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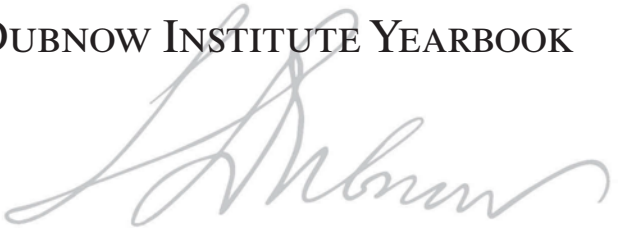

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Aus der Forschung

Literaturbericht

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Editorial

Die siebzehnte Ausgabe des Jahrbuches prägen insbesondere die beiden Schwerpunkte, von denen der erste mit einem Jubiläum in Verbindung steht. Dreißig Jahre Deutsche Einheit nehmen *Philipp Graf* (Leipzig) und *Jeannette van Laak* (Leipzig/Halle [Saale]) zum Anlass für einen Rück- und Ausblick auf die Forschungen zur Geschichte der Juden in der DDR. Während in den ersten beiden Jahrzehnten nach der Wiedervereinigung das Verhältnis der SED zu den jüdischen DDR-Bürgerinnen und -bürgern sowie zum Staat Israel im Vordergrund des Interesses stand, wenden sich jüngere Vorhaben verstärkt erfahrungs- und kulturgeschichtlichen Aspekten zu. Mit Fragen nach der Lebensrealität und nach individuellen Selbstentwürfen im Spannungsfeld von Sozialismus und jüdischer Herkunft – ob bei Rudolf Hirsch und Leo Zuckermann, bei Stefan Heym, Stephan Hermlin, Fred Wander und Jurek Becker oder bei Ehepaaren, die in die SBZ/DDR remigrierten – reiht sich der Schwerpunkt in diese neuen Zugänge zur Geschichte der Juden in der DDR jenseits des »verordneten Antifaschismus« ein.

Der zweite Schwerpunkt reflektiert die aktuell verstärkte Hinwendung des Dubnow-Instituts zu Fragen von Materialität und hier vor allem zu solchen, die aus neuen Archivfunden und der intensiven Beschäftigung mit den darin enthaltenen Dokumenten erwachsen. Im Rahmen des vom Franz Rosenzweig Minerva Research Center an der Hebräischen Universität Jerusalem und vom Deutschen Literaturarchiv Marbach durchgeführten Erschließungsprojekts »Traces and Treasures of German-Jewish History in Israel« wurden von 2012 bis 2018 Archivbestände und Privatsammlungen deutsch-jüdischer Provenienz in Israel katalogisiert. Für das Jahrbuch hat die Literaturwissenschaftlerin *Lina Barouch* (Jerusalem), die dem Verbundprojekt in dessen abschließender Phase als Koordinatorin vorstand, nun einen Schwerpunkt zusammengestellt. Er führt in das Gesamtprojekt wie auch in ausgewählte Einzelbestände ein, betrachtet dabei kritisch die der Archivierung zugrunde liegenden Prozesse und lässt einen verloren geglaubten Teil deutsch-jüdischer Kultur- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte wiedererstehen.

Der *Allgemeine Teil* des Jahrbuches umfasst Arbeiten zur Literatur-, Politik- und Philosophiegeschichte. Zu den Anfängen der modernistischen hebräischen Literatur in Russland führt der Beitrag von *Dina Berdichevsky* (Tel Aviv), die sich der Prosa des Schriftstellers, Literaturkritikers und Übersetzers Yosef Ḥaim Brenner zuwendet und dessen Ringen um einen tragenden literarisch-ästhetischen Sehepunkt in der krisengeschüttelten osteuropäisch-jüdischen Gesellschaft des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts veranschaulicht. *Oskar Czendze* (Chapel Hill, N. C.) schließt chronologisch und inhaltlich hieran

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an, indem er die Erinnerungspraktiken der in *Landsmanshaftn* organisierten osteuropäisch-jüdischen Einwanderer im Amerika der Zwischenkriegszeit beleuchtet. Inmitten der vom Gefühl kulturellen Verlusts dominierten Migrationserfahrung wurden die *Landsmanshaftn* zum Katalysator empfundener Nostalgie und erlebten Traumas, wodurch sie das diasporische Gedächtnis und Selbstverständnis amerikanischer Jüdinnen und Juden entscheidend mit formten. Geschichte und Gebrauch des jiddischen Begriffs *doikayt* (»Hiesigkeit«) in der Zwischenkriegszeit sind Thema des Beitrags von *Michael Casper* (New York). Dabei konzentriert er sich auf den Diskurs in Litauen und hier insbesondere auf die Debatte zwischen Yudl Mark und Jacob Robinson. Casper zeigt, wie im Konflikt zwischen den verschiedenen litauisch-jüdischen Parteien das Konzept der *doikayt* geradezu beschworen wurde und interpretiert dies nicht als Resultat einer Abwendung der Zionisten, sondern als Erfolg ihrer Einmischung in der Diaspora. Auch *Daniel Weidner* (Berlin) setzt in der Phase zwischen den Weltkriegen an. Er untersucht die posthume Wirkung und Deutung von Georg Simmel, die sich vielfach im Graubereich zwischen verschiedenen Disziplinen und Diskursen vollzog, wobei Werk und Person immer wieder zur Zeitdeutung herangezogen wurden: Simmel wurde, so seine These, eine ausgeprägte Physiognomie des Denkens zugeschrieben, in der sein »Jüdisch-Sein« eine zentrale Rolle einnahm. *Ludwig Decke* (Jena) betritt mit seinem Beitrag zur Beziehung zwischen Hannah Arendt und dem amerikanisch-jüdischen Publizisten Melvin Lasky weitgehend Neuland. Anhand von drei Begegnungskontexten – dem Milieu der New York Intellectuals, Laskys Zeitschrift *Der Monat* sowie dem Umfeld des Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) – vollzieht er Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede ihres Antitotalitarismus während der 1940er und 1950er Jahre nach.

Das *Gelehrtenporträt* von *Ernst Müller* (Berlin) widmet sich dem Talmudforscher Lazar Gulkowitsch, der an der Universität Leipzig und nach seiner Vertreibung im estnischen Dorpat (Tartu) Wissenschaft des Judentums lehrte. Obwohl Gulkowitsch 1937 die erste Monografie über die begriffsgeschichtliche Methode veröffentlichte, ist er in diesem Forschungsfeld weithin unbekannt geblieben. Müller skizziert Gulkowitschs auf die Geschichte des Judentums bezogene Arbeit und stellt sie in den Kontext anderer Ansätze zur Begriffsgeschichte. Im Zentrum der *Dubnowiana* steht diesmal die Rezeption von Simon Dubnow in den Vereinigten Staaten. *Markus Krah* (Potsdam/Nashville, Tenn.) zeigt, das Dubnow vor allem von den 1940er bis 1960er Jahren Eingang in das amerikanisch-jüdische Denken fand. Dubnows Plädoyer für die Diasporagemeinschaft, so argumentiert Krah, wurde in den Vereinigten Staaten deswegen so populär, weil es die für viele amerikanische Jüdinnen und Juden essenzielle Erinnerung an das vergangene östliche Europa mit einschloss, Dubnows Konzept also gewissermaßen eine Synthese

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aus Diasporanationalismus und amerikanischem Exzeptionalismus darstellte. In der Rubrik *Aus der Forschung* fragt *Ulrike Huhn* (Bremen) nach den Möglichkeiten judaistischer Forschung in der späten Sowjetunion. Hierzu blickt die Autorin auf die 1982 gegründete Jüdische Historisch-Ethnografische Kommission. Sie legt dar, wie es der Kommission gelang, die Heterogenität der beteiligten Partner sowie die komplexe Binnenlogik der von ihnen vertretenen Institutionen produktiv zu wenden und judaistische Forschung reifen und öffentlich sichtbar werden zu lassen. Der den Band beschließende *Literaturbericht* gibt zu erkennen, wie eng jüdische Geschichte und Wirtschaftsgeschichte miteinander verzahnt sein können. Auf der Grundlage einer detaillierten Analyse von Quellen und Literatur zur Rauchwarenindustrie in Leipzig vom 19. Jahrhundert bis in die Gegenwart spürt *Tim Friedrich Meier* (Leipzig) dem im städtischen Selbstverständnis bis heute aufscheinenden Nexus zwischen der Erinnerung an den einst blühenden Pelzhandel und der Erinnerung an das jüdische Leben in der Messestadt nach.

Am Schluss dieses Editorials steht der herzliche Dank der Herausgeberin. Er gilt zuerst allen Beiträgerinnen und Beiträgern dieses Jahrbuches wie auch den Mitherausgeberinnen und Mitherausgebern der beiden Schwerpunkte. Besonders gedankt sei weiterhin Petra Klara Gamke-Breitschopf, die als Leiterin der wissenschaftlichen Redaktion die Entstehung des Bandes bis zum Druck begleitet hat. Dass sämtliche Beiträge im Vorfeld ein anonymisiertes Begutachtungsverfahren (Doppelblindgutachten) durchlaufen haben und so das Jahrbuch mit dieser Ausgabe erstmals vollständig als Refereed Journal erscheinen kann, ist zuvorderst der Arbeit von Enrico Lucca zu verdanken. Große Teile der Textredaktion hat Margarita Lerman übernommen, während das Gesamtlektorat erneut in der Verantwortung von André Zimmermann lag. Die englischsprachigen Lektorate und die Übersetzungen ins Englische haben Tim Corbett und Jana Duman besorgt. Für ihre unverzichtbare engagierte und zuverlässige Arbeit an dem Band sei allen Mitwirkenden sehr herzlich gedankt.

Yfaat Weiss Leipzig/Jerusalem, Winter 2020

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Allgemeiner Teil

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Dina Berdichevsky

High Exposure: The Poetics and Politics of Y. Ḥ. Brenner's "Ocular Modernist Turn"

"[W]e have to sacrifice our souls and diminish evil in the world, the evil of hunger, of slavery, idleness, hypocrisy, and so on. It is necessary to *understand* everything, to understand and to distance ourselves from mysticism and illusion; it is necessary to *increase reality and holiness in the world*; it is necessary to mend the life of the people of Israel so that they become normal. The great suffering of my soul stems from my doubts in general. Is there a remedy? Are we moving forward? – You write a long historical poem – and that I cannot understand. Can we turn our attention away for even one moment from the present? Do you know the condition of our youth? Do you know that we are the last of the Mohicans? Do you know that our people are dying? Do you know that the world is sick? Do you know that this despair is destroying the soul? Do you have eyes?!"[1]

Such are the often-quoted lines written originally in Hebrew in the year 1900 by then 18-year-old writer Yosef Ḥayim Brenner to his close friend and fellow writer Uri Nissan Gnessin. They present a most glorious epilogue of a cultural epoch, voiced out of the liminal twilight zone, and capturing fundamental fin-de-siècle tensions. The intense desire for discovery, revelation, and progress was already fraught with existential doubts and apocalyptic visions of decay. Indeed, it was an epilogue – as the years that were to come carried Brenner far away from the bold conviction of the necessity "to increase reality and holiness in the world" and his uttered imperative to "have eyes." The turbulent early years of the century, marked by historical atrocities, endless geographic movement, economic distress, intense political debate, and – most important for the current discussion – by new perceptions of artistic vision and physical visibility, brought about the earliest modernist literary expressions in the history of Hebrew writing. This revolutionary, early modernist chapter, formed during Brenner's wanderings between Russia, London, and Galicia, is the topic of the present discussion. The essay

1 Original in: Menaḥem Poznanski (ed.), Igrot Y. Ḥ. Brenner [Letters of Y. Ḥ. Brenner], 2 vols., Tel Aviv 1941, here vol. 1, 86. Translation cit. from Michael Gluzman, The Politics of Canonicity. Lines of Resistance in Modernist Hebrew Poetry, Stanford, Calif., 2003, 7 (emphasis in the original). See also Gluzman's discussion of the letter on pages 7 f. as well as Todd Hasak-Lowy, Here and Now. History, Nationalism, and Realism in Modern Hebrew Fiction, Syracuse, N. Y., 2008, xiii–xiv.

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begins with a description of the unique historical context of the formation of Hebrew modernism and Brenner's crucial role in it. The wider historical framework presented in the first part will guide the analysis of significant formative moments of Brenner's emerging modernist poetics of vision in the following sections. Rather than offering a comprehensive reading of a specific work, this paper endeavors to create an overarching understanding of the formative moment of the eclipse of vision as a principal foundation of early twentieth-century Hebrew poetics and address its political dimensions.

Poetic Revolutions in Days of Tumult

The first years of the twentieth century marked the end of an historical era of the Jewish civilization in the Russian Pale of Settlement. The persistent suppression of Jewish rights by Alexander III, including limitations on their political rights, education, commercial activity, and residence, created mass unemployment and poverty. These, together with the wider social-economical processes of modernization and industrialization in Russia, resulted in the rapid impoverishment of the Jewish traditional shtetl and disintegration of its social structures. Witnessing the decay of the old world, the Jewish young intelligentsia of 1900 put their hopes for the future in the liberal ideologies of resistance to the autocrat Tsarist regime, which flourished in the Russian Empire in the very first years of the century. These liberal ideologies raised new expectations for reforms that would improve the political status of Jews in the Empire. All these hopes were lost just at that moment when they seemed closer than ever to realization. On 17 November 1905, following a year of revolutionary protests and mass strikes in Russia, Tsar Nicholas III proclaimed the October Manifesto in which he promised to establish a constitution to protect basic civil rights of the Russian people. This festive declaration caused an immediate counter-reaction in the form of mass pogroms against Jews throughout the Pale of Settlement and in the big cities Odessa and Kiev. Over one thousand people were killed, many more injured and raped; the damage to houses, businesses, and private property was far beyond what people could remember from the days of the "Storms in the Negev" (1881) or the Kishinev pogroms (1903).[2] These atrocities, along with economic

2 For a broader discussion of the historical context of 1905–1906, see Jonathan Frankel, Prophecy and Politics. Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917, Cambridge 1981, 134–170.

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and social crisis, stimulated mass Jewish emigration, within and outside the borders of the Empire. In the early twentieth century, Jewish migration from Russia turned from what used to be the movement of ambitious individuals to an unprecedented mass phenomenon that saw nearly two million Jews leave between the end of the nineteenth century and the outbreak of World War I.[3]

Naturally, the atrocities of the first decade of the century left their imprint on all aspects of Jewish life, material, spiritual, and cultural, including the field of Hebrew literature. Publishing houses and journals closed one after the other during the first half of the decade, publishers and writers faced professional and personal hardship, while the very culture of writing and reading was in jeopardy. Moreover, the vast migration movement, crisis of traditional education, and acculturation of Jewish youth to Russian culture deprived the Hebrew language of its audiences. Hebrew lost its privileged status as the Jewish elevated classical idiom for high literary speech and was replaced with the more approachable and popular Yiddish and Russian literatures.[4] Hebrew writers felt they were creating in complete vacuum and expressed strong doubts whether Hebrew literary tradition would have any continuation into the future.[5]

Surprisingly, the age of the deepest crisis in the history of Hebrew modern literature appeared to be, in wider historical perspective, one of its greatest hours. Virtually all at once, the most prominent names of modern prose, such as Uri Nissan Gnessin, Shmuel Yosef Agnon, Dvora Baron,

3 See Yannay Spitzer, Pogroms, Networks, and Migration. The Jewish Migration from the Russian Empire to the United States 1881–1914, 29 May 2015, <https://yannayspitzer.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/spitzer_pogromsnetworksmigration_150529.pdf> (1 December 2019).

4 On the crisis of Hebrew publishing and readership, see Dan Miron, Bodedim be-mo'adam. Li-dyokna shel ha-republika ha-sifrutit ha-ivrit be-reshit ha-me'a ha-esrim [When Loners Come Together. A Portrait of Hebrew Literature at the Turn of the Twentieth Century], Tel Aviv 1987, 23–55.

5 See, e. g., Ahad Ha'am's declaration that the Hebrew literature of the early twentieth century did not create anything new and could not do so in the state it was in at the time. Hebrew writers should, therefore, according to Ahad Ha'am, put their efforts in the collection and canonization of the classics of past generations. See idem, Aḥrei eser shanim [After Ten Years], in: Lu'aḥ aḥi'asaf [Ahiasaf Annual] 10 (1903). On Ahad Ha'am's negative views regarding the historical situation of Hebrew literature, see also Miron, Bodedim be-mo'adam, 36–39. In a similar manner, the writer, critic, and publisher David Frishman proclaimed in 1901: "We have no nation and we have no literature." See idem, Kol kitvey David Frishman [The Collected Writings of David Frishman], 9 vols., Warsaw/New York 1929–1935, here vol. 8: Arukot u-kẓarot [At Length and Briefly], 16. Also, the younger Hebrew critic Fishel Lahover described the first decade of the century as the "sunset time" of Hebrew literature. See idem, Im shki'at ha-ḥama [At Sunset], in: David Frishman (ed.), Sifrut. Ma'asaf le-sifrut ha-yafa u-vikoret [Literature. Journal of Belletristic Literature and Criticism] 1 (1909–1910), 161–167.

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Gershon Shofman, Yaakov Steinberg, and Brenner himself, aside young distinguished modernist Yiddish writers, such as Dovid Bergelson or Dovid Hofsteyn, seem to have conquered the Jewish cultural arena in the early years of the twentieth century. As the last children of nineteenth-century Jewish-Russian civilization, they all belonged to that one generation of youth who – in their formative periods of childhood and adolescence – had witnessed its deterioration, and who, by the time they grew up, were destined to endless wandering between cities and continents without a clear goal or destination.

The literary revolution of the first decade was not only a coincidental matter of a high number of talented individuals; rather, the spur of creative energies in these days of tumult was generated by the larger overall process of rapid modernization of Hebrew literature. Within this one decade between the mid-1890s and mid-1900s, Hebrew literature made the long way from progressive realism to twentieth-century experimental modernism. The prose of the young generation of writers mentioned above employed, surprisingly, a whole range of poetic innovations, including distorted narration, unusual metaphorical figures, generic heterogeneity, meta-literary sensitivity, and psychological introspective reflections.[6]

The question one cannot avoid in light of this simultaneity of historical-social crisis and daring modernist creativity is how this highly experimental Hebrew literary language far removed from a modern literary-cultural tradition could emerge in these days of tumult. This simultaneity might suggest that it was precisely the dead-end of politics which became the vital source of literary innovation; it was the impossibility of what Brenner was striving for in 1900, "to understand everything" and "to mend the life of the Jewish people," which instigated literary novelty. Kenneth Moss, albeit skeptical regarding the exceptional status of the revolution of 1905 in particular, describes the common narrative according to which the suppression of the revolution was the cause for the opposite appeal to culture. Culture, he writes,

6 The historical process of Hebrew literature's formation during the early twentieth century was studied and debated from various perspectives. See the important contributions on the topic: Robert Alter, The Invention of Hebrew Prose. Modern Fiction and the Language of Realism, Seattle, Wash., 1988; Benjamin Harshav (Hrushovski), Language in Time of Revolution, Berkeley, Calif./Los Angeles, Calif., 1993; Chana Kronfeld, On the Margins of Modernism. Decentering Literary Dynamics, Berkeley, Calif./Los Angeles, Calif.,/ London 1996; Hamutal Bar-Yosef, Maga'im shel dekadens. Bialik, Berdiẓevski, Brenner [Decadent Trends. Bialik, Berdyczewski, Brenner], Be'er Sheva 1997; Gluzman, The Politics of Canonicity; Hasak-Lowy, Here and Now; Shachar Pinsker, Literary Passports. The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe, Stanford, Calif., 2010; Allison Schachter, Diasporic Modernisms. Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century, New York 2012; Shai Ginsburg, Rhetoric and Nation. The Formation of Hebrew National Culture, 1880–1990, Syracuse, N.Y., 2014.

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was thought to serve "as a substitute or renunciation of politics."[7] Jewish youth sought for a new poetic voice to express their despair and this search gave way to new ideals of aesthetic autonomy. This process took place within the wider context of the Russian culture, in which, as well, traditional ways of life were dramatically undermined and individualism became a new social norm.[8] Subsequently, the process of growing separation between the collective and the individual in fin-de-siècle Russia stimulated the concept of literary autonomy or, using Maurice Blanchot's term, of literature's "essential solitude."[9] Some of the astonishing Hebrew literary experiments of those years, to be discussed further on, were unprecedented by existing literary models, and preceded themselves later modernist developments in European literature. It will be argued here that this fact ought to be conceived precisely against the backdrop of the *anomalous state* of Hebrew literature at the outset of the twentieth century, for which Brenner's œuvre provides one of the most striking examples.

Scholars of Hebrew literature – Yitzhak Bakon, Hamutal Bar-Yosef, Hannan Hever, Shachar Pinsker, and Rafi Tsirkin-Sadan – have addressed, from various perspectives, the ways in which Brenner has paved new poetic paths in his writing. Bakon writes about Brenner's "sublime pessimism" which set the tone of his post-1905 writings.[10] Hever describes Brenner's emerging notion of separation between writing and speech, as the writing – associated with the sublime literary reality – gained conceptual superiority over speech associated with the public sphere of politics.[11] Tsirkin-Sadan shows how, during his time in London, Brenner adopted Gerhard Hauptmann's concept of symbolic realism and stressed the alliance of literature with the subjective realm of individual experience.[12] Hamutal Bar-Yosef discusses the early

7 Kenneth B. Moss, 1905 as a Jewish Cultural Revolution? Revolutionary and Evolutionary Dynamics in the East European Jewish Cultural Sphere, 1900–1914, in: Stefani Hoffman/Ezra Mendelsohn (eds.), The Revolution of 1905 and Russia's Jews. A Turning Point?, Philadelphia, Pa., 2008, 185–198, here 186–189.

8 Anna Geifman, Psychohistorical Approaches to 1905 Radicalism, in: Anthony J. Heywood/Jonathan D. Smele (eds.), The Russian Revolution of 1905. Centenary Perspectives, London/New York 2005, 13–33, here 17–19.

9 Maurice Blanchot, The Space of Literature, transl., with an introduction, by Ann Smock, Lincoln, Nebr./London 1982, 19–34 (1st ed. in French, Paris 1955).

10 Yiẓḥak Bakon, Brenner ha-ẓa'ir. Ḥaiav ve-yeẓirotav shel Brenner ad le-hofa'at ha-me'orer be-London [The Young Brenner. His Life and Works before the Publication of *ha-Meorer* in London], Tel Aviv 1975, 211.

11 Hannan Hever, Rebellion in Writing. Yosef Haim Brenner and the 1905 Revolution, in: Hoffman/Mendelsohn (eds.), The Revolution of 1905 and Russia's Jews, 152–173.

12 Rafi Tsirkin-Sadan, Otiyot yehudiyot be-sifriyat Pushkin. Yeẓirato shel Yosef Ḥayim Brenner ve-zikatah la-sifrut ve-lamaḥshava ha-rusit [Jewish Letters in Pushkin's Library. Yosef Ḥaym Brenner's Work and Its Connection to Russian Literature and Thought], Jerusalem 2013, 94–101.

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twentieth-century writers' adoption of decadent modes at the turn of the century,[13] while Shachar Pinsker points to the adoption of modernist techniques of narration and symbolist style.[14] The following discussion aims to add another component to the understanding of the rise of modernist poetics out of the dead-end of politics by presenting Brenner's parallel artistic process of fashioning new techniques of literary spectatorship. This essay will demonstrate further how the emerging forms of seeing in Brenner's prose – essentially related to the changing experience of vision and visibility – lay the foundations for the early twentieth-century rebellious notion of writing, and thus gave way to the earliest expressions of modernist literary experience, inseparable from the overall "civilizing process of Jewish subjectivity"[15] in these years.

"Do You Have Eyes?!": The Vicissitudes of a Literary Icon

Brenner was born in 1881 into a poor Jewish family in a small town in the Pale of Settlement of the Russian Empire. Following his early years in the heder, he attended various yeshivas in Homel, Halusk, Konotop, and Pochep, which first exposed him to secular Hebrew Haskala literature and later to Russian literature and culture. After the publication of his earliest works, he was drafted into the Russian army, but deserted in 1904, making his long way to the other end of Europe, to East London. In London, Brenner became famous as publisher of the Hebrew literary periodical *The Awakener (ha-Meorer)*, which he launched in October 1905, the only Hebrew periodical of its kind available in the subsequent two years. Parallel to his work for two other newspapers, Brenner acted as editor, publisher, typesetter, distributor, and frequently – under numerous pseudonyms – as author of his periodical. His three years in London were followed by residencies in Lvov, Jaffa (where Brenner settled in 1909), and Jerusalem, and by many more literary works and enterprises, publishing initiatives, and journalistic scandals. Brenner was rebellious and provocative, and took the public by surprise, but nevertheless succeeded in establishing himself as the most vital figure of the Hebrew literary scene in the Yishuv, and one of the leading Jewish intellectuals of his

13 Bar-Yosef, Maga'im shel dekadens.

14 Pinsker, Literary Passports, 80–85.

15 By "Civilizing Process" I refer to Norbert Elias, The Civilizing Process. Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations, ed. by Eric Dunning, Johan Goudsblom, and Stephen Mennell, transl. by Edmund Jepbcott, Oxford 2000.

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time. He remained deeply devoted to Hebrew literature all his life, until his tragic death on 2 May 1921 during the Jaffa riots.[16]

Returning to the beginning of this intensive, turbulent, and tragic life, Brenner's literary career started on a high note. "Do you have eyes?!" he asked his friend Uri Nissan Gnessin in the above-quoted letter, implying that the writer's ultimate devotion was the concrete historical struggles of his people, and his mission was to see. These words revitalized the powerful image of the nineteenth-century "Watchman to the house of Israel," originally the name of the literary collection of Haskalah satirist Isaac Erter. Due to the "watchman's" equivocality, meaning both "the one who guards" and "the one who watches," this figure entered the Jewish discourse as the conceptual ideal of the modern public intellectual. The elevated position, epic perspective, and omnipotent gaze associated with the figure of the watchman, symbolically embodied the new regulative ideal of "knowledge." Prominent writers and intellectuals of the late nineteenth century, including Abraham Uri Kovner, Avraham Paperna, Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh, and later Micha Yosef Berdyczewski and Asher Zvi Ginsberg (Ahad Ha'am), repeatedly proclaimed that for many generations Jews had isolated themselves from the world outside and replaced life with scriptures, empty phrases, and rhetorical embellishments. Now was the time for Hebrew modern literature to turn its gaze back towards life, to put Jews back in touch with reality ("reality" as in secular history, state politics, nature, etc.). Literature was expected to fulfill the need for knowledge, and self-reflection seen as the precondition for historical progress.[17] Hence, the artistic activity was associated with the elevated rational position of the sovereign Jewish subject, the realist artist who, according to Ahad Ha'am, could assist his people to understand themselves and to "plan their future wisely."[18] Thus, the figure of the watchman to the house of Israel gave the fullest expression to what Martin Jay has described

16 For Brenner's rich biography, see Anita Shapira, Yosef Haim Brenner. A Life, Stanford, Calif., 2015.

17 For example, in the 1860s, the critic Abraham Uri Kovner wrote that a social novel was "what Israel needs right now." See Shalom Kramer, Al bikoret u-mevakrim. Prakim betoldot ha-bikoret ha-ivrit [On Criticism and Critics. Chapters in the History of Hebrew Criticism], Tel Aviv 1980, 84. In a similar manner, the critic Avraham Paperna praised Abramovitsh's novel *Limdu hetev* (Learn to Do Well) for presenting a clear picture (*ẓiur*, indicating also description or depiction) of the Jewish people, their nature and society. See Kramer, ibid. 117. This typical nineteenth-century praise of realist novels and clear pictures of social-historical reality were embodied in the mimetic norm of epic, all-encompassing perspective and architectonic advantage of the spectator over the objects of his fictive universe.

18 Ahad Ha'am [Asher Zvi Hirsch Ginsberg], Kol Kitvei Aḥad Ha-am [The Collected Writings of Ahad Ha'am], Tel Aviv/Jerusalem 1954, 127.

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as the "divine liberating aura of light and ocular capacity which gave enlightenment its name."[19]

Clearly, the aura of the watchman had great impact on the 18-year-old Brenner, and it strongly resonates in his dramatic cry to Gnessin, "do you have eyes?!". However, it is precisely against the backdrop of this swan song of the Enlightenment visions that one senses the dimensions of literary and epistemic crisis that was to come later, during the years of wandering, namely, after Brenner had deserted the Russian army and settled in London in 1904. Only seven years separated this famous letter from Brenner's essay titled *From London, from Lvov and from Other Places*, published in 1907, in which he reflects on the city he had just left behind, London, as a figure and distinct existential state, as the mighty icon of historical chaos. The essay opens with the following lines:

> "There are universes in which only silence rules; because of the acknowledgment of the endless sorrow, because of the lack of power to mend or cure anything, […] there, in that universe you *cannot look at anyone*, neither hear a thing. […] [*T*]*he boundaries are blurred*. There, in this world, there is neither London nor Lvov, no analogies and no parallels, no speech and no controversies."[20]

The opening lines of the essay give a striking record of the new experience inhibited by the feeling of loss. Things lose their essential identity and the lines separating spheres and objects blur. More so, the constitutive border between the subject – the one who sees – and his object – the world in front him – is vanishing. In other words, the subject does not see his objects since he has lost his spatial vantage point. One cannot point to the one catastrophe addressed in these lines; the historical crisis is the subjectivity crisis and the crisis of subjectivity is the eclipse of language. Ultimately, it seems that what happened to language, to writing, was more important here than London and Lvov; "There, in this world," says the speaker in the last sentence, "there is neither London nor Lvov, no analogies and no parallels …" The speaker's thoughts move naturally from the world outside to self-mirroring of his own text. The theme becomes now the mimetic eclipse, which negates analogies and parallels, that is, which negates language, representation itself.

Clearly, this time, what is essential to the critic's position is the inability to see and to reflect. In Brenner's London novella *From the Narrows* (1908), written parallel to this essay, the protagonist, also a Jewish writer, constantly repeats one mantra, "where would one find a vision?".[21] It seems that the

19 Martin Jay, Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought, Berkeley, Calif./Los Angeles, Calif./London 1993, 89.

20 Yosef Ḥayim Brenner, Ktavim [Writings], 4 vols., Tel Aviv 1978–1985, here vol. 3: Criticism, 163 (emphases by the author).

21 Ibid., vol. 2: Short Stories, Novels, and Plays, 1027 and 1030.

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shining image of the watchman to the house of Israel had to clear the way for new conceptions of art and creativity. These new problematics of vision as the essence of the crisis of subjectivity would pave the new poetic paths in Brenner's prose in the years following his flight from Russia, and the London reflections on vision and modernity would initiate the search for an adequate poetics to mirror present Jewish experience. This search is clearly captured through Brenner's intriguing treatment of the trope of London fog in the same essay quoted above, *From London, from Lvov and from Other Places*:

"[A]ll of us are in the 'fog' here, in the dark, smoggy, dusty fog. But you do not know, of course, naturally, what this fog is. For educated intelligentsia it is a dimness, something mystical, dark and lyrical. But, in reality, and for the half-intelligentsia, such as we are, it is nothing but the time when everything gets dark and turns into a cloud, a suffocating dark cloud […]. In times of 'fog' you do not see a thing until you stick your nose into this fog, and, even then, you do not see it, only through the fog, through dim.[22]"

The aesthetic manifesto for shaky hold of reality implied in this short piece says gazing through the fog. Each sentence here holds an account of the essence of writing in modern time and simultaneously performs a tense dialogue with European modern literary tradition. Through the solid articulation of the modern condition as the eclipse of seeing, this text joins the European discourse on the epistemic challenges of modern art. The debate goes half a century back to Gogol, who witnessed how the "unstable" and "arousing" historical reality stood in the way of "great" art,[23] and to John Ruskin, who described a new historical state of darkness that turned all things "impossible to arrest, and difficult to comprehend."[24] In Brenner's time, these concerns about the epistemological status of the object of art found their expressions through the multiple visual experiments of modernist artists who acknowledged and stressed the conditioned, subjective nature of seeing. One of the boldest expressions of these experiments was developed in a social sphere neighboring to Brenner's, by the painter Kazimir Malevich – a Konotop-born Ukrainian artist, who presented his concept of Suprematism in 1913, fundamentally contesting the essential foundations of pictorial representation.[25] At the same time, in Germany, Rainer Maria Rilke advanced his literary experiments of "annulation of gaze" in his revolutionary work of 1910 *The*

22 Ibid.

23 Nikolay Vasilyevich Gogol, Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh [Collected Works in Six Volumes], 6 vols., Moscow 1952, here vol. 6: Selected Essays and Letters, 1855.

24 John Ruskin, Modern Painters, 3 vols., New York 1863, here vol. 3, 254.

25 On Malevich's Suprematism, see Charlotte Douglas, Suprematism. The Sensible Dimension, in: The Russian Review 34 (July 1975), no. 3, 266–281. I wish to thank Inbal Ben-Asher Gitler for sharing with me her illuminating knowledge on Malevich and his visual modernism as well as this valuable source.

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Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge.[26] Interestingly enough, Brenner preceded the experiments of those celebrated European modernists. The relation of the Hebrew writer to the wider European developments in literary style is not one of simple imitation or passive acceptance of prevailing poetical trends. Furthermore, through his treatment of the celebrated symbol of the London fog, Brenner himself articulates his complex stance toward the European Symbolism. He ironically rejects the neo-romantic symbolist praise of mystery with its attraction to ambiguous figures, undermining it by the low-realism of the image of the nose stuck into the dark cloud. The relative status of celebrated classical symbols of European literature is made present once again through the witty comparison between the distinct experience-languages of the intelligentsia vs. the half-intelligentsia. These nuances delineate Brenner's search for an adequate language of representation, not only for the post-Enlightenment experience of loss of the fundamental foundations of rationalism, but for the Jewish, "half-intelligentsia's" historical experience, as well. As the following section will endeavor to demonstrate, the ocular modernist turn of the first decade contained a "Jewish moment" due to its strong political impulse of rejection of what Martin Jay called "scopic regimes of modernity."[27]

National Discourse and the Politics of Jewish Eyes

Johanan Marshak, the main hero of Brenner's 1907 play *Beyond the Limits*, is a Hebrew writer in London. His friend Dobe, who is in love with him, wonders why he is not willing to look straight at her:

> "Johanan: well, Dobe, go home, it's time. The hour is late. Why are you looking at me? Dobe: am I looking at you? It is you who is looking at me. Oh, but I almost forgot: seeing is the novelists' privilege, isn't it? Flesh and blood human beings are not entitled to this. You don't allow a single glance to go wasted, isn't it so? Look at me, please."[28]

Flesh and blood human beings were not entitled to look, says Dobe, only novelists. Clearly, she does not present her own views on that matter, but ironically reflects those of Johanan. What is not completely clear, however,

26 On the unique poetics of spectatorship in Rilke's Novel, see Eric L. Santner, On Creaturely Life. Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald, Chicago, Ill., 2006, 47–49. Santner sees in Rilke's novel the advent of "spectral materialism." The terminology presented above, "annulation of gaze," I owe to Nicolas Berg whom I thank for this conceptualization and the wise comments.

27 Jay, Downcast Eyes, 149–210.

28 Brenner, Ktavim, vol. 1: Short Stories, Novels, Plays, 873.

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is whether Dobe knows that Johanan himself rejects the realist novel and its scopic techniques of representation altogether. Prior to this scene, Johanan had already declared that there was no place for realist mimesis in present time and expressed his belief that symbolic realism was the right form for literary artistic expression.[29] Indeed, Marshak disdains seeing; in one place, he compares himself to a boy striving "to darken the darkening world."[30] This association of writing, creativity, this new ideal of humanity itself, with blindness, darkening gaze, which – in a striking opposition to the earlier imperative to have eyes – emerges in Brenner's works during the first decade, calls for close attention because Marshak is not alone in his surprising negation of seeing. In fact, practically no one sees clearly in Brenner's plots of wandering. The hero of his 1908 novella *From the Narrows*, 65-year-old reb Leibush, is a typesetter in a printing house who fled the 1905 pogroms in Warsaw to London. Brenner's narrator describes his constant blinking of eyes, as if he was "wondering about the place he stands in, in what sense is he standing there?"[31] And in the following sentences he adds:

> "Reb Leibush was not at all satisfied with this printing house: there is no order in it! Everything is not in its place, turned upside down, the windows are open, the cold is strong, and here the electron light … this he could not stand at all! He would work an additional two hours every day, he would work without his glasses on, if he could only get rid of this trouble – the electron light …"[32]

Reb Leibush's eyes are clearly representative of the epistemic distress in the strange metropole, but more so of his mental state as a Jewish refugee from the pogrom, humiliated and deprived of power. This might be the reason why the majority of Brenner's Jewish figures of his European prose are suffering from eye diseases, above all Trachoma, a disease widespread in poor areas at the time that could lead to blindness. Interestingly, Brenner's plots turn these eye diseases into the main obstacle of his heroes in their effort to set foot on dry land again. Thus, these plots draw clear parallels between seeing and sovereignty, or rather between their opposites, blindness and political nomadism. The mother of the nomadic family in the story *Nerves* (1910) is stopped numerous times by border inspectors because of her Trachoma, and the narrator repeatedly focuses on her oozing, infected eyes.[33] Similarly, we learn about Shmaya Taller, one of the protagonists of *From the Narrows*, who got stuck in London since he was not allowed to enter America because

29 Ibid., 773.
30 Ibid., 806.
31 Ibid., vol. 2, 1055.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 1238, 1243, and 1252.

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