

**THE NARRATIVE USE OF DISABILITY IN *TALES OF LOVE AND DARKNESS*
AND *SWEET MUD***

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Abstract

Mitchell and Snyder suggest a pattern of representation in which the disability is used to inaugurate narrative and provide motivation and backstory for character, obscuring the reality of disability, and usurping the signifying potential of disability. These narrative uses of disability point to deeper held cultural attitudes. Israel has recently passed legislation that reflects a move towards a rights based model. However, studies of representation Israeli media reveal that disability is still depicted in a restricted number of negative tropes. An narrative analysis of two major Israeli feature films, *Tales of Love and Darkness* and *Sweet Mud*, utilizing the tools suggested by Mitchell and Snyder, reveals that disability is used by these films as a metaphor for social dysfunction.

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Introduction

Using the tools for the analysis of narrative suggested by disability scholars David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder in *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependence of Discourse* (2002), I will examine *Sweet Mud* (2007) and *Tales of Love and Darkness* (2016). I will attempt to situate these two films in their cultural context, as well as place them alongside other films, in order to better understand their representation of disability, and the barriers that they represent.

Rational

Telling stories about our lives as a means of understanding experience is central to the human condition. We organize events into narratives and in the process, assign meaning to them. Stories are shared as a resource for giving substance to events. Understanding the tales that people tell and live by can impart information about the internal world of others (Smith and Sparkes 18).

Rather than functioning as a transparent window to an interior or exterior reality, stories happen in a social context. They speak to the social and cultural milieu of the teller. Tellers draw from the stock of narratives available. Events are structured according to socially and culturally shared conventions and the narrative resources available. As they construct meaning, they also suggest action. Stories provide raw material from which individual identity may be constructed. Understanding narrative can help us understand an individual's sense of agency and how events have been shaped (Smith and Sparkes 18).

A fundamental assumption of Disability Studies is that notions of the body and impairment are socially constructed. Because our understandings are informed by the stories around us, investigating narrative can provide insight into how impairment is constructed and negotiated. Inquiry into narrative may provide tools to enable individual and societal change. Stories can offer counter narratives to disabling themes, or suggest alternate maps that challenge and resist oppression. Narrative studies offer a tool by which we can examine how oppression is created, sustained and reproduced. By changing the stories we use to construct our identity, we may “transform and change our lives and society too” (Smith and Sparkes 19).

Narrative enquiry may take many forms. Through narrative analysis, we seek to evaluate stories about reality and to discover how reality is being perceived. Narrative analysis assumes that how a story is told is as important as what is being said (Smith and Sparkes 20). The act of storytelling is inherently analytical. In telling stories, we apply interpretation to experience (Smith and Sparkes 21).

Smith and Sparkes suggest that structural analysis can be valuable. Key elements of the story such as the identity, perception, values and moral dilemmas of the teller are expressed in its formal aspects. Form cannot be separated from content. Analysis of form can reveal, “without disregarding material conditions, what socio-cultural narrative types...are connected to and draw(n) on...” (Smith and Sparkes 22). The form of representation shapes understanding.

Films offer an avenue to explore the unfamiliar in a safe environment. For those who lack direct experience with individuals with various disabilities, these depictions may be their primary source of information. While they entertain, films

project representations of how individuals fit into the social and political landscape. Media portrayals may reflect, define, or perpetuate ways of thinking about disabled persons. Filmmakers may not be preoccupied with accurate portrayals, and may advertently or inadvertently perpetuate either positive or negative images. These depictions can influence how community members see individuals with disabilities, or influence the perceptions that individuals with disabilities have about themselves (Black and Pretes 66).

Method

This project was inspired by the work of Kimberle Crenshaw on intersectionality. As a person with a Jewish background, I was interested in how recognizably Jewish characters with psychiatric disabilities are depicted in the popular media. After consultation with faculty, and unable to find any writing on the subject, it became clear that this was too large a topic to cover comprehensively in an MRP. However, I constructed a theoretical framework for my analysis based on course readings and began to survey feature films. I was looking for films with recognizably Jewish characters with realistically portrayed psychiatric disabilities. I found that two films that had been suggested to me, *Tales of Love and Darkness* (*Tales*), and *Sweet Mud*, resonated with the framework suggested by the readings.

After I had chosen these two films, it was suggested to me by faculty that I discuss the larger cultural context around them, particularly how other Israeli films dealt with the same themes of trauma and the Holocaust. While I was doing this research, I encountered writings on the disability rights movement in Israel that added

further context. This material was located during searches using the study guide tools at the York University Library website.

Before I began to screen films, I constructed a summary of my analytical tools based on course readings. I screened films that were recommended to me or that I encountered in readings. On the initial viewing, I checked for characters that met my criteria. On subsequent viewings, I made a transcript of the events in the film, attending to the significance of the characters and disability in the narrative. I also attended to the relationship between characters, their dialogue, and general cinematography as it was significant to the portrayal of disability. I then used these notes to write an analysis of the films that attended to the use of disability by the narrative based on my framework. I watched the films that met my criteria as many times as was necessary to record these notes. I also screened commentary tracks when available in an attempt to gain some insight into the artistic intent behind the works.

The films discussed here should not be taken as an exhaustive sample of the portrayal of disability in Israeli film.

Analytical Framework

Disability appears in contradictory ways in texts. It is both included and excluded. The ways that disability is included may contribute to the structures that constitute disabled people in negative ways. Disability is the metaphor of choice to express dysfunction. At the same time, actual experiences are downplayed or erased from the social landscape. Attending to media images is a way to understand that we are active participants in making meaning. Mitchell and Snyder suggest that disability

scholars should focus critical attention on how disability is read and written, in order to provide the possibility of developing new relations to cultural values (Titchkosky 5).

Mitchell and Snyder use the term *narrative prosthesis* to describe the opportunistic use of disability as a metaphoric device. They argue that narrative depends on an “otherness” such as that suggested by disability. Difference demands explanation, for which the narrative then accounts. Disability is exploited to distinguish otherwise anonymous characters. Physical or cognitive abnormality is used to lend tangibility to otherwise abstract concepts. Disability acts as a convenient signifier of social and individual collapse. When it is drawn on in this way, the reality of disability is obscured, and the signifying power of disability is usurped or abstracted in the process (Mitchell and Snyder 48-49).

Mitchell and Snyder argue that this use of disability serves the function of erasure. The appearance of a disability in a character in the narrative inaugurates the need for a story, but then is quickly forgotten once the difference is established. Disability necessitates the narrative, which then continues on its own tangent, obliterating the reality of the disability from which it has originated. Disability is often drawn upon as a metaphor for social disorder. These depictions have a cumulative impact on cultural attitudes toward disabled people. Beyond the erasure of the disability, the signifying traits of the disability are also usurped.

The representation of disability and its use as a narrative device is found across cultures. Various approaches are proffered to the problem presented by disability, from charitable organizations through euthanasia. However, the very

necessity for accommodation places people with disabilities in an ambivalent position. This ambivalence makes itself apparent in the appearance of the disabled as an object of representation. (Mitchell and Snyder 47).

Mitchell and Snyder suggest that in the western tradition, the “able” body serves as the “average” or “normal,” and has no definitional core. However, the disabled body perpetually serves as a reminder of our corporeality, of physical limits to transcendent ideas, and to things which rest “outside the norm.” The appearance of disability in the story demands interpretation. Disability has a representational power as an identity which resists or refuses cultural scripts imposed on it (Mitchell and Snyder 50).

Paradoxically, while disability functions in literary writing as a destabilizing sign, it is also a deterministic feature of characterization. The appearance of disability binds a character in which it is found to a limited identity. These characters are fixed to negative outcomes by their biological unruliness. In literary texts, disability may be used to challenge cultural ideas of “normal,” but then acts as an obstacle that closes down the open ended nature of these texts. Disabled characters provide counterpoints for greater “cultural truths” about the construction of deviance and normality, but are themselves bound to certain outcomes. While disability functions to provide origins for characters, it also does so in a way that frequently obscures the reality of living with a disability (Mitchell and Snyder 50).

Physical disability and character identity are almost always linked. Disability challenges cultural ideals of normal or whole, but at the same time, functions as an obstacle which closes down the open ended nature of texts. Disability binds characters

to a predetermined identity or outcome. It provides an explanation for a character's identity, but in an opaque manner. Once it has initiated a narrative, the reality of the experience of disability is typically discarded. Disabled characters conform to a narrow range of tropes. In order for narrative resolution to occur, disability must be accounted for or erased (Mitchell and Snyder 50-51).

Furthermore, after it is fixed as a sign of unruliness or disorder, any other signifying potential that disability might have possessed is usurped. The able body has no definitional core, but the disabled body perpetually rests outside the norm. The disabled body serves as a subject to be interpreted. As a narrative device, disability may be used to explain everything, but eventually comes to mean nothing (Mitchell and Snyder 50). The absence of realistic representational narratives points to the repression of the experiences of those with biological or cognitive difference (Mitchell and Snyder 52).

Mitchell and Snyder theorize that the very instinct to create narrative arises from the desire to explain either a perceived limitation, or to account for and/or control a perceived excess. Anything which deviates from the norm demands to be accounted for. Narratives are inaugurated by those things which depart from the place assigned to them by the cultural discourse. These are things which have gone amiss with the world as it understood. In terms of structural architecture, narrative correction commences from a deviance or difference revealed to the audience. The narrative calls for, and then provides, an explanation of the origin and consequences of the deviation, justifying its own existence as it does so. Deviance or difference is then brought from the margin of concern to the center of the story. Finally, deviance

is rehabilitated or resolved. Resolution often involves an obliteration of the difference through its remedy, redemption from social isolation, the extermination of the social deviant as purification of the social order, or in a new way of being (Mitchell and Snyder 53).

The difference suggested by disability demands explanation. Typically, these obscure the actual lived reality of disability. In other words, disability is exploited by the narratives, but is then forgotten. In the process, even its signifying power is usurped (Mitchell and Snyder 60).

Mitchell and Snyder point to the myth of Oedipus as an example of this process. In this myth, a child is born to King Laius and his wife Jocasta. The Oracle of Apollo at Delphi predicts that the child will kill his father and marry his mother. In order to thwart the prophecy of the Oracle, Laius and Jocasta physically disable the boy and leave him to die. A passing shepherd rescues him and he is eventually adopted by the King and Queen of Corinth. The name that they give him, Oedipus, refers to the deformity that his injury has created. Oedipus eventually learns that he has been adopted. He consults the Oracle of Delphi, where he receives the prophecy that he will eventually kill his father and marry his mother. In an attempt to thwart his fate, he goes to live in Thebes. Along the way he encounters the Sphinx. He answers its riddle, "What has four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon and three at night," with "Man, as an infant crawls on all fours, as an adult he walks on two, and as an old man uses a walking stick." Oedipus continues on to Thebes where he unwittingly fulfills the prophecy by murdering King Laius and marrying Jocasta,

neither of whom he recognizes as his parents. Upon learning of his true identity and what he has done, he blinds himself.

Oedipus' character is closely tied to his disabled identity. His name points to his deformity. Paradoxically, this disability does not seem to physically hamper him. If anything, it propels him to fulfill the curse. The answer to the riddle of the Sphinx is connected to mobility, which speaks to the nature of his injury. The practical reality of the experience of disability is erased from the narrative. Oedipus is disabled because he is cursed by prophecy. In the end, the prophecy is fulfilled and Oedipus's fate is proven to have been predetermined. Fate cannot be avoided. The name given to Oedipus signifies the damage done to him, obscures his identity, and his reality as a person with a physical injury (Mitchell and Snyder 61-64).

In the myth, disability is used to give tangibility to abstract concepts. In this case, disability is used to affirm notions of fate and predetermination by being tied to a supernatural origin. Disability inaugurates the narrative as the plot commences close to Oedipus' injury. Disability is accounted for as an attempt to escape prophecy.

Mitchell and Snyder suggest another example in Shakespeare's play, *Richard III*. Physical differences underscore the king's metaphysical unfitness to govern.

Richard's disabled body embodies the ruthless political willingness to survive. Disability propels his ruthlessness. The narrative uses his body as a sign of a political order gone astray as Richard draws on his disability while acting out his political machinations (Mitchell and Snyder 101).

Mitchell and Snyder suggest that the translation of written works into film further illuminates the narrative reliance on negative depictions of disability. Film and

text are inherently different mediums. In the move from text to film, internal dialogue, narration, and abstract concepts require visual display. Film adaptations must realize exposition with visual cues. As a result, film often resorts to spectacle. In a common tactic, the physical anomalies of characters are showcased to form arresting images. Displays of disability are drawn upon to imply backstory, relationships between characters, or the existence of deeper meanings. Generally, filmic conventions encourage a fascination with overt displays of difference (Mitchell and Snyder 96).

The depiction of physical disability to communicate character motivation in silent film is a natural extension of the literary trope that disability in narrative is deterministic of character identity. In James Keane's and Frederick Warde's film adaptation of Shakespeare's play, *Richard III* (1912), King Richard's vengeance is motivated by his disability. It propels his actions as a character and is also deeply symptomatic of his illegitimacy to lead. Perhaps drawing on the convention of the theatre, Warde relies on the physical performance of disability in his depiction.

Warde's *Richard III* begins with a scholarly figure formally introducing the film in front of a stage curtain. Warde signals the character of the Duke of Gloucester through a hunched over walk and hard stares. Physicality, and in particular, deformity, is central to the character. As Richard watches an approaching funeral procession of a man he has helped to kill, he walks with a pronounced gait. In an attempt to seduce Lady Anne, he switches from malevolence to sham humility and gallantry, trying to garner sympathy by emphasizing his deformity. After she passes by, he gives a knowing wink to the audience over his shoulder, signaling duplicity. Similarly, during a visit to the ailing King Edward IV, he exudes mock sympathy and

gazes upwards with hands clasped in a show of piety. Richard's hump is a clear visual metaphor for his deceptive and treacherous nature. It contrasts with Lady Anne's upright stance and regal bearing. Richard's disability propels him through the narrative. He frequently uses it in attempts to deceive or garner sympathy. Ultimately, he is obliterated by the narrative for resolution to occur. On the evening before his final battle, Richard lays down to dream, his infirmity clearly visible to the audience. In his dreams, all the people that he has deceived point towards him. After awaking from this vision, he charges into the battle that will destroy him.

In *Richard III*, representation of disability obscured both the social reality of King Richard as well as the signifying power of disability. Shakespeare appears to have pulled material for Richard from accounts from Sir Thomas More, who in turn relied on Bishop Ely. Ely is believed to have fictionalized elements of his account for political reasons. In these retellings, Richard's disability is reflective of the House of York's illegitimacy. Historians still argue that, in spite of his deformity, King Richard was in fact quite physically capable. The very debate over the degree of Richard's infirmity reflects a discourse that equates deformity with incompetence (Mitchell and Snyder 102).

Among the selling points of early film was the proffered promise of visual glimpses into the extremes of human experience, things which the audience had formerly only been able to imagine. Film held the potential to make visible previously unfamiliar lives and landscapes. Silent film drew on the tropes of disability and otherness to rationalize its own existence. It built on and reinforced existing ideas of disabled lives as inherently alien and tied to ideas of divine or supernatural retribution

and fate. Horror, science fiction and fantasy genres were constructed around the display of disability. These depictions used disability to provide answers to questions about character motivation, while also suggesting existential backgrounds for disability that were removed from reality (Mitchell and Snyder 100).

Watching a film, audiences are given permission to stare, something that is denied to them in other settings (Mitchell and Snyder 96). The promise of spectacle continues to be a major selling point in movies. Special effects have always been a major draw. Representations of disability often functioned as an excuse to display technological achievement. These depictions drive innovations in camera technology, editing, makeup and prosthetics, as films attempted to deliver greater realism (Mitchell and Snyder 100).

Contrasting Depictions

In *Distending Straight Masculine Time: A Phenomenology of the Disabled Speaking Body*, Saint Pierre argues that the symptoms of impairment threaten to reduce those who experience them to the status of objects (Pierre 52). Because disabled bodies move through space in unpredictable ways, they thwart “straight” time, reproductive schedules, and the logic of labour and production (Pierre 54). Disability is often associated with tragedy and loss. Saint Pierre’s writings suggest that a more productive task is to imagine temporalities in which the disabled are not cast “out of time” and can instead flourish. Crip time has the potential to open previously suppressed or rejected possibilities. An essential element of this task is to reveal the gendered construction of time, particularly those disabling elements (Pierre

54). Disabled bodies, because they fail to be docile and predictable, are evaluated as a waste of time. Rather, they may call attention to and disrupt the entire economy of time (Pierre 60).

Narrative has the potential to restore subjectivity. Positive depictions on film can humanize characters by exploring their internal experience. They can demonstrate barriers such as stigma, institutional hurdles, or other challenges of navigating the straight world. Examples include *The Snake Pit* (1948), *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), *Nuts* (2003), and *A Woman under the Influence* (1974).

The Snake Pit (1948) explores Virginia's subjective experiences, depicting her sense of isolation, social disjunction, and confusion. She is aware of her separateness from normal people. She argues that neither she nor other patients are monsters. The film suggests that treatment can be arduous and complex but not pointless. In *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), the ethnicity of the Chief and the guards, and a brief news report on the radio, suggest the larger issues of social injustice that surround the institution. McMurphy protests to Dr. Spivey of Nurse Ratched that "she likes a fixed game, you know what I mean". In *Nuts* (2003), Claudia's seemingly extreme behaviour is shown to be a response to the abuse that she has suffered. In *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974), mental illness weaves in and out of the domestic lives of Nick and Mabel. The inherent unfairness of "equal treatment" is seen in Mabel's response to Nick's work schedule and the well intentioned welcome home party that threatens to cause a relapse. The film depicts stigma as Mabel attempts to pick up her children from a bus stop and throw them a birthday party. Rather than be

obliterated by the narrative at the end of the film, the characters pick up the pieces of their lives and carry on.

Disability Rights Movement in Israel

In both *Sweet Mud* and *Tales of Love and Darkness*, the voice of a character with a psychiatric disability is muted or usurped and disability is drawn upon to signify social disorder. Some perspective for these two films may be offered by the observations made by Rimmerman and Herr on the appearance of psychiatric disability in Israeli media.

In Rimmerman and Herr's study of Israeli media coverage of the Israeli Disability Strike of 1999, they observed differential treatment of disability groups, a lack of advocacy, the frequent appearance of negative disability tropes in the media, and a lack of any research on these depictions. They suggest that this reflects the status and social invisibility of people with some, particularly psychiatric disabilities, in Israel (Soffer, et. al. 691).

Rimmerman and Herr found that the disability rights movement in Israel has historically been fragmented around disease labels. Most disability rights organizations date to the 1950s, and are relegated to providing services rather than advocacy. They found differential treatment between veterans with disabilities, individuals with work related disabilities, and the rest of the population with disabilities (Rimmerman and Herr 13).

Reviews of Israeli media from 1948 to 2001 showed little coverage of the struggle for civil rights for persons with disabilities not belonging to the first two groups. Most social spaces for people with disabilities are confined to those with

similar impairments. Four protests similar to the 1999 strike had been held since 1973 (Rimmerman and Herr 14).

In studies of newspaper coverage of the strike, mobility disability was mentioned most frequently (n=57), followed by general disabilities (n=20), deafness (n=22) and blindness (n=4). Intellectual and psychiatric disabilities were absent in coverage (15). The most cited goal of the 1999 strike in newspaper coverage of the time was greater benefits (n=180), with work benefits (n=14) and civil rights (n=32) trailing significantly far behind. Participants in the strike were most often characterized in the press as objects of pity rather than as activists struggling for civil rights. This may reflect an overall societal attitude that is protective and sympathetic rather than support of them as individuals who should receive access to equal opportunities (Rimmerman and Herr 15).

Historically, the Israeli disability movement has been fragmented and organized according to disability categories, falling under the shadow of groups for veterans with disabilities and those with work related disabilities. Rimmerman and Herr found that most of the leaders of the 1999 strike were themselves successful with respect to employment, inclusion and self-confidence. The protest had not been aligned with organizations that supported those with intellectual or psychiatric disabilities, possibly because these groups were perceived as being service providers rather than advocacy organizations (Rimmerman and Herr 17).

In 1998, Israel enacted the *Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities Law 5758-1998*. The basic principles of this law reflect a shift from a charity to a rights based model (Sofer, et. al. 2010, 689). Soffer, Rimmerman, Blanck and Hill studied

the coverage of this legislation in Israeli Media. Their study was predicated on the notion that the media defines as well as mirrors normative systems. They found that while there has been a great deal of research on the images of mental illness and personal with psychiatric disabilities in Western countries, there have been no such studies in Israel. They suggest that the paucity of research may signify the status and social invisibility of people with disabilities in Israel (Soffer, et. al. 691).

The study authors found that portrayals of persons with disabilities typically fell into a limited number of common tropes. These include objects of pity, victims, heroes or dangerous “others” (Soffer, Rimmerman, Blanck and Hill 691).

A study of portrayal of physical illness in the Israeli press from 1999 to 2000 found that 56.1% of articles portrayed individuals with physical illnesses as tragic victims. This study found that the prevalence of these representations reflected a biomedical understanding of disability, with impairment resting within the individual, rather than with larger institutional or social structures. These conflict with images of individuals fighting for rights under recent legislation, and reinforce the notion of people with disabilities as being helpless and in need of protection (Soffer, Rimmerman, Blanck and Hill 692).

Another common trope in reporting was the “super crip,” occurring in 3.8% of surveyed articles. Not unlike the previous trope, this frames disability as an issue of individual agency or willpower, rather than as a structural one (Soffer, Rimmerman, Blanck and Hill 692).

While trying to account for the origins of these tropes, Soffer et. al. note that one of the central symbols of early Zionism was the “New Jew.” Jews were thought to have been physically and psychologically impaired by the conditions of the diaspora. Zionism was seen as a medicine for transforming and healing the infirmities that resulted from exile. The New Jew was to be young, healthy, working and secular. Disability stands in contrast to this aspired for image, recalling instead the weakened, dependant “diaspora body”. Disability does not merely represent a tragic situation, but also runs counter to this collective identity (Soffer, Rimmerman, Blanck and Hill 695).

When considering the gap between legislation, policy and media representation, the study authors speculate that the rights approach is still unfamiliar to the Israeli mainstream. They suggest that additional perspective may be garnered by considering widely held views on immigration. Among many Israelis, immigration was historically thought of as an extension of the nation building process, with the image of the melting pot held as an ideal. This position precludes the cultural other, and therefore may find group-based struggles toward recognition to be threatening (Soffer, Rimmerman, Blanck and Hill 696).

Observations and Analysis

In Mitchell and Snyder’s concept of narrative prosthesis, the idiosyncrasy of disability is exploited to act as an impetus for the narrative, to distinguish characters from their background, to lend tangibility to abstract arguments or to be drawn upon

as a signifier of social and individual collapse. Disability plays these roles in *Sweet Mud* (2006), and *Tales of Love and Darkness* (2016).

In *Sweet Mud* (2007), directed by Dror Shaul, disability is utilized as a metaphor for social disorder. Dvir comes of age on a kibbutz in the 1970's. When the kibbutz rejects his mother's boyfriend, she relapses into mental illness. Dvir eventually elects to assist in her suicide and flees the kibbutz. The film suggests a connection between the socially stifling atmosphere of the kibbutz, his mother's mental health, and Dvir's decision to leave. Mental illness is used to tell the story of the disintegration of social order. In the end, Dvir's mother dies, suggesting the narrative erasure or punishment of disability proposed by Mitchell and Snyder.

The events of the film comprise Dvir's 13th year, before a coming of age ceremony where he is to be inducted as a member of his community. The film opens with a shot of Dvir eating a piece of hard candy. We later learn that this has been given to him by his friend for "when things are so you bad that you can't take it anymore." The next scene is of a woman who monitors and feeds the babies at the kibbutz in the evening, signaling that this particular kibbutz collectively raises its children. In the next shot, Dvir witnesses Avraham, a kibbutz member, abusing one of the communal dairy cows. The sequence sets up Dvir's kibbutz as a community with a comprehensive social net that is flawed.

Dvir is informed that his "peaches" class will undertake a series of challenges as part of their coming of age, in order to prove their worthiness. A new girl comes to class from France. Dvir volunteers to adopt the new student, but gets into a fight with another boy who objects to this because Dvir has no father. After the boys fight at

recess, they get their mouths washed out with soap for swearing by the school teacher. This includes a boy who cannot even speak. The episode implies that Dvir's family, despite the cohesive social support of his community, is still somehow defective.

In the next scene, which takes place in his mother's cottage on the kibbutz, Dvir welcomes two volunteers from Finland and Sweden. His mother enters the room in her undergarments. Her appearance is awkward and suggests that she is unstable. Dvir's older brother tells her to get dressed and instructs Dvir to place the volunteers in different dormitories, with an attractive girl closer to him. The scene confirms that Dvir's family is dysfunctional. His mother is incompetent, and his brother, who has taken over management of the family, seems only concerned for his own physical interests.

Dvir visits his grandparents who are attending to a tree planted in his father's memory. His grandparents express displeasure that his brother is at the pool flirting with the volunteers, who are not Jewish. They give Dvir jars of jam to distribute to the other kibbutz members. However, they instruct him to hold back jam from the ambulance driver because her child kicked a ball at the tree. Despite its ideals, resources are not always distributed equally, and that the community is plagued by petty bickering and grudges.

Dvir bikes around distributing jam to grateful kibbutz members. Finally he meets his mother, Miri, under a tree in an open field. She shares a letter from her boyfriend Stephan, who wishes to visit her at the kibbutz. In a later scene, the community members hold a meeting to discuss the issue of Stephan's visit. Some support Miri's petition to allow the visit. They argue that she met the man near the

sanatorium where she was convalescing. While he is not Jewish, he was a Swiss judo champion. Other members suggest the amount of time Stephan will be allowed to stay. Miri's father gets up to comment, but his wife pulls him down. Other members, like the ambulance driver, try to divert the issue.

Miri and her children compose a letter to Stephan, asking him to visit and to bring gifts. The letter is translated by other members, who vet the children's choices and arbitrarily determine how long the visit can last. While the meeting and subsequent scene with the letter suggests that the community is compassionate and progressive, they imply a social atmosphere in which basic life choices must be negotiated with the collective, and one in which every personal detail of one's life history is known by everyone else. The community supported Miri during the period when she was incapacitated by mental illness, but won't let her forget it. It will now dictate what is best for her, with disastrous consequences.

Miri's boyfriend Stephan arrives on the bus. The children who have come to welcome new arrivals make jokes about his age. As the community gathers in the kibbutz dining hall for a communal Sabbath meal, Stephan and Miri enter with gifts for the kids. Miri's late husband's parents clearly disapprove. However, Stephan asks Miri to dance and soon everyone in the kibbutz gets up to join them while Dvir's grandparents look on glumly. Dvir steals Stephan's cigarette lighter and pockets it.

The film contrasts Miri's supportive relationship with Stephan with a transactional affair between two kibbutz members. Dvir and his classmate Uzi are dropped off in the fields. The two must navigate their way back to the kibbutz as part of one of their tests. The pair eat their lunch and smoke under a tree while their school

teacher and Shimon, a kibbutz administrator, keep watch from a distance. The school teacher asks Shimon for a promotion to full teacher. He tells her to strip. She responds that she forgot to bring a condom. “Very responsible” he retorts.

While Shimon and the school teacher couple brusquely under a tree, the film cuts to Stephan and Miri relaxing outside her cottage on the kibbutz. As Avraham passes by, he warns Stephan to keep his dog, Smiley, leashed. He then goes to lock his own dog in his own cottage. After Avraham leaves, Smiley breaks loose and runs after the other dog. The film cuts back to the two boys hiking through the woods, where they see the school teacher and Shimon having sex.

Though Stephan appears to be a positive influence on Miri and her family, the otherwise tolerant kibbutz members ultimately do not accept him. Stephan offers to donate his pension and move to the kibbutz to be with Miri. He helps Dvir to build a kite at fly it at competition. When Dvir catches the attention of Maya, the girl next to him at the competition, Stephan helps him to strike up a conversation with her.

Dvir wins the competition, but Avraham approaches angrily with his now pregnant dog. He pushes Dvir to the ground and starts to hit him. Stephan grabs Avraham, and Avraham’s arm is broken in the fight. Stephan is later asked to leave by the community administrator, as they cannot tolerate “violence or bestial behaviour.” This pronouncement is ironic in light of Avraham’s abuse of the dairy cow earlier in the film, and the violence that he will soon commit to Dvir’s dog Smiley. Stephan asks Miri to come to Europe with him, but she won’t leave the community.

Miri’s mental health and Dvir’s situation rapidly deteriorates in the wake of Stephan’s departure. Dvir meets Maya in the children’s dorm, she is eating a piece of

the hard candy he is seen eating at the beginning of the film. Dvir attempts to coach Maya in how to steal popsicles, as his brother had done earlier. In the freezer, he discovers the body of his dog, Smiley. He confronts his mother, “He killed Smiley because of you...You are a wreck.”

Miri angrily argues with the Shimon, the kibbutz administrator, but he refuses to punish Avraham. “He’s a good worker. Your dog could open doors.” “This place is rotten” she shoots back at him. “We take care of everything. Have you ever heard complaints? Because in our community we give as much as we can and take as much as we need,” he retorts, and reminds her that they took care of her and her children when she was hospitalized. “Why kick him out?” she asks. “He broke someone’s arm,” he shoots back. Shimon’s support for Avraham over her visitor suggests an element of hypocrisy. His final pronouncement, “You can’t blame the kibbutz for your problems,” is ironic. It is clearly the kibbutz members who have caused her problems by exiling Stephan and allowing Avraham to go unpunished.

In the next scene, Miri holds Avraham at bay with a pitchfork while another worker tries to calm her down. “I’m alright,” she protests. The reply, “Come with me, you are late for work,” almost seems like a parody of the communal ethic. Miri has almost calmed down when Avraham goads her, “Is it my fault he dumped you?” She charges at him with the pitchfork. “Calm down or we will put you back in the hospital,” says one of the kibbutz workers. They grab her, apply a sedative, and the ambulance driver takes her away. The timing strongly implies that the hypocrisy over the assault on her son, the community rejection of Stephan, and her lack of redress are responsible for aggravating her mental illness.

In the next scene, Dvir sets a brush fire in the grass with Stephan's lighter. Dvir goes to speak with his brother about their mother. The latter receives a haircut from the Finnish volunteer, now his girlfriend, in preparation for his military service. Dvir goes to visit Miri and finds her working on the puzzle Stephan brought for them as a gift. Miri's condition has noticeably worsened. The dark hues in her cottage suggest her emotional state. Dvir attempts to help her compose a letter to Stephan. She insists that Stephan has left her and starts crying. Dvir searches through the classified ads in an attempt to find another spouse for her.

At night in the children's dormitory, the students are dragged from bed and placed on a tractor to be taken to a hazing and swearing in ceremony. The camera follows the ceremony with an ironic, almost comical detachment, emphasizing the absurdity. The hazing and initiation ceremony are juxtaposed with Dvir's increasing burden of taking care of his mother and her deteriorating mental condition.

Dvir bikes up to his mother's cottage in the rain. The change in weather parallels his mother's deterioration. His grandfather meets him at the door with a container of kerosene. Dvir's grandfather warns him not to follow the same path as his father, "Don't let what happened to your father happened to you." "What's that?" asks Dvir. "It's all her fault," his grandfather answers enigmatically and walks off in the rain.

In the cottage, Miri is sitting over the puzzle, shivering and looking deranged. Dvir assumes the role of her caretaker as he fills the stove and lights it. Miri suggests they look for potatoes in the rain. Dvir appears to enjoy himself, but Dvir seems to be aware that Miri's judgement is compromised. After they return to the cottage, she

insists that she will leave to go to Stephan in an hour. “You’re not going anywhere” he tells her.

Dvir continues to assume the role of caretaker to Miri, a role that is clearly too big for him. Dvir returns to his mother’s cottage to find her drinking with a strange man. The man sheepishly leaves as Dvir arrives. Miri’s mental state seems to be continuing to deteriorate. The sink is full of dirty dishes. Miri tearfully apologizes to Dvir that the puzzle was very difficult. “Why did he leave me?” she asks, though it is not clear who she is referring to. Dvir sends her to bed against her protests, as if he were the parent. Outside, he sees the man waiting. Instead of returning to his dorm, Dvir stands watch outside his mother’s door until the man leaves, attempting to protect her from an opportunistic stranger poised to exploit her confused mental state.

In the next scene, Dvir’s teacher leads the class in a lesson in human sexuality. “There is no sex without love” she says. “Two people who have a baby must love each other or the baby will not be happy. They can only have sex after 18.” Dvir arrives late, presumably from his vigil outside his mother’s cottage. The school teacher continues to drill them, “Love plus sex after 18 equals pregnancy.” As if to underscore the hypocrisy, she runs off to vomit, pregnant from her affair with Shimon.

Dvir’s mother suffers under the effects of her medication. She sluggishly works at the laundromat with the Finnish volunteer, who points out that she is incorrectly sorting the clothes. She receives a letter which may or may not have come from Stephan or from the other kibbutzniks who are trying to comfort her. “Stephan loves me” says Miri. “We all love you” they tell her, somewhat patronizingly.

As one of the coming of age tests, Dvir and his friend Maya are given the task of looking after the babies. The two sit down to write a letter for Miri from Stephan. Their task underscores that they have become both the parents and the lover to the infantilized Miri. This is something neither they nor the community can do well.

On the way to deliver milk to one of the babies, Dvir finds his mother sitting in a swing in the rain, staring blankly into space. Miri reveals that she is out of Etarol, the medication she has been taking since Dvir's father killed himself. Dvir goes to the nurse to get more but the nurse insists that Miri has been using too much.

Dressed as an owl, Dvir peers through a window as the adults dance at a costume party. He returns to his mother's cottage, finding it littered with empty liquor bottles and discarded masks. The sounds of heavy breathing lead him to the bedroom where, through a crack in the door, he sees his mother in a tangle of arms and legs with several other people. Dvir returns to the children's dorm dejectedly. His friend Maya attempts to comfort him by suggesting that they write another letter. This time they write to Stephan in Miri's name to tell him that she is ready to leave and to send tickets.

With the coming of spring, Dvir rides a new bike around the kibbutz, recalling his earlier trip from the beginning of the film. The schoolmarm lies in Avraham's arms, pregnant with Shimon's baby. Dvir delivers jam to people, this time including the ambulance driver.

Dvir's brother returns on the bus and tells him stories about his macho adventures in the army. Dvir asks him to visit their mother, but his brother protests that he only has two hours of leave, and that he would rather get laid. "What can I

do,” his brother protests, “She doesn't want to live....Don't take this upon yourself. No one can. She will never recover.” Dvir's brother gives him a letter Stephan wrote for Miri, but which he never bothered to have translated for her. Dvir runs to Maya to get it translated. In the letter, Stephan has sent plane tickets for Miri and her children.

Visiting his mother at the laundry, Dvir shows her the plane tickets. He tells her that they are leaving after the fire ceremony, and to keep it a secret. She promises not to tell anyone.

At night, Dvir and Maya lay down on the ground next to each other. Maya agrees to leave with him after the graduation ceremony, using the ticket sent for his brother. Dvir and Maya share a chaste kiss. Their innocence stands as a counterpoint to the decadence and moral corruption of the older members of the community.

At the graduation ceremony, the students run an obstacle course while their parents read encouraging messages. “May you grow up to be an officer like me” says one set of parents. “Work hard and make everyone proud” says another. Dvir's turn comes. He starts to run the course. Dvir's mother says, “I wish you to be a person...” She stammers, and then launches into a harangue against the kibbutz:

“I wanted to be a mother to you, I wanted to raise and care for you, but I couldn't” She says. “It's not my fault. I wish you happy life. I hope you run away and never come back. This kibbutz is death, full of evil people. You must know the truth. Your father wanted to leave but they suffocated him until he broke. They wouldn't let me take care of you. They said I was

crazy. You must know the truth. Run as far as you can.”

(Sweet Mud)

The other members tackle her and hold her in front of the flames as if she was a witch before dragging her off.

In the next scene, Dvir sits in front of the almost completed puzzle, holding the plane tickets. The nurse comes out of his mother's room. Miri asks Dvir for his forgiveness. “They’re going to hospitalize me tomorrow. I just want to sleep. Please help me.” He insists that they can still leave for Stephan’s. “Dvir, I want to sleep...Please have mercy on me...I’m out of pills. Help me” she pleads. Dvir breaks into the medicine cabinet in the nurse's office and places the pills on the table next to his mother. “Take care of yourself” she says. He goes back to his dorm. The scene implies that he has assisted her in taking an overdose. In the morning, the puzzle is completed. The pills are gone. Dvir takes the ticket and goes. He and Maya ride off through the field on bicycles away from the kibbutz.

In the model suggested by Mitchell and Snyder (2002), the idiosyncrasy of disability is exploited to inaugurate narrative, and to distinguish otherwise anonymous characters. Disability is used to lend tangibility to abstract arguments, frequently being drawn upon as a signifier of social and individual collapse. Disability defines characters, propelling them through the narrative. Finally, disabled character is obliterated by the narrative. In the process, the reality of the experiences of people with disabilities are suppressed or erased.

Sweet Mud tells the story of communal dysfunction. Miri, and by extension, her family, inaugurate this revelation through her experience of disability. Miri exists for the members of the kibbutz to act upon in order to reveal their own inner natures. As a character, illness is her primary defining trait. Her first appearance is her bizarre welcome to the two Finnish volunteers. Her second to last act is to condemn the kibbutz for its social flaws. Her final act is to kill herself, obliterating herself from the narrative.

One reading of *Sweet Mud* focuses on the dystopia of the kibbutz. The shortcomings of the community are what eventually kill Miri. While the kibbutz depicted in *Sweet Mud* provided a socially supportive environment, the film implies that it was also responsible for her worsening mental illness. Miri had her own cottage to live in. She and her children were fed, educated and taken care of when she was at the sanatorium. She received ongoing medical care in the form of medication. However, the community members would not let her forget her past or her debt to them. Miri is infantilized and her ability to make basic life decisions taken away. Their hypocrisy, rejection of Stephan, and moral laxity, are what triggers and sustains her mental collapse and eventually leads to her suicide. The film suggests that the community was deeply flawed, with theft, and sexual immorality being commonplace. Politics drove how resources were administered, for example, the jam. There was inconsistency over how rules were enforced, as seen when Stephan is punished instead of Avraham. *Sweet Mud* uses Miri's experience of mental illness to make its critique of the kibbutz. Miri embodies the social disorder through her illness.

Miri and her family can be read as an allegory for her community. As Dvir matures, he progressively comes to fill the role of caretaker to Miri/the kibbutz, and simultaneously confronts the dysfunction of communal life. Dvir's brother deals with the problem by surrendering responsibility for his mother and establishing a new family through the institution of the army and with this new girlfriend. The film suggests that the only solution for Dvir is to escape and start a new life somewhere else. Mental illness is a metaphor for social breakdown. The original title of the film, *Adama Meshuga'at*, puns with the Yiddish *adama meshugana*, the "crazy land," or the "crazy man." It is the people on the kibbutz who are insane.

Another reading of *Sweet Mud* focuses on Dvir's path to sexual maturity. Key scenes take place under trees. Dvir meets his grandparents under his father's tree. He shows his class a model of his family tree, which includes Stephan and his deceased father. Dvir and Miri meet under a tree. The school teacher and Shimon have their tryst under one. Trees may be taken as symbol for the family unit which Dvir is trying to form. Dvir's family and the kibbutz are conflated. In Dvir's first encounter with his mother in the film, she is dressed sensually in undergarments. The triangle between Dvir, his mother, his absent father and Stephan is Oedipal. Dvir's brother tries to show him the way by telling him to leave his mother and look outside the home. Dvir's anxiety over leaving his childhood home is reflected in the foreignness of the volunteers. His anxieties toward sex are seen in the loveless bond between the school teacher and Shimon, and in the tangle of bodies he witnesses after the party. Smiley, the family dog, represents his childhood affections. Dvir tries to be a spouse to Miri, but to stay with her is to flirt with insanity. The hard candy shared by Dvir and Miri

suggest sexual fulfillment. The recurring images of fire suggest physical desire. Dvir must leave his mother or wind up like the perverted Avraham. Eventually he severs the bond with his childhood by killing Miri and departing to start a new family with Maya. In this reading, Miri's illness is a symbol for Dvir's misdirected sexual desire. Again, she must be obliterated for him to move forward. As a person with a disability, Miri's arc is inescapably negative. *Sweet Mud* does not leave the viewer with the suggestion that there was any other way for her.

Tales of Love and Darkness (2015), directed by Natalie Portman, is based on an autobiographical novel by Amos Oz. In the film, an elderly narrator looks back on his early childhood. Amos' mother Fania, a romantic girl from Poland, is crushed by the harsh realities of life in the period just before and after Israel's War for Independence. Disability is used as a device to illustrate the misguided nature of her idealism. While the narrator partially acknowledges the impossibility of reconstructing his mother's subjective perspective, she is still made complicit in his retelling through the incorporation of elements of her experience drawn from his memory. Ultimately, her experience of mental illness is subservient to the narrator's interpretation. The narrative suggests the primacy of subjective perspective through its use of parables, but still robs Fania of her voice in trying to reconstruct it.

The film opens on darkness. Fania attempts to put her young son Amos to sleep. He protests that he can't, so she engages in the act of telling a story, which the two proceed to relate together. She begins with, "There was once a village abandoned by its inhabitants, even the rats." She continues, "Rain washes away all trace of them. Birds come and blot out the sky." As she speaks, dark animated birds flock against a

white background. Amos picks up the narrative with “A small boy emerges from a house.”

The story may be taken as a parable for how Amos came to be. The destruction of the village is the obliteration of Fania’s childhood home during the Second World War. This is the preamble to Amos’ existence. This is something which Amos as the narrator of the tale can only look on in darkness, as it is outside of his personal experience, but which he attempts to reconstruct. Amos fills in for his mother’s absence by telling the story, implicitly acknowledging the constructed nature of memory. The image of the animated birds obscuring the sky reappears later in the film as Amos describes his mother’s world coming to an end for the second time, just before her death. What they represent becomes clearer at that point.

The film flashes forward to Amos as an old man walking through the same Jerusalem streets that his family had years before. His mother was just 38 when she died, he tells us. He reflects that city has been destroyed and rebuilt. Each conqueror leaves behind walls. He intones, “The city is a black widow that devours her lovers.” The pessimism that informs the narrator's view of his past may perhaps motivated by his mother’s early death. However, the city may also be read as a metaphor for memory, or historical understanding, something which is constantly renegotiated as it is recalled. Each “conqueror” is a subsequent retelling, or alternatively, a subsequent generation trying to reimagine the past before its own existence.

The narrative flashes back to show us Amos’ mother as young girl growing up in relative luxury in Poland. The narrator tells us that as anti-Semitism spread across Europe, the young Fania dreamed of Israel as a land of milk and honey, where sturdy

pioneers made the land bloom. He suggests that she imagined the pioneer as both an emotional being and an intellectual, a poet who could till the soil and fight battles. In Amos' mind's eye, his mother sees the pioneer as a swarthy, muscular hero. As the elderly narrator tells us that his mother would sleep under the stars, the film envisions an idyllic woodland scene. This image is tinged with melancholy, as Fania will never experience nature this way again, even as she pursues her pioneer dreams. Fania's bucolic childhood ends abruptly as the Lithuanians and Germans murder everyone she had ever known.

From here, the film moves forward to 1948 as Fania and her husband Arieh hurriedly drag the young Amos through the street. A deranged and dishevelled homeless man screams at Amos that they had killed a million like him, presumably referring to the destruction of the Jewish communities of Europe. At a pharmacy, his parents place a call with his father's brother Tsvi, who lives in Tel Aviv. After a terse conversation in which they assure one another that there is nothing new, they make arrangements for their next call. The elderly narrator considers the uncertainty of their lives, given the disruptions caused by the riots and pogroms of the Arab Revolt. The family rushes back to their house before curfew, under the indifferent gaze of British soldiers lounging on jeeps. A warden walks through the street, checking that the windows are closed against snipers. Fania's life is a contrast to her idealized childhood dreams.

In the next scene, her husband's new book arrives in the mail. Fania prepares borscht for her bitterly unappreciative mother-in-law. The next morning, Amos' father stakes out a small vegetable garden in the dirt of their small front yard. He

invites his son to hold one of the stakes for what he describes as their own kibbutz. Clearly, Fania's life is a disappointment. As will be revealed in subsequent scenes, Ariele is a failed intellectual and philandering husband. His friend is the only one to purchase copies of his book. Their meek garden is a poor comparison to the fields she had dreamed about as a young child. Moving to Jerusalem had not ensured their safety and was only a temporary respite from danger.

As they construct the garden, Amos's father informs him that *kedima*, the word for forward in Hebrew, refers to the grapevine, which alludes to the ancient past. As he does so, the film visualizes his mother's fantasy of a strong pioneer farmer. The elderly narrator considers that his father had once counselled him to consider the philological links between earth (*adoma* in Hebrew), red (*adom*), and silence (*duma*). The narrative appears to be expressing through him what Fania presumably cannot articulate about her unhappy marriage.

Amos hides under the table while his mother entertains a group of women in their home. They discuss how having children has taken away their identities. One of them recalls their childhood neighbour, Ira. Ira's alcoholic husband would repeatedly lose her in card games to other men. One night Ira left him for the coachman's son, moving into his modest hut. From the hut, she could see her children playing, but was unable to approach them. One day she tried to speak to her daughter, but the girl ran away and called her names. Ira went back to her new home and burned it to the ground with her inside. "Our children don't warn us how much they can hurt us," says Fania's guest, "Your only food, you are what the chick eats to grow strong, every mother feels this way." Fania sees Amos under the table and lets the message sink in.

If Fania is read as Ira, an identification that will later be suggested in Amos' retelling of this tale, then she is a prisoner to her marriage because of him.

Amos' parent's friends Staszek and Malka Rudnicki have no children of their own, so Amos is loaned to them. On the bus with his mother, Amos reads a copy of *Tarzan the Invincible*. The Rudnickis take him to visit the home of a prominent Arab. They have only been invited because his uncle helped to heal the man's son. The couple nervously coach him on how to behave politely. They warn him that a transgression in protocol could "cause a rift between their two peoples." The garden party at the home has a feeling of high culture. French music plays while the guests talk and eat pastries carried by servants. Staszek's anxiety is apparent as he trips over the carpet, and awkwardly tries to move it back with his foot. His accident foreshadows the unhappy outcome of the encounter.

Amos is sent to the garden to play where he meets a young girl sitting on a swing. The host is her mother's uncle. Amos is shocked to learn that she can speak Hebrew. She informs him that she learned it studying piano. "There is enough room for both of us in this country," Amos says to her. "You will be a lawyer based on how you speak," the young girl cleverly retorts.

The young girl tells him that she is writing a book of poems in French and English, but also writes in Arabic. She asks him if there is any nice Hebrew poetry. Amos dramatically reads a few lines from Zionist philosophy. Impressed, she asks him if he can also climb trees. He obliges, to her amusement, and starts swinging from a chain and calling out like Tarzan. Tragically, the swing breaks, and strikes her younger brother who is playing below.

Amos's father uses the phone at the pharmacy to earnestly apologize for the event and offers to pay any medical expenses. He wishes to "right the wrong." The episode suggests a parable for any diplomatic and cultural missteps in the early state period. The Rudnickis, as a stand in for European immigrants to the Middle East, desperately want to fit in. They find themselves in a cultural environment that is strange to them. By enacting the stories that he reads, the Zionist philosophy, Amos inadvertently drives a wedge between them and their surroundings. This is one of many critiques the film will make about nationalism.

Later, Fania attempts to console Amos with a story. Two monks resolve to cross India on foot, taking a vow of solitude not to speak. They come across a woman drowning in a river. The younger monk jumps in to save her, carrying her to safety on his back. They continue on in silence. Six months later, the younger monk asks the older if he had sinned by carrying the woman. "Are you still carrying her?" asks the older monk, here envisioned as his mother. The tale suggests the futility of dwelling on the tragedies of the past, another theme that will be echoed later.

While she irons, Fania tells Amos that as a young girl, when her family moved into a new home, they inherited its old tenants. One was a Polish officer named Jan. The film imagines Fania being sent down with biscuits and tea to bid him and his friends a greeting on the Sabbath, *Shabbat Shalom*. One Saturday the officer returned home drunk, and as she watched, put a gun to his temple. "Nobody knows anything about anything, not even the person you marry," Fania counsels Amos.

The parable, alluding to the interior life of the Polish officer, hints at the impossibility of this narrative task, for Amos to recreate the inner world of his

mother. A later scene will reveal her finding a message hidden in the officer's desk. This element of the parable suggests the yet unspoken critique of Fania's romantic political idealism. The officer stands in for her nationalist ideals and the message in the desk, the undiscovered consequences.

Arieh and Fania take Amos to hear a broadcast of the vote that will create the state of Israel. His father quizzes him on which member states support the partition. As the resolution of the ad hoc committee is adopted, his father screams with joy and the crowd is elated. "The Jewish nation lives," the crowd screams and dances. Everything is about to change, his father tells him. The film cuts to a shot of the young girl on the swing. The juxtaposition questions what the fallout of the resolution will entail.

In the next scene, Arieh lays next to Amos. "You cannot imagine what the gentile boys did to me in Vilna," he tells him. When his own father came to complain, he relates, they attacked him, threw him to the ground, and stole his pants in an enactment of a medieval anti-Semitic ritual. Kids laughed at his humiliation while their teachers stood by silently, some of them laughing as well. "Bullies may bully you someday," he says, "They may do it because you are a bit like me. But from now on, now that we have our own state, you will never be bullied just because you are a Jew. Never again."

As if in counterpoint, the narrator announces that at 7:00 AM that morning, riots erupted across the country. Amos walks through fields alone where formerly he had walked with his parents. Smoke rises in the background and the sound of gunshots can be heard. At school, Amos and his friends are organized by a

swaggering, slightly ridiculous youth leader. They aid in the war effort by scavenging and filling sandbags, making Molotov cocktails and collecting edible plants.

Amos returns home after scavenging to relinquish the greens that he has collected to his mother to cook. His father enters in uniform and announces that he has joined the National Guard, but Fania appears displeased. “What do you want me to say? Congratulations, you’re very brave”, she says icily. It appears that the violence that the bitter conflict will bring was not part of Fania’s dream.

“The war infiltrated our home,” says the narrator, “life became rations and sandbags, mourning.” The elderly narrator looks back with a conciliatory perspective. The War for Independence had entailed tragedy for Arab and Jew alike:

In the lives of individuals and in the lives of nations, the worst conflicts erupt between two persecuted peoples. Only in the imagination do the persecuted unite in solidarity to fight against their ruthless oppressor. In reality, the children of the same abusive father will not become allies. Often, they see in their brother their fathers threatening face. Europe humiliated the Arabs with colonialism and the same Europe persecuted and annihilated the Jews. But the Arabs see us as an arrogant new branch of European colonialism and exploitation and we don't see the Arabs as brothers in diversity but as anti-Semites, Nazis in disguise (*Tales of Love and Darkness*).

Newsreel footage depicts graphic house-to-house combat and wounded soldiers from both sides. Exhausted refugees from Europe arrive by boat, and Arabs surrender to soldiers. There are shots of Jordanian soldiers mounting horses and armored vehicles.

This episode suggests a thesis for Fania's life. As a child, anti-Semitism arising from unchecked nationalism had destroyed Fania's home. As a member of a people without a country, she had looked to Zionism for an answer. However, the national project failed to bring Fania's hoped for deliverance, and had instead gave rise to other displaced peoples and more violence.

Amos' basement apartment is converted into a bomb shelter for the neighbours, who sleep on the floor in areas partitioned by hanging curtains. The radio announces that after thirty years of mandate, a new state is born. In another scene, as Fania stands in a food line, she overhears conversations about Jewish doctors, nurses, and students burned alive near Sheik Jarrah in an ambushed convey going to the hospital and University at Mount Scopus after the British prevent them from being rescued. An explosion causes those in line for the butcher to flinch. In another overheard conversation, a woman says that her children are starving. In her mind's eye, Fania sees the idealized soldiers of her youthful imagination running in panic through the forest.

Fania's friend is shot by a sniper as she is hanging laundry on the roof of her house. This death precipitates Fania's mental collapse. In a parallel scene, a young boy playing with a ball is similarly struck and killed. Back in the field where Amos is collecting bottles, he hears a gunshot and runs.

In bed at night, Amos hears his mother weeping and tries to comfort her. The narrator reflects “When her friend died, when the real tragedy landed outside the pages of my mother’s novels, the suffering was not romantic at all.” The camera pans over the sleeping figures of his neighbours huddled on the floor.

Eventually, armistice is declared. The neighbours return to their apartments. However, Fania is irrevocably changed. The elderly narrator reflects, as Fania stares with hollow eyes into the mirror and walks by herself in the street:

The improbable creation of the new State of Israel extinguished thousands of years of Jewish longing for a homeland of its own. Maybe my mother felt the loss of this passion, this dream because suddenly, she stopped telling her stories (*Tales of Love and Darkness*).

Personal stories speak to interior, subjective reality. The film suggests that Fania’s inner life, her subjective perspective, was expressed through stories of the return of her people to its ancient homeland. Attempting to enact out her nationalist dreams had paradoxically robbed her of them. Personal stories are interior and subjective, national narratives attempt to fix or impose meaning. Personal stories are subjective, but national ones are not. The narrative articulates this loss through her mental illness.

As a bell rings, the boys in Amos’ school rush into the yard. Amos heads to a corner with a book, but other boys come over and demand his lunch. They start

fighting with him, take his sandwich, and run. He begins to slap himself. He walks past posters, "Our blood will not be spilled in vain!" Amos is bullied like his father, only now the bullies are Jewish, like him. Amos now beats himself as he had witnessed Fania beating herself earlier, in response to her mother's criticism. The film suggests the futility of internalizing the hatred of others.

Fania's mental state deteriorates. Amos returns home to find his mother sitting and reading a book. As he enters, she gets up to go out with robotic movements, obviously distraught. Surreptitiously, he follows her through the street as she wanders aimlessly. The film cuts to images of the parable of the drowning woman as Amos watches his mother from a distance.

"Maybe you can finally tell me, what is about you makes me love you so much?" she asks him, "...you'll be a man who is quite closed and full, like a well in a deserted village." The image recalls the parable they tell each other at the beginning of the film. Fania wants Amos to be a replacement for the world that she had lost as well as the place that she had dreamt for. The image of a closed and full well suggests the rich interior textual life that Fania had lost. Amos' writing, an expression of his subjective truth, embodies this hope.

After this episode, the narrator reflects that he felt a terrible dread, as if on the distant horizon a vague disaster was taking shape. The film shows Fania walking alone under a flock of birds that blots out the sky, recalling the opening parable from the film. The image suggests that the disaster that had overtaken her childhood home is now overtaking her.

As Fania's mental state declines, her marriage also begins to disintegrate. Fania sits and stares out the window as her husband prepares to go out. "Go," she tells him bitterly, "Play a little outside." "Do you need anything?" he sheepishly asks her. "Amos is here" she says.

After his father leaves, Amos gets into bed with his mother to comfort her. The ailing Fania lives for and through her son. "You're a ray of sunshine" his mother's friend tells him in a later scene, "I have a feeling that when you grow up you will be a writer." Fania's future, her intellectual legacy, rests with Amos and his ability to tell stories. Attempting to act out her romantic nationalist fantasies had lead Fania to disaster. However, Fania's romanticism, her inner world and subjectivity, may live on through Amos' literary effort.

At school, a group of children overtake Amos after the bell rings. To avoid a beating, Amos amuses them with stories that he makes up about Tarzan battling with Cowboys and Indians. Amos' skills as a raconteur save him from a beating, not his fists. The boys cheerfully follow Amos home.

On the way, one of the boys spots Ariele at a cafe with a strange woman. As it begins to rain, Amos runs home. He turns to find his mother sitting in the yard, staring off into space as she is drenched by the rain. The image recalls Dvir finding Miri sitting on the swing in *Sweet Mud*. Amos must take her inside and dry her with a towel. Amos' father cuts himself while preparing food, Amos must take care of his wounds. This reversal of roles also recalls *Sweet Mud*. Amos has become the parent to incompetent adults, as a narrative device he comes to supplant what they had represented.

Perhaps to suggest her mental fog, and therefore her point of view, the camera weaves and follows Fania around her apartment, slightly out of focus. In her dreams, Fania wanders in the desert. She encounters the handsome young man dressed as a religious figure, with forelocks and a prayer shawl. He intones, "Behold, I call Heaven and Earth today to bear witness that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life, so that you and your descendants may live."

This biblical verse recalls the choice given to the Israelites, either to follow the covenant and receive blessing, or to stray from it and be cursed. Within the context of the film, the narrative suggests that Fania, the sensitive and bookish poet, and by extension, the country, have taken the wrong turn. Her mental illness is a symptom of her losing her way.

The morning after her vision, Fania is uncharacteristically alert. "The new pills must be working" says her husband. "I had so many dreams...One was of someone I hadn't thought about for years." Fania's tells a parable of a fox trader who abandons his profession in order to wander naked in the woods. The parable suggests that she has come to terms with her misstep. It implies that she is about to retreat from the path that she has taken in life, and from the world. Amos howls like the fox. He has been the catalyst for this realization.

After a public relapse, Fania retreats to Tel Aviv to be with her remaining sisters. On the bus, she overhears a bitter debate about accepting German war reparations, "They can't give back what they have stolen...We need money to absorb survivors...its blood money, we can't sell forgiveness." As had the parable of the

travelling monks, this snippet suggests the futility of dwelling on tragedies of the past or attempting to exact revenge.

“That night the Ayalon River overflowed its banks and flooded part of Tel Aviv,” the narrator informs us. There is a shot of Fania at the edge of the bed, fishing for pills before lying down. This deluge recalls the flood that destroyed the village at the beginning of the film. Fania is about to be obliterated from the narrative. After her realization, her usefulness as a narrative device is concluded.

“My mother grew up in an ethereal culture of misted beauty,” says the elderly narrator, as the film pictures Fania walking drenched through a rainy street holding an umbrella, “whose wings were finally dashed on the harsh Jerusalem stone hot and dusty.” There are more shots of her pacing agitatedly while taking more pills.

The “misted beauty” of Fania’s childhood home was its rich textual life, as evidenced by her storytelling. The imagery of wings recalls the dove, a symbol for the Israelites in rabbinic Midrashic literature (Genesis Rabbah 39.8, and the Midrash to Song of Songs 2.14). The narrator places Fania as a stand in for her people, in this context, educated, literary immigrants from Europe displaced by the Second World War. Midrash is the use of one textual narrative, one parable, to comment on another, in order to arrive at a deeper meaning. By contrast, nationalism is the act of trying to fix one subjective reality over another. This speaks to what Fania lost when she left her home in pursuit of her nationalist dreams. This mistake trapped her in an unhappy marriage. The camera views Amos and Ariele playing chess through a rainy window as if engaged in an act of narrative manipulation, rearranging pieces of stories. The pouring rain recalls *Sweet Mud*.

“Twenty years after completing her studies in Rovno, that romantic school girl was confronted by daily life,” intones the narrator, “The promise of her childhood was trampled underfoot and ridiculed by the monotony....the heat waves, poverty, and violence, diapers, migraines, ration lines, marriage.” Ultimately, reality crushed Fania’s romantic idealism. Fania walks through the rainy streets. She sits down in front of a cafe in the rain, putting down her umbrella. She looks into the window while people sit and talk. The imagery suggests a person becoming overwhelmed and letting go. She is already looking in from outside, moving outside the narrative.

“The promise of her childhood was trampled underfoot, and ridiculed by the monotony of life itself.” The elderly narrator gazes at his reflection in a rain soaked window, the film cuts to a mirror shot of Fania gazing back. This sequence transposes Fania and the elderly narrator, and by placing us in his perspective, incorporates the audience as well. Fania looks distressed. A hand reaches down to her, she looks up to it. “Perhaps when life failed to fulfill the promises of her youth, my mother began to envision death as a protective, soothing lover.” Fania dances slowly in the rain with the young man from her dreams, this time wearing a rain slicker. She looks distressed but relieved as she surrenders herself. They dance in the rain and embrace, the screen goes black. Fania’s suicide is strongly implied.

“My version of the story would have ended differently” says the narrator. There are shots of them in the river. Fania is the drowning lady and Amos is the young monk dragging her back to shore. Next, Fania is the officer with the gun to her head. Amos rushes in and slaps it away before he embraces her. There is shot of Amos dressed as a fireman pulling her as Ira, the Polish neighbour, from the burning shack.

“But it was her story to tell,” finishes the narrator. This is somewhat disingenuous, as he has been telling it all along.

Fania’s mistake was attempting to act out her romantic fantasies. Nationalism had driven her from her idealized childhood home. She internalized this hatred, much as she had internalized the harsh criticism of her mother and mother in law. Fania, as a symbol for the nation, repeated this cycle by enacting a fresh set of violence. Her nationalist aspirations trapped her in a failing marriage. This mistake is undone by Amos’ literary retelling. The film suggests that this is the way forward, a return to subjective perspective realized through fiction.

In the next scene, a fist pounds on the door. A book falls to the floor. His mother lies on a bed next to a bottle of pills, sunlight plays on the opposite wall. Fania’s death by her own hand is strongly implied. There is a shot of an ambulance travelling slowly through the street in the morning light. Perhaps the first bright sunshine we have seen in the entire film. This is again similar to *Sweet Mud*, where Miri’s cathartic demise also seems to trigger a change in the weather.

In a following scene, Amos sits on a bench outside a plantation. “A few years after my mother’s death I left my father and all of Jerusalem, changed my name and went to Kibbutz Hulda on my own,” the narrator informs us. Amos, now a healthy young man, pulls up driving a tractor, while the narrator intones, “My mother’s dream, milk and honey, make the desert bloom, pioneer.” Arie’h greets him and climbs awkwardly onto the tractor. “Though I forced myself to learn how to drive a tractor, lay irrigation hoses, hit the target with a Czech rifle, I still did not manage to transform myself,” laments the narrator. There are shots of them walking past

buildings and farms with young people energetically playing. “No one was taken by my suntan. They all knew perfectly well and I knew myself then even when my skin was bronzed, I would still be pale on the inside.”

“This is my school now,” he leads his father to a group of young people sitting amongst the trees. “The only way to keep the dream whole,” says the narrator, “hopeful and not disappointing, is to never try to live it out. A fulfilled dream is a disappointing dream...This disappointment is in the nature of dreams.” Amos and his father sit surrounded by hopeful, beautiful young people, a sharp contrast to the gaunt faces of Amos’ childhood. For a split second, the camera shows a young woman sitting in front of them. Her Sephardic, Middle Eastern face is a striking contrast to that of his mother’s.

The message of the coda appears to be that, try as he might, Fania’s spiritual heir, Amos, cannot live up to her romantic idealism. The narrative questions the validity of her attempts to live out her dream. Fania attempted to find in nationalism an antidote to anti-Semitic persecution, itself the result of rampant European nationalism. Fania’s despair and mental illness, never named, is a symptom of this social disorder. The film suggests that the way forward is through a return to subjectivity, embodied in Amos’ literature. Fania and her people were steeped in literature. This is the path that she should have taken. Her mental illness was an embodiment of her intellectual misstep, her attempt to live out her romantic ideals. As a narrative device in the service of the central thesis of the film, Fania is doomed to obliteration. Her arc as a character with a disability is irretrievably negative.

Tales of Love and Darkness implicitly acknowledges the impossibility of recreating Fania's subjective experience. However, it still uses her experience of mental illness to make its own point. It is the voice of Amos that narrates the film. Fania's voice is subjected to the narrative or absent. The best that Amos can do is to attempt to reconstruct it.

To its credit, the film acknowledges the barriers Fania realistically faces. The parable of Ira and the coachman's son suggest that she is locked in a fixed social role. "Heat waves, poverty...diapers, migraines, ration lines, marriage" suggests the challenges that she faced unsupported. Violence and grief intrude on her life. The reactions of her family reflects the attitudes toward mental illness of Fania's time, "My father told people that she had the flu or a particular sensitivity to daylight, or that she was very tired. We didn't tell anyone what we both knew." Fania's illness can only be alluded to in conversation but not spoken of openly.

In a later scene, Fania sits and stares off into space despondently. His father counsels Amos to keep as quiet as possible. "Do you need anything? Then why don't you lie down?" asks Fania's hypercritical mother in law. "She's being so dramatic, as if she deserves the moon." "So what? Moods. Melancholia. It just shows that her heart is still young," her father in law comes to her defense. "As if she's the only one having a hard time here! That the rest of us are living in luxury" says her mother in law. Fania is expected to suppress her personal suffering.

***Tales of Love and Darkness* and *Sweet Mud* in the Context of Israeli Film**

Tales of Love and Darkness frames Fania's illness within the context of her marriage, the trauma that she experienced from the destruction of her childhood home during the Holocaust and experiences during the War of Independence. However, the film also strongly implies that Fania's mental illness is a result of her attempt to enact her idealistic nationalism. Over the course of the film her illness is developed as a symbol of what the film implies is social dysfunction. Similarly *Sweet Mud* realistically depicts how Miri's disability is complicated by her interactions with the people and social structures that surround her. However the film also develops this disability as a metaphor for her environment. *Tales* and *Sweet Mud* are contiguous with larger developments in Israeli cinema. More than these two films explore the subjective experiences of their characters as persons with disabilities, these narratives use them as cyphers to comment on historiographical and cinematic trends. These films utilize disability to comment on the state and the place of the individual within it. While these two films reflect a greater interest in the perspective of the individual over the collective, these characters remain adjunct to narrative demands. The subjective reality that they are meant to represent remains obscure.

Avisar suggests that, in order to be properly understood, Israeli culture should be viewed in consideration of the overwhelming trauma of the Holocaust. Quoting Dominick LaCapra, he writes that "trauma poses a limit to critical reason and...eclipses thought itself." The impact of overwhelming trauma of events such as the Holocaust is not immediately understood. Trauma lingers, and its effects become apparent as events are remembered and restructured over time (Avisar 152).

As described by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, a psychological complex is a sign of unconscious feelings and beliefs related to a traumatic experience. The complex makes itself apparent through idiosyncratic behaviour and emotional stress. The intense reaction that the Holocaust still provokes in Israeli culture points to a still unhealed wound. According to Jung, complexes appear in pairs. Avisar suggests that the trauma of the Holocaust in Israel is registered as a dual obsession with survival and ethical moral conduct. These two appear as ongoing themes in Israeli cinema (Avisar 157).

Two dominant themes emerge in the treatment of the Holocaust in Israeli cinema. The first is anxiety over survival. The second is an obsession with moral behaviour at the personal and national level. The first theme is reflected in filmic preoccupations with the critical value of human life and the survival of Jewish existence. The second theme is expressed on film as a desire to seek justice, banish all forms of evil, and in a determination to avoid immoral acts in national conduct. These depictions in popular works of art have evolved with the passage of time and ongoing historical events (Avisar 152).

Early depictions of the Holocaust in Israeli cinema often featured survivors who arrive in Israel as traumatized victims. They are then transformed into healthy, happy people through adoption of Zionist ideals and practises, such as farming, defence, and communal living. In one of the first Israeli movies after the war, *The Great Promise* (1947), an older refugee speaks sadly about the loss of his home and declares his willingness to fight. He is welcomed by a youthful Zionist soldier who offers him a new place to live, thus rejuvenating him (Avisar 153).

In films of this period, survivors were often portrayed as broken in body and spirit. They required the help of a sabra (native born Israeli) figure to transform them from a victim of the diaspora into a “New Jew.” Early Zionist writing positioned itself in opposition to the maligned old world of the diaspora. Holocaust survivors were often met with empathy, but also suspicion for allowing themselves to be victimized. Survivors symbolized the worst aspects of the diaspora. Many survivors preferred not to talk about their pasts, and instead focused on rebuilding their lives. In popular entertainment, they were occasionally accused of cowardice, or of committing immoral acts to survive (Steir-Livny 169).

Israeli films of the 1950’s are characterized by moral distance and judgement. A controversial reparations agreement with West Germany in the 1950s and the public trial of Rudolf Kastner, accused of collaboration, shaped the popular discourse. Official national commemorations and monuments focused on the actions of partisans, ghetto fighters and Zionist soldiers. As if in counterpoint, Israeli artistic works of this period feature references to survivors with questionable pasts, characters who were kapos, women associated with sexual exploitation, and survivors accused of exploiting the past for profit (Avisar 154).

Israeli films of the early 1950s often did not deal directly with the events of the Holocaust, but instead focused on its lessons for Zionism, namely the establishment of a strong state. Survivors were reduced to a homogenous group with vaguely negative connotations, often physically and mentally broken. These characters were often depicted as stubborn and anti-social. The emotional breakdowns that they experienced upon absorption into Israeli society are resolved through the

help of native Israelis. In *The Great Promise* (1947), survivors are uncommunicative, steal everything within reach, and run away when approached. They are eventually transformed in response to the warmth and kindness demonstrated by their hosts (Steir-Livny 170). In *Yonatan and Tali* (1953), a holocaust survivor who is released from a mental institution agrees to give up her children to be raised by farmers to be a proper Israeli. She surrenders them of her own free will, after incriminating herself through her own testimony (Steir-Livny 171).

Among the characters of *Hill 24 Doesn't Answer* (1955) is a Holocaust survivor who leads operations to smuggle refugees. Another character is a member of the Israeli underground who becomes embroiled in a love affair with a British officer. A Sabra character captures an Egyptian officer. This outwardly tough soldier is momentarily weakened, undergoing a symbolic transformation into an Orthodox Jew, when he becomes aware that the Egyptian officer was a former member of the SS. The overall plot suggests popular anxieties toward transhistorical foes and the mismatch of Jews with no military tradition against professionally trained, ideologically indoctrinated soldiers (Avisar 154)

Films in the 1960s appeared in the wake of another widely publicized trial. Adolf Eichmann had been captured by Israeli agents and brought to stand trial in Jerusalem in the late 1950's. The trial cast Israelis in the light of avenging victors. Films of this period feature qualified identification with survivors. In *The Cellar* (1963), a survivor travels to Germany to capture a former school friend turned Nazi who was responsible for deporting his family. At the end of the film, it is not clear if the events have actually taken place or were merely a figment of his imagination. The

imagery of construction workers returning to work suggests the central importance of rebuilding the country (Avisar 155).

The late 1960s saw a period of optimism, particularly after the triumph of the 1967 Six Day War. The Holocaust made few appearances in cinema. However, the 1970s brought the Yom Kippur War of 1973, a rise in anti-Israel terrorism, and an oil embargo lead by Arab states that resulted in international isolation. A United Nations decision in 1975 equated Zionism with racism. Many Israelis felt that they were now subject to genocidal threats that had replaced anti-Semitism with an anti-Zionism ideology (Avisar 155).

Films produced in the 1970's were a generation removed from the Holocaust. These works showed a growing identification with those under the Nazi menace. Official ceremonies and recollections also shifted from celebrating heroism to recounting personal narratives of loss and survival. An increasing nostalgia for pre-war Jewish life in Europe and the Middle East developed in popular culture.

Operation Jonathan (1977) featured a rescue of hostages by Israeli commandos.

Jewish hostages with numbers tattooed on their arms are shepherded by terrorists, whose leaders speak German, in scenes reminiscent of deportations (Avisar 156).

Avisar suggests that the film reflects the first of the two main responses to the trauma of the Holocaust. As famously articulated by Menachem Begin in 1977, whose own perspective was shaped by the Jewish experience in the diaspora, it finds expression in a fear of forces bent on genocidal extermination, a conviction that no one will help the Jews but themselves, and a determination to never again be helpless (Avisar 156).

The Wooden Gun (1979), set in the early years of the state, begins with a group of children who have internalized the violence to which they have been exposed to the point that they engage in gang wars with each other. The protagonist of the film flees after a devastating attack on his rival, and takes shelter in the hut of a Holocaust survivor. As she cares for him, he sees her photographs of the war, including a photo of a young child raising his hands before an SS officer. He sees his classmate in the figure of the child and comes to realize the futility of physical brutality (Avisar 158).

In the 1970s, stagnation and corruption in the Labour government lead to the ascent of the Likud party for the first time in history of the country. Growing interest in multiculturalism came to supplant the dominant ideal of a homogenous society. In this period, more survivors began to publish personal memoirs. Artistic works increasingly featured those previously considered to be “others” as protagonists. Mizrahi Jews, women and Palestinians began appearing as protagonists in feature films. The glorification of Zionism and the absorption process was supplanted by criticisms of early Zionism and its attitudes toward marginal groups (Steir-Livny 173).

Israeli cinema of the 1970s continued to portray survivors as emotionally scarred, but these characters came to be treated with greater respect and empathy. In light of the general disillusionment of the period, Steir Livny argues that survivors are still portrayed as physically and emotionally broken, but these images are now used to criticize Zionism (Steir Livny 173).

From the 1980's and onwards, Israeli films continued to move to stress personal experience or the individual viewpoint over that of the collective. Films from this period focused on the individual predicaments of survivors and their children in terms of family relationships and gender identity. Characters explored family roots in an effort to reclaim or recover a diasporic past or identity. These films featured refugees longing for their European past, often contrasting a nostalgic view of the cultural refinement of their past homes with the gritty reality of the present (Avisar 159). For example, *The New Land* (1994) depicts the absorption of Holocaust survivors on a kibbutz that forces them to accept a Zionist identity, from which they fantasize trying to escape (Avisar 160).

The image of the military in Israeli cinema has likewise undergone profound changes since 1948 that correspond to changes in its status in the cultural and social arenas (Kaplan 59). In the early years of the state, military strength was regarded as a part of the Zionist dream, a fulfillment of the concept of the "New Jew" (59). Collectivism was celebrated almost as a civil religion, with the military being central to the core values of society. In 1960s, Israel gradually moved from being a country locked in a battle for survival into a regional power. This heralded a gradual transformation from a collectivist identity to a greater interest in personal freedoms. The military began to lose prestige and centrality, a move reflected on film. In very broad terms, in Israeli cinema of the 1950s and 60s, the Israeli soldier was portrayed as a hero who captured the essence of the New Jew. Films of the 1970s and 80s present the soldier in more ambivalent terms (Kaplan 60).

The 1990s have been described as a post-Zionist period. After the Oslo Accords there was a general optimism that the country was approaching an era of peace and prosperity. This period also saw a move toward greater privatization of several elements of Israeli society. Many symbols of the Israeli welfare state were dismantled or transferred into the private sphere. In the popular imagination, attitudes toward military service shifted from collective duty to an opportunity to maximize personal potential (Kaplan 64). Films of this period often portray the soldier as a detached slacker, more interested in his personal well-being than the mission. From the turn of the 21st century, after the Second Intifada and an increase in terrorism, the possibilities for peace suddenly began to seem remote. Depictions of the soldier in this period embody wider preoccupations of becoming a victim of senseless and irrational violence (Kaplan 60-61).

Uri Cohen suggests that this cultural shift in the status of the military can be in the contrast between *Hill 24 Doesn't Answer* (1955) and the more recent *Beaufort* (2007). Both films are about the nature of self-sacrifice in war. He writes that the first film claims justice without considering the enemies' catastrophe in a way that in fact precludes justice (Cohen 44). The film begins with shots of the wall around the Old City of Jerusalem, implying a battle for survival with "backs against the wall." The film progresses to shots of the dead faces of its main characters. It then cuts to scenes of the same characters volunteering for the mission that will lead to their deaths. The film functions as a tribute, with these events constructed as a noble and worth sacrifice (Cohen 46). The film equates the battle for the hill with the struggle of the Jewish people for survival. More recent films are more likely to develop the

complexity of individual characters and to be more critical of the role of military decision makers and political figures (Cohen 48). In the comedy *Halfon Hill Doesn't Answer* (1976), the soldiers don't pick up the phone because they are too busy goofing around (Cohen 49-50). Unlike the anonymous hill in *Hill 24*, *Beaufort* is cast in a well-known location. The hill had been seized by the PLO in 1976 and used to stage attacks on Israel. After it was taken at a high price, news broadcasts erroneously reported that the battle had been won without casualties (50). While *Hill 24* began with omniscient shots of its setting from a distance, emphasizing historical perspective, *Beaufort* commences from a view originating inside the hill, focusing on its weary commander (Cohen 51). The soldiers are portrayed as victims of politically folly and military mismanagement (Cohen 51). A shot of a helicopter arriving under fire is reminiscent of *Apocalypse Now* (1979). In the final moments of the film, the commander sheds his military gear, and begins to sob in a pose that Cohen suggests recalls *Platoon* (1986), only with the character accepting or resigned to fate, rather than questioning it (Cohen 54).

Discussion

Tales of Love and Darkness and *Sweet Mud* both show an awareness of and dialogue with these trends. Avisar suggests that the trauma of the Holocaust is registered in a dual obsession with survival and ethical moral conduct on the national level. These appear as ongoing themes in Israeli cinema (Avisar 157). The events of the Holocaust are interpreted along ideological lines. One view of this history stresses the assault and genocide as the culmination of generations of persecution in the diaspora, the response to which must be a strong state. The ethical approach stresses

that the Jewish state must adhere to strong ethical codes of social and political behaviour (Avisar 158).

The looming shadow of Nazism is often expressed cinematographically in shadow imagery. Early Israeli films from the 1940s contrast dark European settings with bright Israeli landscapes. Darkness is used to evoke shadowy history and the black holes in the memory of survivors (Avisar 156). Both *Tales of Love and Darkness* and *Sweet Mud* use darkness to convey psychological states of their protagonists. The elderly narrator of *Tales* is first introduced in a dark street. Fania dances in a dark street in the rain before her suicide. In *Sweet Mud*, the scenes in which Miri's mental state is shown to have deteriorated are filmed in gloom or darkness.

Ambivalence toward Holocaust survivors can be seen in the figure of the broken homeless man who shouts at Fania, Arie and Amos as they pass by. Fania's childhood home is destroyed by the Holocaust and Fania has pursued Zionism as safe haven. However, instead of being transformed into a "New Jew," she is crushed by the reality of everyday life. Violence and the existential threat of destruction hang over her life in the form of the uncertainty of the next call, the neighbours who shelter in their apartment, the loss of Fania's friend to the sniper, and the overheard conversation about the massacre of the convoy. A renegotiation of the myth of military prowess is explored in Arie's undistinguished turn as a warden, the comically swaggering youth leader, and Amos' participation in the youth brigade as a gatherer. Amos' encounter with the girl on the swing implies that the film carries an awareness of the Arab perspective. Amos' experience with the schoolyard bullies

questions the mythos of the collective. The narrator's conciliatory account of the conflict, the overheard debate of the war reparations, and the film's exploration of Fania's experience from a feminist approach is consistent with the ethical obsession described by Avisar. The film implies the importance of her personal experience, but instead of depicting the reality of mental illness, Fania primarily exists as a foil for the film to comment on historiographical and cinematic themes.

Eldad Kedem argues that the historical backdrop of the 1982 Lebanon War, ongoing conflict in the West Bank and Gaza, and general disappointment with the Labour party is reflected in films which return to the past to criticize kibbutz society, values and ideology (Kedem 327). The symbolic space held by the kibbutz in the Zionist history made it a focus point for criticisms of Zionist ideology. Kibbutz films from this period are dominated by themes of the clash between kibbutz ideology and individual needs, and the oppression of the "other". Ideological collectivism is presented as the cause of individual oppression, especially of those who are different (Kedem 327). These films highlight the negative aspects of communal life, the hypocrisy, insularity, and its arbitrariness. The ideological rigidity of the collectives depicted in these films results in intolerance, and emotional indifference (Kedem 328).

From the mid-1980s, due to deflated financial resources, new free market policies, inflation, bad investments and a collapse of Israeli banks in 1983, many kibbutzim found themselves in financial crises. This resulted in lowered living standards and flight of members from some kibbutzim. Some predicted the end of the kibbutz in its collective form (Kedem 329).

Many films made in the wake of the crises in the kibbutz movement deconstruct myths, ideals and symbols of the kibbutz. This includes its core notions of solidarity, harmony and equality. These films rebel against the kibbutz as an ideological “father”, and against the founders of the kibbutz as condensed symbols of Zionism and the state. Kaplan writes that rebellion against the symbolic father figure is signified by images of flawed masculinity connected with madness, illness, cruelty, and deviant sexuality (Kaplan 331). Kaplan specifically footnotes the bestiality scene at the beginning of *Sweet Mud* as an example. He suggests that these films should not be considered as direct representations of reality, but instead as experimentations with hegemonic understandings and a renegotiation of social and political issues. Like *Sweet Mud*, many of these films follow a path away from the symbolic father figure of the kibbutz. (Kaplan 332).

Kaplan observes that *Sweet Mud* examines the clash between kibbutz values and its weaker members. The film revisits the past in an attempt to explore what went wrong with the kibbutz movement and in order to deconstruct the notion of the 1970s kibbutz as an idealistic way of life that instead represses the individual (Kaplan 333).

Kaplan comments on *Sweet Mud*'s frequent use of tree imagery. Trees serve Dvir as a hiding place, lookout, or location for secret rendezvous with this mother. The tree functions as an intersection between inside and outside, a border marking the end of the known world and an embarkation point for new emotional territory. Framed against the horizon, it marks the meeting of the sky and earth, between the universal and the individual. He writes that it holds a sensation of boundless space and potential. The tree changes over the seasons, visually signifying familiarity, flux

as well as latent possibilities. As a recurring refrain, it disarticulates hierarchical values in the signifying power of the kibbutz. Dvir's desires are based on lack or loss, on the absence of his father and the silence and madness of his mother. Desire is produced and proliferates through connections and encounters that break through boundaries of the subject (as seen in the meetings at the tree and the hazing). Desire as a process is produced via encounters with elemental forces, light and dark, mineral, animal and vegetable realms. Kaplan writes, "Those encounters affirm the power of love as expressed through the forces of seasons, temperatures, soil, and multiplicitous molecular connections-the topography of life being lived" (Kaplan 334).

In one scene, Dvir receives jars of jam and a list of names. This act of territorialisation, of imposed limits, social order, blocking of desire, is undone as Dvir rides his bike through endless space. The lines between boundaries are blurred. Over the course of the film, the blacklist is transformed through bodily experimentation, movement, rhythm and the potential to move in new directions (Kaplan 335).

Not unlike *Tales*, *Sweet Mud* is an extension of larger moves in Israeli cinema toward the importance of the individual over the collective as part of a cultural renegotiation of national mythos. Miri's madness and weakness as a mother, and the Dvir's absent father are packaged as a criticism of the kibbutz movement rather than explored as events in themselves.

Conclusion

The narrative uses of disability reveals a pervasive dependency on otherness. (Mitchell and Snyder 50-51). Mitchell and Snyder point to patterns of minority representation for analogies. Like other forms of difference, disability is often

ignored, overlooked or relegated to the margins when it is depicted in works of art. Similarly, disabled people are pushed to the margins of society, finding little representation outside of medical discourse or narrative expediency. The absence of realistic representational narratives points to a repression of the experiences of those with biological or cognitive disabilities (Mitchell and Snyder 52). While images of disability are ubiquitous across cultures, disability is usually socially marginalized. Depictions of disability provide a gauge to assess norms imposed on the body (Mitchell and Snyder 50-51). The narrative tropes through which disability is represented speak to deeper core cultural definitions and values (Mitchell and Snyder 53).

Deviance disproportionality serves as the basis for narrative. While femininity, race, class and sexuality have also served this purpose, narratives have a pervasive dependency upon the trope of disability. Narratives are commonly inaugurated by the arrival of something anomalous into the social sphere. This arrival must be attended to. The appearance of disability engenders an act of epistemological violence that stories seek to rescue or reclaim. Once singled out, the disabled character becomes the focus of interest. Ironically, once disability has been harnessed as a narrative device, its practical realities are often ignored. As a difference, disability cannot be tolerated. It is usually left behind and/or punished for lack of conformity. Once identified, disability is then nullified (Mitchell and Snyder 55-56).

Recent legislation in Israel reflects a move toward a rights based model. However, in their study of Israeli media, Soffer et al. found a lack of realistic representation of the perspectives of people with psychological disabilities. Little

research had been done on the appearance of disability in the media. The depictions that Sofer et al. encountered fell into a limited number of stigmatizing tropes, including, objects of pity, victims, dangerous “others” or “supercrips.” Rimmerman and Herr found that news coverage was more likely to frame the disability rights movement as an attempt to secure financial resources, rather than greater civil rights or participation. They found that disability organizations were fragmented, with most aimed at providing service rather than advocacy. As a point of context, Sofer et. al. point to the foundational image of the “new Jew”, an image that contrasts with disability.

Tales of Love and Darkness and *Sweet Mud* are both sympathetic and realistic in their depiction of the social factors that complicate the psychiatric disabilities of their characters. Fania’s depression is shown to be a result of experiencing violence. Traditional gender roles and attitudes toward mental illness restrict her. In *Sweet Mud*, the equal treatment that Miri receives from her community, while well intentioned, complicates her illness. However, in both films, mental illness is used as symbol for social disorder or dysfunction. Neither film gives a voice to its disabled characters. Maya lacks interiority and seems to exist as a foil for other characters to act upon. *Tales* discusses the issues that might be driving Fania’s illness, but ultimately, it’s not her voice that the audience hears. Both characters have irredeemably negative arcs. There is no sense that things could have worked out differently for them.

As Avisar points out, traumatic memories are by their nature fragmentary. They make their presence felt in idiosyncratic obsessions. *Sweet Mud* and *Tales of Love and Darkness* may be honest attempts to recover traumatic pasts. However these

accounts of disability are still adjunct to larger discussions. The narrator can only address the issue of psychiatric disability by way of some ancillary topic. Fania's mental illness is about her disillusionment with the immigrant experience and her trauma from the war. Miri's illness is used to comment on her community. As mentioned earlier, these films are not an exhaustive sample. However, they represent a pattern of cinematic language described by Mitchell and Snyder. In these two films, the narrator can only address mental illness by using it to talk about something else.

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