dedicated to members of this group, including Mayer Randegger (Cohen 2016: 431-2) Giuseppe Almanzi (Cohen 2016: 455-468), Rabbi Mordechai Ashkenazi, and his father-in-law, Rabbi Raphael Halevi (Cohen 2016: 486-7). As we have seen, she also wrote a lament upon the death of R. Shabbatai Elḥanan Trèves, and another upon the death of R. Mordechai Ashkenazi (Cohen 2016: 523-5). Her friendships with Almanzi, Randegger and his daughter Flora, and Rabbi Mordechai Ashkenazi were especially warm, and the poems she wrote and dedicated to them express degrees of connection and emotion well beyond those usually expressed for such ephemeral, local events.

Morpurgo’s sonnet “Choice spices, solid myrrh you are called” (Cohen 2016: 482-5) was written in 1859 in honor of Rabbi Mordechai Ashkenazi, who was appointed Rabbi of Trieste a year and a half after R. Trèves’s death. R. Ashkenazi had joined the circle of the Trieste Hebrew intellectuals, and several of them had dedicated poems to him. This poem of gratitude and admiration, which Morpurgo apparently presented to him as a gift,[18] is unique among her works. After the first stanza, in which superlative imagery is used in describing the addressee (“Choice spices, solid myrrh you are called / old wine from the finest vine”; Cohen 2016: 482), Morpurgo switches to the first person to make a personal statement: “By your good will you honored me! / And in great humility, you taught me / a lion to the voice of a lamb [a play on the poet’s Hebrew

name '*Raḥel*'] lent his ear / the lamb, when comes the lion – her knees shake with fear" (Cohen 2016: 483).

The strength of this description lies in its reversal of expectations: While the lion (the rabbi) would ordinarily pose an existential threat to the lamb (Rachel, the poet), these verses depict the lion respecting the lamb, teaching her humility, and lending her his ear. The speaker's admiration of her poem's addressee resonates in its evocation of this dual chasm – between the rabbi and the woman, and between her expectations and his conduct – and, consequently, she finds the courage to address him in the second person, to write him a poem, and to offer it to him: "Do pardon my transgression, and accept, unripe though it be / my offering to the banquet, in place of wine / this poem, if lacking found to be" (Cohen 2016: 483).

The speaker's emotional ambivalence is conspicuous. Even as she offers her poem to the addressee, she fears it unworthy, as expressed in her rhyming of *boser* (unripe) with *ḥoser* (lack of). To be sure, expressions of self-deprecation are to be found in other poems by Morpurgo (Cohen 2016: 132-41), but this one is different, in that there is no irony or protest in the speaker's self-deprecation. The ironic dimension generated in several of Morpurgo's poems by the incongruity between the poet's evident intellectual and poetic force and her self-deprecating remarks is most certainly an expression of protest against her religious and intellectual marginalization (Cohen 2016: 289-92). By contrast, in the poem written for Rabbi Ashkenazi, her self-effacement is emotionally enhanced by the complex depiction of the rabbi himself, who combines greatness with humility and willingness to respect the poet, and of her own ambivalent feelings, reverence and cognizance of the gap separating her from him, on the one hand, and her daring to offer him the poem, on the other. Thus, the poem, though it begins as a conventional poem of plaudits written for an external occasion, becomes an opportunity for the expression of her own identity and of an authentic personal connection with the addressee.

A further example of an occasional poem that goes beyond the external event to become a vehicle of emotionally profound interpersonal communication is the poem that Morpurgo wrote in 1851 for her friend, the Triestian Enlightenment intellectual Mayer Randegger (Cohen 2016: 431-2):

הלא ישיש נכבד ישיש

לשמחת תקופת השנים יום הלדת הגביר ר״ם ונשא מורה הוראות בישראל רבי מאיר ראנדגגער יצ״ו [ישמרהו צורו ויחיהו] לעד יחיה, והראה לי פירוש ההגדה שהוציאה לאור בתו היקרה ואשמח בשמחת תורה.

הֲלֹא יָשִׂישׂ נִכְבָּד יָשִׂישׂ
בְּהַרְאוֹתוֹ חָכְמַת בִּתּוֹ
הִנָּהּ יָפָה זַכָּה בָּרָה
וְחֵן חֵן לָהּ שִׂמְחַת בֵּיתוֹ.

יוֹם זֶה בְּחִיר שִׁמְשׁוֹ יָאִיר
כִּי בוֹ נוֹלַד רַבִּי מֵאִיר
וְלֹא יִפֹּל וְלֹא יוּטָל
כִּי אִמְרָתוֹ תְּזַל כַּטָּל.

וּמִזַּרְעוֹ וּמִגִּזְעוֹ
יָצִיץ יִפְרַח כְּמוֹ אֶזְרָח
וּבָם יִשְׂמַח כָּל-הַיָּמִים.

יָשִׁישׁ נִכְבָּד אֲשֶׁר עָבַד
לֵילוֹת יָמִים צוּר עוֹלָמִים
לָעַד כַּחוֹל יִרְבֶּה יָמִים!
הצעירה מן הצאן כשבה מורפורגו.

The old gent is rejoicing

On the occasion of the birthday of the lofty [*ram*, a play on Randegger's Hebrew initials] and exalted lord, disseminator of instruction in Israel, Rabbi Mayer Randegger, may [God] keep him, body and soul, long may he live, and of his showing me the interpretation of the [Passover] *Haggadah* published by his dear daughter, so that I rejoiced in the delight of the Torah.

'Tis the old gent is rejoicing
his daughter's wisdom to display
lovely, pure, and radiant
all praise to her, his home's delight.

This day elect, its sun must shine
for on it was Rabbi Meir born
and he will not stumble nor fall down
his speech, like dew, will go on flowing.

And of his seed and sturdy trunk
prosperous offspring will burst and bloom
day by day, they will be his boon.

The noble gent who has served so long
o'er nights and days, the Rock of Ages
as grains of sand, his days prolong!
The youngest of the flock, the lamb, Morpurgo

Mayer Randegger and his daughter Flora were among the most prominent of the Trieste intellectuals,[19] and Morpurgo had a close and warm relationship with them. This is expressed in the above poem, with its double occasion for composition: Mayer's birthday, and the publication of his daughter's translation of the *Haggadah* into Italian,[20] which was a very special event not only in Trieste but also in the history of women's Jewish scholarship.

On its surface, the poem looks like an occasional courtesy poem, and that may well have been Morpurgo's initial intention. Its lightness and quick pace, its internal rhymes, making for a pleasing melodiousness, and its wording, taken from positive semantic fields (joy, beauty, sunshine, blossoming), make it a fitting gift for a double celebration. The poem, however, quickly acquires emotional depth, expressing a personal relationship that goes beyond simple courtesy. It is dedicated to the father, Mayer, who belonged to Morpurgo's generation (she was then 61 and Mayer was 71; Flora was 27), but it is the blessing for his daughter that stands at the center of the first verse, thus driving our understanding of the entire poem as an expression of a female intellectual and creative identity shared by both the writer and the subject of her poem.

Following upon the dedication of the poem to Randegger's birthday, the first line relates to the poem's object by way of the lighthearted play on the words *yashish* (old gent) and *yasis* (will rejoice), merging old age with joy. Surprisingly, the verse continues not with birthday wishes (which are relegated to the following stanzas), but with the description of Randegger's joy over his daughter's scholarly achievement. What might have appeared like an addendum to the dedication turns out to be the true reason for Randegger's rejoicing.

The superlatives lavished upon Flora Randegger may surely be taken as a statement about her special qualities and an expression of the speaker's affection for her. The depth of these feelings is further manifested in the stratum of biblical allusions, which together form a portrait of the female ideal that Flora embodied, with which the speaker identifies. Of major significance, initially, is the very association of the abstract noun *ḥokhmah*, "wisdom," with a woman. Certainly, the adjective *ḥakhamah*, "wise," is used vis-a-vis women in the Hebrew Bible (II *Samuel* 14:2), but the noun *ḥokhmah* (as it appears in the poem) had only been associated with men (I *Kings* 5:10 and *Ecclesiastes* 8:1). Of no less significance is the description of Flora's wisdom, in the next line, by way of the pair of adjectives *yafah*, "beautiful" and *barah*, "radiant." The biblical context of this pair is the erotic description of the beloved's beauty in the Song of Songs (6:10): "Beautiful as the moon, radiant as the sun," appropriated here to characterize something entirely different – a woman's wisdom. In the poem, the two adjectives are separated by a third one that neutralizes the erotic context: *zakah*, "pure," a word traditionally associated with prayer (*Job* 16:17; also note that the *tefilah zakah*, "pure prayer," is recited at the onset of Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year).

In this manner, the poetic speaker pushes back against the stereotypical portrayals of women, posing the possibility of a new set of features by which women may be described. Instead of "womanly beauty" in its conventional erotic context, we have the beauty of her wisdom. Perhaps, it is for this reason that the poet employed the verb *behar'oto* "when showing off," in the first

stanza – contrasting Mayer's pride in Flora's wisdom with descritions in the Book of Esther of King Ahasuerus taking pride in his wealth: "He displayed (*behar'oto*) the vast riches of his kingdom and the splendid glory of his majesty" (*Esther* 1: 4), as well as attempting to show off the beauty of his wife Vashti: "to display (*le-har'ot*) her beauty to the peoples and ministers" (1:11).

In this way, Morpurgo presents a new feminine ideal – that of a woman whose pure and lovely wisdom takes the place of traditional feminine beauty. The speaker's admiring description intimates her utter identification with that ideal and with her female subject, with whom Morpurgo experiences a profound sense of connection. Moreover, that emotional connection extends not only to Flora, but also to Mayer, her friend, who was able to rejoice in his talented daughter, "his home's delight" '*simḥat beito'* – playing on the similarity between the words *bito* "his daughter" and *beito* "his home"). From this ensues a description of Mayer as blessed, replete with light and vitality, accompanied by scriptural allusions to the blessings of a righteous individual (*Psalms* 37:24), of the prophet Moses ("May my discourse come down as the rain, my speech distill as the dew" (*Deuteronomy* 32:2), and of the People of Israel ("[In days] to come, Jacob shall strike root, Israel shall sprout and blossom"; *Isaiah* 27:6). The next stanza adds to those blessings Mayer's delight that his daughters are following in his footsteps.

Thus, though this might seem to be an occasional poem whose connective importance lies in the very fact of the relationship between individuals within the intellectual community of Trieste, it is loaded with imagery and emotions that express a profound and uncommon connection with the father and daughter in whose honor the poem was composed. Although Morpurgo eschews an openly personal expression in the first person, her own voice can well be heard in the poem's unconventional descriptions, its wealth of biblical allusions, and its especially congenial tone, embodying the speaker's affection for and admiration of her addressees.

Conclusion

"This poem is a token of love," wrote Rachel Morpurgo to her younger cousin Rachel Luzzatto, upon the latter's marriage, and, indeed, Morpurgo's occasional poems, both familial and social, comprised perhaps the only means at her disposal to break through the walls of her loneliness. The function of these occasional poems, as we have seen, was initially to maintain relationships, even on the basic level of courtesy ties. Yet, some of these occasional poems are more crucial to her oeuvre, in that they provided the poet with a means of expressing her feelings and identity, transcending the event for which they were written.

Following E. M. Forster's description of how a flat character in a novel may be filled out and transformed into a well-rounded one ("The disk has suddenly extended and become a little globe"; 1972: 74-5), thus acquiring a new meaning, we may describe these latter poems as being "rounder" and deeper, transcending their initial function and bursting the bounds of the poetic conventions at the time, giving Morpurgo a way to express her personal emotions, identity, and significant relationships.

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[1] Like Rachel Morpurgo, Castiglioni (1840-1911) was a native of Trieste. In 1904, he was appointed Chief Rabbi of Rome. His edition contained some fifty poems and twenty letters written by Rachel. My book (Cohen 2016) includes a new annotated edition of Morpurgo's poems and correspondence. The quotations presented here from *Ugav Raḥel* are from this new edition. All translations from Hebrew texts are by Deborah Greniman.

[2] Even Israel Zmora, who reprinted *Ugav Raḥel* (1943), did not see Morpurgo's poems as a poetic achievement. He emphasizes in his preface that "this collection and republication of the poems of Rachel Morpurgo […] is not meant to glorify her poetry, but rather to point to an interesting (literary) phenomenon: the resonance of Hebrew on the strings of a woman's harp" (Zmora 1943: VI). Dov Sadan, too, in a response to Zmora's publication, though it was full of admiration for Morpurgo, mainly highlighted her status as the first modern Hebrew woman poet: "This woman, in whose breast stormed the conflicting streams of the first modern woman Hebraist […] was a herald for the sisters who came after her" (Sadan 1970: 34-6).

The first critique of Morpurgo's poems to be based on a deep reading and an effort to understand and evaluate them, with no touch of hegemonic, supercilious judgment, was penned, perhaps not surprisingly, by a woman, Nina Salaman (1924). In this short book, transcribing her lecture on the subject at Cambridge, Salaman devoted some ten pages to the translation of several of Morpurgo's poems, accompanied by a full, appreciative discussion of their content and poetic form: the sophisticated rhymes, the humor in a specific riddling poem, the distinction of various genres (sonnets, dirges), and the circumstances in which some of the poems were written.

[3] "Re-vision – the act of looking back [. . .] of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women [. . .] an act of survival" (Rich 1995: 35).

[4] Morpurgo's footnote appears in the poem as published in *Kokhvei Yitsḥaq*, but it was omitted in *Ugav Raḥel*. Perhaps Castiglioni either considered it too outspoken or did not understand its importance.

[5] Only in the 1850s, apparently after the death of Rachel's parents, did the Morpurgo family move to another home, at 773 Via San Nicolò (Hecht 2006: 119).

[6] Castiglioni describes the opposition of Rachel's parents to her choice of Jacob Morpurgo, though "her soul was bound up with his" (*Genesis* 44:30), and how they relented only after she had refused for many years to marry anyone else, so that she married the man of her choice at the age of twenty-nine (1890: 6).

[7] Castiglioni's description leaves little room for doubt regarding the intensity of these labors: "Rachel's daughter told me as well that as her brothers grew, and with them the housework, as they had no servants, her mother had no leisure for her studies, […] with her own hands […]

she mended the family members' worn-out clothes, and she mopped the floors as well." (1890: 7).

[8] The discussion that follows does not extend to poems that were written to mark specific occasions but had no particular addressee, as these do not express interpersonal relations. Such, for example, were "The events of the times (5608)," written in response to the events of the 1848 "spring of nations" in Italy (Cohen 2016: 412-3); "On those fleeing the plague of cholera," marking the outbreak of cholera in Trieste in 1855 (Cohen 2016: 447-9), and "Do not be dismayed by portents in the sky," written in response to the terror that gripped Trieste in 1855, when a comet crossed the city's sky (Cohen 2016: 476-7).

[9] It may well be that the poems we have are but the tip of the iceberg, and that further poems were written and given as gifts in honor of various occasions. We do have one example of such a poem, that was not included in *Ugav Raḥel*; the poem presented here as: "Choice spices, solid myrrh you are called," was discovered by Moses Avigdor Shulvass, printed on a decorated sheet of paper; he published it under the title: "An unknown sonnet by Rachel Morpurgo" in 1960. For another example of this custom see Bregman 1997: 174; 2006.

[10] We also possess a number of letters written by Morpurgo the contents of which dealt with the maintenance of the family ties. Thus, for example, her extensive correspondence with S. D. Luzzatto, also reflects, beyond their shared intellectual interests, her desire to keep up their friendly, familial relationship. For these letters, in Italian and Hebrew, see (Cohen 2016: 541-7, 555-9, and 571-9). Only one of these letters has an overtly emotional-personal nature – her letter of condolence to him following the death of his son, Philoxenus (*Ohev-Ger*) Luzzatto, in 1854 (Cohen 2016: 571-573). Another example of her correspondence with Luzzatto family members is the short, simple letter that she sent in 1868 to her cousin Isaac Luzzatto, which attests to a strong, almost daily connection. In the letter, the 78-year-old poetess thanks her younger cousin for an errand he had done for her ("I was happy that you posted my letter") and for the fine figs that he had sent her, by way of her sister (Cohen 2016: 591-2).

[11] Verbs in the first-person plural are used for familial and communal expressions: "We will rejoice and thrill;" "We behold with respect;" "Dear friends, let us bless."

[12] Isaac Luzzatto and his two sisters, Rachel and Tamar (for all three of whom Morpurgo wrote poems), were the children of Raphael Luzzatto, the brother of Baruch Luzzatto, Morpurgo's father.

[13] In 1850, Morpurgo wrote a poem in honor of the birth of Isaac's son: "Before she labored, she was delivered" (Cohen 2016: 422-3). Thirteen years later, she wrote another for the same boy's bar mitzvah: "Joseph is a fruitful branch" (Cohen 2016: 492-3). In 1868, she wrote Isaac a poem of thanks for healing her finger: "I bear praises" (Cohen 2016: 519), and a letter she wrote to him in the same year, dealing with everyday affairs, has also been preserved (see note 10 above). It seems from all this that there was a continuous familial and intellectual relationship between Morpurgo and her cousin over the course of many years.

[14] This note seems to have been added by S. D. Luzzatto. Morpurgo sent him the poem in a letter she wrote on 1 May 1847, in which she remarks: "I prepared a further sonnet to be conveyed to our bride at the moment of parting." (Cohen 2016: 545).

[15] This event was reported in Trieste's newspaper: *Osservatore Triestino* 66 (20 March 1856): 260, announcing the sudden death of the priest Nuvoli Francesco dei Contis, head of the city's Capuchin Order. The announcement includes the details of the funeral on the next day "to be

held tomorrow at 4:00 p.m." Purim fell that year on March 21, so the funeral indeed took place at the time of the festive Purim meal, just as Morpurgo wrote.

[16] Echoes of these relationships can be heard in S. D. Luzzatto's letters to some of the members of this group (such as Giuseppe Almanzi, Mayer Randegger, and Giuseppe Aronne Randegger) and in the poems they dedicated to each other. For example, Almanzi (1858) dedicated poems to: S. D. Luzzatto, Samuele Vita Zelman, Moses Ehrenreich, and Rachel Morpurgo. Zelman (Zelman 1866) stands out in this regard for dedicating poems to many fellow members of the circle: Shabbatai Elḥanan Trèves, Giuseppe Aronne Randegger, Mordechai Ashkenazi (Tedeschi), Giuseppe Almanzi, Vittorio Castiglioni and Moses Isaac Ashkenazi (Tedeschi).

[17] Those we know of include, for example: Mayer Randegger (who was Luzzatto's teacher in his youth, and later his own son was Luzzatto's student); Luzzatto's close friend Giuseppe Almanzi (who moved from Padua to Trieste at the end of the 1850s and lived there until his death in 1860); Samuele Vita Zelman, and several of the latter's students, including Vittorio Castiglioni and Moses Isaac Ashkenazi (Tedeschi). For attestations of this group see (Cohen 2016: 144-s51).

[18] Another copy of this single page, which was in Shulvass's possession (see note 9 above), is in the Centro Bibliografico dell' Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, S. D. Luzzatto Collection, no. 3073. The poem is printed on decorated paper and was apparently given to Rabbi Mordechai Ashkenazi.

[19] Mayer Randegger (1780-1853), an educator from Austria, moved to Trieste early in the nineteenth century. He served there as a rabbi but worked mainly in education, and he instructed S. D. Luzzatto in French and German. In 1848, upon his return to Trieste after a sojourn of several years elsewhere, he opened a school for girls together with his daughters Flora and Theresa. He published a number of articles (for example, in *Kokhvei Yitsḥaq*, in 1851 and 1852), as well as a work on the Book of Psalms: *Tsinath David.*

[20] Mayer Randegger is named as the translator in the title, but he states explicitly in the book's preface that the translation was the work of his daughter Flora.

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