

## ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: AN EDITOR IN ISRAEL: THE PERIODICALS OF AHAD HA'AM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN HEBREW LITERATURE

Noah L. Fabricant, Doctor of Philosophy, 2021

Dissertation directed by: Professor Eric Zakim,  
Comparative Literature Program

This dissertation argues for a reevaluation of the significance of Ahad Ha'am (Asher Ginsberg) in the development of modern Hebrew literature on the basis of his work as an editor of periodicals. Critics commonly portray Ahad Ha'am as rigid and didactic, enforcing his own literary norms while excluding aesthetic and humanistic literature in favor of literature with explicit Jewish themes. Reading the periodicals edited by Ahad Ha'am shows that this reputation is exaggerated; his work is in fact characterized by significant heterogeneity and flexibility.

This dissertation introduces the critical perspective and methodology of periodical studies to Hebrew literature. The first chapter shows how Ahad Ha'am as an editor brings diverse ideologies and Hebrew styles together in an organic whole, the "Odessa nusach," in the literary collection *Kaveret* (1890). The second chapter argues that Yehoshua Hana Ravnitsky, editor of *Pardes* (1892-1896), lacks the editorial skill and vision of Ahad Ha'am, and as a result *Pardes* is divisive and lacks

the unity of Ahad Ha'am's periodicals. The final two chapters are devoted to *Ha-Shiloah*, the most prestigious outlet for Hebrew literature of its era, founded and edited by Ahad Ha'am from 1896 to 1903. Chapter Three traces the history of the critical reception of Ahad Ha'am's controversy with Micha Yosef Berdichevsky over the boundaries of Hebrew literature, showing the development of a polarized standard account of the dispute that discredits Ahad Ha'am. Reading the original essays of the dispute in context shows that Ahad Ha'am's resistance to belles lettres and humanistic literature is far from absolute, and in a sense Ahad Ha'am authors the entire controversy by collaborating with and publishing Berdichevsky and his supporters. Finally, the dissertation uses the belletristic literature published by Ahad Ha'am in *Ha-Shiloah* to show that his selections as an editor were not as narrow as critics claim or even as Ahad Ha'am himself prescribes in his essays. As a periodical editor, Ahad Ha'am fostered diversity and dialogue, and this should be accounted for in evaluating his influence on the development of Hebrew literature.

AN EDITOR IN ISRAEL: THE PERIODICALS OF AHAD HA'AM IN THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN HEBREW LITERATURE

by

Noah L. Fabricant

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
2021

Advisory Committee:  
Professor Eric Zakim, Chair  
Professor Sheila Jelen  
Professor Josh Alvizu  
Professor Shay Hazkani  
Professor Elizabeth Papazian

© Copyright by  
Noah L. Fabricant  
2021

## Acknowledgements

This dissertation and the course of study it concludes were made possible by two extraordinary mentors. Professor Sheila Jelen welcomed me as a student and helped me navigate the personal and administrative challenges of pursuing graduate study with a full-time job and career outside of academia. Prof. Jelen first introduced me to modern Hebrew periodicals, and her expertise shaped the questions I set out to pursue in this project. As much as I value her wisdom, I have been affected most by Prof. Jelen's kindness. I was not always a diligent student, and those times that I came to her expecting rebuke or disappointment, I only ever received empathy, encouragement, and generosity.

When Professor Eric Zakim took over as my advisor, I had moved to a different state and made little progress on the project in several years. I considered giving up. Prof. Zakim encouraged me to stay the course, helped me see how it could be done, and has supported me continuously since that moment. His questions and insights shaped every part of this dissertation. He pushed me to clarify my thinking and sharpen my writing. Beyond academics, I am grateful for the humanity of Prof. Zakim's mentorship. He has guided me with humor, patience, and deep compassion. Quite simply, I could not have written this or any dissertation without him, and I will always be grateful.

In addition to Profs. Jelen and Zakim, I have benefited from the comments and suggestions of the members of my Dissertation Examining Committee:

Profs. Josh Alvizu, Shay Hazkani, Elizabeth Papazian, and our Dean's

Representative, Prof. Maxine Grossman. This diverse group made my Dissertation Examination an uplifting and memorable milestone. I am also grateful to Dr. Agnieszka Legutko and Prof. Christina Walter, who served with Profs. Jelen and Zakim on my Qualifying Examination Committee and helped me develop a reading list in Hebrew, Yiddish, and modernity that continues to serve me well.

At the University of Maryland, my studies were co-funded by the Comparative Literature Program and The Joseph and Rebecca Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Studies. I am grateful for the opportunity to learn and teach in both programs.

Looking back on my path to these doctoral studies, I am fortunate to be a student of many beloved teachers. Dr. Irit Aharony of Harvard University was my first Hebrew teacher, and she instilled in me a lifelong love of modern Hebrew language, literature, and culture. My rabbinical studies at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Jerusalem and Cincinnati allowed me to place myself in the millennia-long conversation of the “ruah,” the spirit of the Jewish people. Dr. Michael Meyer taught me to view Reform Judaism as a “response to modernity,” which inspired me to seek responses to modernity in Hebrew literature. Rabbi Dr. Edward Goldman believed I could be both a congregational rabbi and a scholar and encouraged me not to give up on either. Rabbi Kenneth Kanter is a mentor who has become a dear friend, and he has taught me much as both.

As a congregational rabbi, I have been blessed to serve communities that have valued and supported my continuing education. I offer thanks to my clergy and staff colleagues and to the lay leadership and membership of Washington Hebrew

Congregation in Washington, D.C., Temple Beth Or in Washington Township, New Jersey, and Kol Dorot: A Reform Jewish Community in Oradell, New Jersey.

My family made this achievement possible for me, out of love. My parents, Jeri Warhaftig and Neil Fabricant, have given me everything it is possible to give. My daughters, Lorraine Harwin and Frances Harwin, were both born during the preparation of this dissertation. I hope it will someday make them proud and inspire their own ambitious learning.

This dissertation would not exist but for the loving support of my wife, Alexandra Harwin. She did more than her fair share for our family, so that I would have the time and space to do this. She held my hand through the doubts and despair that this writing sometimes entailed. In the end, she read this dissertation in its entirety, and as the best editor I know, she saved me from many errors. I dedicate this work to her with love.

This dissertation was written during the coronavirus pandemic of 2020. As a result, many sources I would have liked to consult were unavailable. As with everything in this strange and terrible year, I have tried to make the most out of what I have. I have been blessed, and I am grateful.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Introduction — Mirror, Melting Pot, Mosaic .....	1
Odessa as a Center of Hebrew Culture .....	7
Characterizing the Odessa Nusach.....	9
Engaging Periodical Studies .....	17
Plan of the Dissertation.....	21
Chapter 1 — <i>Kaveret</i> : Ahad Ha'am's First Editorial Message .....	26
The Origins of Benei Moshe and <i>Kaveret</i> .....	28
<i>Kaveret</i> Description and Overview.....	31
The Rhetoric of Past and Present .....	36
Ruah and Jewish Continuity .....	45
Ruah and the Hebrew Language.....	51
Conclusion .....	61
Chapter 2 — A Lack of Editorial Vision: Reform and Haskalah in <i>Pardes</i> .....	64
<i>Pardes</i> and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitsky.....	68
Approach to German-Style Reform Judaism.....	71
<i>Pardes</i> and Haskalah.....	83
Chapter 3 — The Ahad Ha'am-Berdichevsky Controversy in Context and Hebrew Literary Criticism.....	96
<i>Ha-Shiloah</i> and Ahad Ha'am.....	99
Ahad Ha'am, Berdichevsky, and the “Young Writers” .....	104
Critical Reception of the Ahad Ha'am-Berdichevsky Controversy .....	106
Early Critical Accounts.....	108
The State of Israel and The Standard Narrative .....	114
Recent Studies.....	116
Texts of the Ahad Ha'am-Berdichevsky Controversy .....	122
“Te'udat <i>Ha-Shiloah</i> ” .....	124
“Al Parashat Derakhim” .....	132
“Tzorekh ve-Yekholet” .....	139
The Other Young Writers .....	144
“Eitzah Tovah”.....	150
“‘Tzorekh ve-Yekholet’ be-Sifroteinu ha-Yafah” .....	153
The Discourse Breaks Down .....	156
Conclusion .....	162
Chapter 4 — Belletristic Literature in <i>Ha-Shiloah</i> .....	164
From the Expected to the Unexpected .....	166
Universalism and Humanism.....	167
Encounters with Nature.....	172

Descents Into Madness .....	175
Berdichevsky's Contributions.....	183
Conclusion .....	189
Conclusion .....	192
Bibliography .....	202

## Introduction — Mirror, Melting Pot, Mosaic

Modern Hebrew literature was first formed piece by piece in periodicals, not just in books.... Without them this creation is completely obscured. This coming into being, this formation – it cannot be seen in the isolated book, but in the periodicals, a kind of stage and shofar for the generation. Paging through “*Ha-Shiloah*,” we see how modern Hebrew literature was created. We see the stories of Mendele, later collected in books, which were published before Mendele was a great name; we not only find poems by Bialik, by Tchernichovsky, by Yaakov Cohen, etc., but we feel the atmosphere that surrounded them. It is a mirror, and more so: It is a melting pot.<sup>1</sup>

Twentieth-century critic Israel Cohen gives several reasons why reading original periodicals is necessary for modern Hebrew literary studies. As modern Hebrew literature emerged, periodicals served as a “stage,” a platform for writers of each new generation to be recognized and enter the discourse of modern Hebrew letters. And periodicals were a “shofar,” the ceremonial ram’s horn, which not only amplified their voices to the whole Jewish people, but symbolized continuity with the Jewish past, going back to the Hebrew Bible. Like a physical stage, these platforms were not neutral and open to all; their gatekeeping determined the authors and works that would reach the Hebrew reading public. And as the shofar in the Bible is used to call the people to war and assembly or in later Jewish thought as a call for spiritual and moral awakening, periodicals functioned as a call to action in the period where

---

<sup>1</sup> "הספרות העברית החדשה נתרקמה תחילה חטיבות חטיבות בכתבי-עת ולא רק בספרים.... בלעדיהם היצירה בכלל עלומה. כי ההתהוות, ההתקמות – אותה אי אפשר לראות בספר הנפרד, אלא בכתבי-העת, שהם מעין במת הדור ושופרו. כשנדפדף ב'השילוח' נראה כיצד נוצרה הספרות העברית החדשה. נראה שם את סיפורי מנדלי, שכונסו אח"כ בספרים, שהודפסו עוד בטרם היה למנדלי שמו הגדול; נמצא לא רק שירים של ביאליק, של טשרניחובסקי, של יעקב כהן וכו', אלא נרגיש גם את האווירה האופפת אותם. זוהי אספקלריה, יותר מכך: זהו כור היתוך" Israel Cohen, "Al kitvei eit ve-al ketav eit merkazi" ["On Periodicals and On a Central Periodical"], *Aspaklariyot [Mirrors]* (Massada, 1968), 250. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

Hebrew literature was inextricably linked to the conversation around Jewish nationalism. These “stage” and “shofar” effects can only be appreciated when the original periodical is taken as the object of study.

Cohen says that reading canonical works in the periodicals where they originally appeared allows us to “feel the atmosphere that surrounded them.” What literary trends, contemporary concerns, and popular tastes were they influenced by and responding to? How would the reader’s reception of a work be colored by what they read on the facing page? Was the content or form of a work exceptional or widely shared? This contextual insight, so relevant to the meaning of a work in the development of Hebrew literature, is lost when the work is stripped from its periodical setting.

Finally, Cohen offers two metaphors for the modern Hebrew periodical: the mirror and the melting pot. The periodical is a mirror because it reflects the circumstances of its production. Because they are inherently multivocal and ephemeral, periodicals capture a cultural moment in a way that stable and authoritative books do not. The melting pot metaphor suggests that the periodical context transforms individual literary contributions. This contextual meaning is lost when these writings are studied on their own.

It is no accident that Cohen takes *Ha-Shiloah*, the literary journal founded by Ahad Ha’am in 1896, as his example. *Ha-Shiloah* was not only the most prestigious outlet for modern Hebrew literature in its day, it is also the best example of a periodical whose selection process, editing, organization, and context contribute significantly to its meaning and influence. In Ahad Ha’am’s hands, *Ha-Shiloah* was a

mirror and a melting pot, and its significance is best perceived when the periodical as a whole is taken as the object of study. Reading *Ha-Shiloah* and the periodicals produced by Ahad Ha'am's circle leading up to it reveals the profound importance of Ahad Ha'am's work as an editor in the development of modern Hebrew literature.

This dissertation focuses on three periodicals produced by Ahad Ha'am and his intellectual circle in Odessa at the end of the nineteenth century: *Kaveret* (1890), *Pardes* (1892-1896), and *Ha-Shiloah*, founded and edited by Ahad Ha'am from 1896 until his resignation in 1903. During this period, Ahad Ha'am was a leading figure in the Jewish nationalist movement Hibbat Zion and in Hebrew letters; under the banner of cultural nationalism, he consciously worked at forging modern Hebrew culture, its literature and language. These three periodicals disseminated the Odessa nusach, a cultural sensibility and new Hebrew style, to modernizing Jews throughout Europe. They are emblematic of the Teḥiyah (Revival) period in Hebrew literary history, forming a bridge between the artificial, constrained Hebrew writing of the Haskalah and the more organic, sophisticated modernism that developed after the turn of the century.

As vital as these periodicals are to the development of modern Hebrew literature, they are rarely read or discussed in their original formats. Studying periodicals has inherent difficulties: The full run of a periodical often represents an inconveniently large body of writing. Turn-of-the-century almanacs and general journals published pieces across genres and fields of inquiry; a present-day reader is unlikely to have the interest or expertise to closely read works that span Zionist politics, Wissenschaft des Judentums, current events, cultural theory, literature, etc.

Because they typically lack indices, investigating specific topics is difficult.<sup>2</sup> While some of the material is digitized and searchable, scans vary widely in quality, and searches are unreliable. Because they were produced to be ephemeral, complete runs of a given periodical can be difficult to access or be inconsistently preserved (lacking front and back matter, for example).<sup>3</sup>

For these reasons, the literary legacy of a periodical is often based on a few isolated selections and the accounts of secondary sources. This is certainly the case for Ahad Ha'am's periodicals. Many of the authors and works published in these journals became canonical—Mendele, Bialik, Berdichevsky, Ahad Ha'am himself—and the journals are associated with their well-known contributions. *Pardes*, for example, is best known for including Bialik's first published poem, "El ha-tzippor," despite the poem and poetry in general being marginal to the concerns of the journal. In the critical imagination, *Ha-Shiloah* is often defined by the goals that Ahad Ha'am lays out in the opening pages of the first issue, regardless of what was published in the issues and years that followed. The challenges of studying whole periodicals directly makes it more likely that right or wrong, critical narratives will go unchallenged. Claims that *Kaveret* is primarily a political manifesto for Ahad Ha'am's Benei Moshe faction of Hibbat Zion or that *Ha-Shiloah* represents the most consistent, refined Hebrew style of its era pass from one generation of critics to the next as received wisdom. Non-canonical authors and works are forgotten, and the

---

<sup>2</sup> There is an index to *Ha-Shiloah*: Yehoshua Barzilai (Fulman), *Ha-Shilo'ah, 1896–1927: Bibliografiyah* (Tel Aviv, 1964). While Barzilai gives a full list of the contributions to *Ha-Shiloah* by author and by title, the subject index is limited.

<sup>3</sup> This has been called "the hole in the archive." See Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, "The Rise of Periodical Studies," *PMLA* 121, no. 2 (2006): 517-531.

interplay of selections in the periodical is not taken into account, let alone such “external” considerations as format, design, advertisements, and such.

In 1995, *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History* produced a special issue on “The Role of Periodicals in the Formation of Modern Jewish Identity.” In his introduction to the issue, Alan Mintz identifies a bias on the part of literary and cultural critics against the “bustle and busy-ness” of periodicals, in favor of the salience and stability of books.<sup>4</sup> Despite the fact that the most important innovations in modern Jewish culture—debates and developments in language and literature, politics, religion, and scholarship—played out in the pages of newspapers, journals, and occasional collections, those writings are best known through later anthologies, removed from the periodical context. Mintz addresses this methodological deficit: “Developing a new set of critical practices for approaching the radically polyglot nature of the periodical text is a challenge of no small order.” This practical challenge reflects a deeper lack, the “absence of a *theory* of the periodical,” and here, Mintz laments, “there is not much help to be gotten from the world of general literature.”

Twenty-five years later, this gap in Hebrew literary studies remains. Although modern Hebrew periodicals have continually been mined for primary sources, they have not been substantially considered as “autonomous objects of study,” rather than “containers of discrete information.”<sup>5</sup> But now, the progress of “Periodical Studies” offers the theoretical and methodological help that Mintz sought. This dissertation introduces the perspective of Periodical Studies to modern Hebrew literary studies.

---

<sup>4</sup> Alan Mintz, “The Many Rather Than the One: On the Critical Study of Jewish Periodicals.” *Prooftexts* 15, no. 1 (1995): 1-4.

<sup>5</sup> Latham and Scholes, “The Rise of Periodical Studies,” 517–518.

Bringing the Periodical Studies approach to Ahad Ha'am's publications allows us to reevaluate his literary contributions, correcting the bias introduced by later critics who disdained his cultural politics. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Ahad Ha'am's influence had waned. His cultural program had been eclipsed by Theodor Herzl's political Zionism. In literature, a new generation of modernist writers defined themselves in opposition to his style and norms. Ahad Ha'am was regarded as parochial and rigid, a relic of a past era.<sup>6</sup> To what extent was this critical evaluation, which continues to inflect Hebrew literary scholarship, justified? Or did Ahad Ha'am's association with Europe and hesitations about political Zionism lead writers and critics in the Yishuv and State of Israel to mischaracterize and reject him?

This inquiry will also allow us to incorporate Ahad Ha'am's work as an editor and publisher into our understanding of his literary legacy. Ahad Ha'am was not a prolific writer. A great deal of his time and effort went into corresponding with authors, selecting submissions, and editing them for publication: creating a cohesive whole. This "authorial" function of the periodical editor finds greatest expression in *Ha-Shiloah*. To what extent does Ahad Ha'am's work as an editor match the literary doctrine expressed in his famous essays? Where they differ, how can we incorporate Ahad Ha'am's impact as an editor into an account of his literary sensibility and influence?

---

<sup>6</sup> See Dan Miron, *Bodedim be-mo'adam: li-diyokanah shel ha-republikah ha-sifrutit ha-Ivrit bi-tehilat ha-me'ah ha-esrim* [When Loners Come Together: A Portrait of Hebrew Literature at the Turn of the Twentieth Century] (Am Oved, 1987), 354; Stanley Nash, "Ahad Ha-Am and 'Ahad Ha-Amism': The Onset of Crisis." In *At the Crossroads: Essays on Ahad Ha'am*, ed. Jacques Kornberg (SUNY Press, 1983), 73-83.

This dissertation argues that the periodicals produced by Ahad Ha'am and his Odessa circle in the 1890s are more flexible and heterogenous than they are generally described. The periodicals are polyvocal, including a range of views and modes of expression even on the most fundamental issues. In many ways they are experimental and anticipate some of the modernist innovations of the early twentieth century.

Ahad Ha'am did not merely tolerate this diversity—he used it. As an editor, he juxtaposed different genres, topics, styles, and ideological positions to produce a tapestry of Hebrew literary expression. The boundaries of that tapestry went far beyond the doctrine he espoused in his essays. Focus on Ahad Ha'am's explicit doctrine to the exclusion of his work as an editor, combined with the political biases of Zionist literary history, have created a stereotype that later writers could define themselves against.

### **Odessa as a Center of Hebrew Culture**

At the end of the nineteenth century, historical and cultural factors combined to make Odessa a flourishing and progressive center of Hebrew literature and culture, home to a circle of cultural authorities—the “Sages of Odessa”—who exerted a powerful normative influence on the style, subject matter, and ideology of modern Hebrew literature.<sup>7</sup> The Jewish presence in Odessa began in the 1820s, when Galician

---

<sup>7</sup> See Steven Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881* (Stanford University Press, 1985); Ezra Spicehandler, “Odessa as a Literary Center” in *The Great Transition: The Recovery of the Lost Centers of Modern Hebrew Literature*, eds. Glenda Abramson and Tudor Parfitt (Rowman and Allenhend, 1985); Shachar Pinsker, *Literary Passports: The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe* (Stanford University Press, 2011), 39-48.

Jews from the city of Brody immigrated to Odessa to engage in the grain trade on the Black Sea. They were strongly influenced by the Haskalah (the European Jewish enlightenment) and established liberal religious practices and modern educational institutions. By the mid-nineteenth century, Odessa was the most influential center of modern Jewish religious and cultural institutions in the Russian Empire. Odessa became a gathering place for Jewish writers in Hebrew (Peretz Smolenskin, Alexander Zederbaum, Simon Dubnow) and Yiddish (S.Y. Abramovitsh, Avrom Goldfadn, Shimen Frug), and it was the center of Jewish periodical publication in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Russian. It was famous for music and opera and was the birthplace of Yiddish theater.

In the 1880s and 1890s, Odessa became the center of the Hibbat Zion Jewish nationalist movement, under the organizational leadership of Leon Pinsker. Ahad Ha'am settled in Odessa in 1886 and quickly became the leading figure in both Zionism and Hebrew letters in the Russian Empire. The presence of Ahad Ha'am, S.Y. Abramovitsh (known by the name of his literary persona, Mendele Mokher Sforim), Sholem Aleichem, and other prominent literary figures in Hebrew and Yiddish led many Jewish writers to settle in the city. For example, Yosef Klausner's family relocated to Odessa in 1885 to participate in the activities of Hibbat Zion; Klausner became a disciple of Ahad Ha'am, eventually taking over for him as editor of *Ha-Shiloah*, and after immigrating to Palestine he shaped the canon of modern Hebrew literature as the first professor of that subject at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Hayyim Nahman Bialik left the traditional confines of the Volozhin Yeshiva in 1891 to embark on a literary career in Odessa. In the 1890s, these Hebrew

and Yiddish elites came to be known as the “Sages of Odessa,” and in addition to producing many influential periodicals and published works, they were a beacon to young Jewish writers, including the pioneers of Hebrew modernism, who made “pilgrimages” to Odessa make personal contact with its luminaries.

With the rise of the Hibbat Zion at the end of the nineteenth century, the audience for modern Hebrew periodicals in Eastern Europe and the Russian Empire increased dramatically, and numerous publishing venues were available to authors and readers. Beginning in 1886, three separate daily newspapers were published in Hebrew: *Ha-Melitz* and *Ha-Yom* in Saint Petersburg and *Ha-Tzefirah* in Warsaw. Each of these included some literary selections, as well as literary and cultural criticism. The weekly *Ha-Maggid*, published during the 1890s in Berlin, Krakow, and Vienna, published young writers. Annual anthologies, such as Nahum Sokolow’s *He-Asif* and *Luah Ahiasaf*, were a popular format bringing together literature and essays. The writers of the Odessa school were involved with many of these publications as contributors, editors, critics, and correspondents.

### **Characterizing the Odessa Nusach**

Critical engagement with the periodicals of Ahad Ha’am’s circle begins with the periodicals themselves. They are deeply self-aware, providing metacommentary and analysis of their own literary and cultural innovations. In *Kaveret*, Mendele Mokher Sforim’s story “Shem ve-Yafet ba-agalah” (“Shem and Japheth on the Train”) is preceded by a critical appreciation by Zalman Epstein, “Rehov ha-Yehudim ve-sofrah” (“The Jewish Street and Its Author”). Epstein praises Mendele: “The style

of his language...is absolutely simple, without gimmicks, without exaggeration, as befits a realistic writer, whose prime concern is the truth of the life depicted.”<sup>8</sup>

Epstein elevates social realism and clear, direct style as a model for Hebrew literature.

This differs somewhat from the most famous paean to Mendele’s style, found in a short essay by the poet Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik. Bialik credits Mendele with crafting a new “nusach” in Hebrew.<sup>9</sup> In Jewish worship, a nusach is a musical mode for chanting prayers. According to Bialik, Mendele’s Hebrew style is a template that can be used by anyone to express themselves, just as a musical nusach can be adapted to many different prayers. Robert Alter explains that Mendele’s major innovation was to base his grammar and syntax on Rabbinic Hebrew, which allows for greater precision and flexibility than the Hebrew of the Bible. Mendele also incorporated a profusion of vocabulary and idioms from all stages of post-Biblical Hebrew, greatly expanding the expressiveness of his language.<sup>10</sup>

The term “nusach” is commonly used as a description of the writing not only of Mendele Mokher Sforim, but of all the Hebrew literati in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Odessa, especially Ahad Ha’am. As the “Odessa nusach,” it refers not only to a characteristic style, but literary subjects and ideology. Dan Miron lists four defining characteristics of nusach literature, and only the first is stylistic. They are: 1) the

---

<sup>8</sup> סגנון לשונו...פשוט בתכלית, מבלי צעצועים, מבלי הפרזות, כיאות לסופר רעאלי, אשר העיקר אצלו “ *Kaveret*, 43. Note that this evaluation is quite different from Bialik’s description of Mendele’s Hebrew style in “Yotzeir ha-nusach.”

<sup>9</sup> “Yotzeir ha-nusach” [“Creator of the Nusach”], 1910.

<sup>10</sup> “Inventing Hebrew Prose,” in *Hebrew and Modernity* (Indiana University Press, 1994), 53.

“norm of clarity”—clarity of logic, description, and psychological motivation; 2) collectivism; 3) “criticism through identification”—critical reflection or outcry born not out of distance, but fellow feeling; and 4) historicity or continuity with the Jewish past.<sup>11</sup> The last three of these are core elements of Ahad Ha’am’s cultural nationalism, which shows how closely the term “nusach” is associated with Ahad Ha’am’s general worldview, at least by some.<sup>12</sup> The concept of the Odessa nusach can be frustratingly vague, as various authors and critics define it differently, usually in whatever way is convenient to define themselves against it.

Since the 1890s, even before the term was introduced, the progress of Hebrew modernism has been charted in relation or opposition to the standard of the Odessa nusach. Yosef Klausner, in an essay in 1907, categorized all of the “young literature” in Hebrew based on its degree of adherence to the norms of Ahad Ha’am.<sup>13</sup> One finds the same approach in the early twentieth-century criticism of Yehoshua Ravnitsky and Shlomo Tzemach.<sup>14</sup> The dichotomy persists in contemporary scholarship. Robert Alter introduced the term “anti-nusach” to describe the conscious rejection of the Odessa norms in the poetics of modernists such as Gnessin, Brenner, and Fogel.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Dan Miron, “Al ‘Hakhmei Odessa” [“On the ‘Sages of Odessa’”], in *Zeman Yehudi ḥadash: tarbut Yehudit be-eydan ḥiloni* [*New Jewish Time: Jewish Culture in a Secular Age*], eds. Yirmiyahu Yovel, David Shacham, et. al (Keter, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> The first criterion, clarity of logic, description, and psychological motivation, is also more characteristic of Ahad Ha’am’s Hebrew style than Mendele’s.

<sup>13</sup> *Ha-Zeramim ha-ḥadashim shel ha-sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-Tze’irah* [*The New Trends in the Young Hebrew Literature*] (Ivriyah, 1907).

<sup>14</sup> Other critics, such as Ben-Avigdor and Bal Maḥshoves, objected to such Ahad Ha’am-centric schemes. See Gershon Shaked, *Ha-Sipporet ha-Ivrit, 1880-1980* [*Hebrew Fiction, 1880-1980*], vol. 1 (HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1977), 275-278.

<sup>15</sup> *The Invention of Hebrew Prose: Modern Fiction and the Language of Realism* (University of Washington Press, 1988).

Chana Kronfeld claims that the short-lived authoritative norm of the Odessa nusach, by engendering the automatization of discourse necessary for rebellion and rejuvenation, “enabled the modernist Hebrew poets to turn their defective polysystem into a source of strength.”<sup>16</sup> Jordan Finkin creates a new category, describing the Hebrew style of I.L. Peretz as “proto-anti-nusach” for its use of references to Rabbinic literature in “freighted and often subversive ways.”<sup>17</sup>

The strong binary opposition underlying this whole history of interpretation relies on the premise that the Odessa nusach is rigid, consistent, and clear. The periodical readings in this study argue that language and style of Ahad Ha’am’s camp was not so definite or static. It embraced a multitude of voices, which related to the historical strata of Hebrew, Jewish intertexts, and the relationship of Hebrew to other languages in a variety of ways. Some of these were rejected by the young modernists, but not all. Much more than the modernists or later critics were willing to admit, the Hebrew style fostered by Ahad Ha’am displayed the seeds of flexibility and experimentation that the modernists claimed as their own.

Just as the development of Hebrew literary style has been described as movement from nusach to anti-nusach, so too Hebrew critics have argued for a strict divide between Ahad Ha’am’s view of the proper role and content of literature and the literary philosophy of the younger generation. This opposition underlies the treatment of Ahad Ha’am in nearly all comprehensive literary histories, such as those

---

<sup>16</sup> *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (University of California Press, 1996), 89-90.

<sup>17</sup> *A Rhetorical Conversation: Jewish Discourse in Modern Yiddish Literature* (Penn State University Press, 2010), 14-15.

of Lachower, Ben Avigdor, Sadan, Halkin, and Shaked.<sup>18</sup> The binary takes many forms: Ahad Ha'am is positivist, rigid, parochial, and coldly rational, while the young modernists are romantic, innovative, universalist, and humanist. Ahad Ha'am upholds the liberalism of Herbert Spencer, while the young writers, especially Micha Yosef Berdichevsky, are drawn to Friedrich Nietzsche.

In recent generations, the binary is represented most starkly by Dan Miron. In *Bodedim be-mo'adam* (*When Loners Come Together*, 1987), Miron describes how the negation of Ahad Ha'am, which began in the notorious controversy with Berdichevsky in the 1890s, intensified after the turn of the century. He quotes Bialik, who mocks Yosef Brenner's association of Ahad Ha'am with the "lexicon of yesterday"—"Judaism, culture, nation, history, science, progress"—and the young generation of writers with the "lexicon of today"—"art, creativity, individual, mystery, revolution."<sup>19</sup> Iris Parush makes a similar argument regarding Brenner's rejection of Ahad Ha'am.<sup>20</sup>

More recently, Miron proposes several philosophical grounds on which Berdichevsky supplanted Ahad Ha'am. Miron writes that Ahad Ha'am was mistaken to believe that no "genuinely poetic" Hebrew expression could exist until a spoken Hebrew language had been established in a Jewish national home, while Berdichevsky contended that literary language emerged through a transformation of

---

<sup>18</sup> The exception here is Klausner, Ahad Ha'am's disciple, who gives his mentor more credit for the developments in Hebrew that followed.

<sup>19</sup> Miron, *Bodedim be-mo'adam*, 354.

<sup>20</sup> Iris Parush, *Kanon sifrut ve-idiyologiyah le-umit: bikoret ha-sifrut shel Frishman be-hashva'ah le-vikoret ha-sifrut shel Klausner u-Vrenner* [*Literary Canon and National Ideology: Frishman's Literary Criticism Compared to the Literary Criticism of Klausner and Brenner*] (Mossad Bialik, 1992).

linguistic elements in an encounter with the subjectivity of the individual writer, regardless of the social function of the language.<sup>21</sup> According to Miron, Ahad Ha'am incorrectly believed in "a supra-historical collective Jewish historical psyche in which Hebrew was the only linguistic link," while Berdichevsky embraced the reality of language diversity in the Jewish people and upheld the value of Yiddish literature.<sup>22</sup>

Some recent studies have begun to problematize the black-and-white opposition of Ahad Ha'am and the young modernists. Both Hanan Hever and Michael Gluzman disrupt the idea that Ahad Ha'am insists that Hebrew literature have a collective nationalist subject, while Berdichevsky upholds autonomy and individual subjectivity. Hever shows that Berdichevsky's appeal to existential needs, the source of the "tear in the heart," sets up an alternative collective subject.<sup>23</sup> Gluzman shows that Berdichevsky's collective cry, "The place is too narrow for us!", is itself nationalist, subsuming the individual within the group.<sup>24</sup> In a recent dissertation, Roni Henig finds common ideological ground between Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky: both are invested in the "revival" of the Hebrew language, though they differ on the role of aestheticization in that revival. Both accept the figure of the "tear in the heart," as they circle and accuse each other of exacerbating it.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford University Press, 2010), 94.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-96.

<sup>23</sup> *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon: Nation Building and Minority Discourse* (New York University Press, 2002), 12-18.

<sup>24</sup> *The Politics of Canonicity: Lines of Resistance in Modernist Hebrew Poetry* (Stanford University Press, 2003), 25-28.

<sup>25</sup> Roni Henig, *Life of the Non-Living: Nationalization, Language and the Narrative of "Revival" in Modern Hebrew Literary Discourse*, PhD diss., Columbia University, 2018, 21-74.

This study joins those just mentioned in questioning the narrative that places Ahad Ha'am in complete opposition to the younger generation of Hebrew writers who came after him. The periodicals show how Ahad Ha'am's literary activity was continuous with the innovations of the next generation. My critique of the binary opposition goes a step further. Hever, Gluzman, and Henig all collapse the binary by arguing that Berdichevsky is advocating a nationalist position, essentially moving Berdichevsky to the position of Ahad Ha'am. This study attempts to collapse the binary from the other direction, showing that in fact, Ahad Ha'am's literary activity is not as rigid and parochial as it has been portrayed. His activity as editor and participant in these periodicals reveals linguistic flexibility, humanism, and appreciation of subjectivity—precisely the characteristics he is accused of neglecting.

In pursuing this revision, I follow Shachar Pinsker's *Literary Passports: The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe* (2011). Pinsker argues that modernism in Hebrew prose fiction arose in the period from 1900 to 1930 as a result of young writers struggling with issues of Hebrew identity in contact with “the shifting terrain of European modernity.”<sup>26</sup> Pinsker's method of incorporating cultural history, biography, and literary analysis has influenced my approach here. Pinsker also claims that the story of Hebrew modernism in Europe has not been adequately told, because the literary history of modern Hebrew literature is linked to the Zionist narrative, which focuses on settlement in Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel. In order to conduct his analysis, he challenges himself to set aside that teleological narrative “and instead to capture the Hebrew, Jewish, and European

---

<sup>26</sup> *Literary Passports*, 8.

cultural landscape in the uniqueness and complexity of this time and place.”<sup>27</sup> I believe this is also what is necessary to gain a new perspective on the literary activity of Ahad Ha’am and the Odessa circle.

Pinsker states this challenge in productive terms in an essay related to his research for *Literary Passports*.<sup>28</sup> He notes that Gershon Shaked’s monumental history of modern Hebrew fiction does not include the European writers of 1900-1930 among the “modernists.” Pinsker theorizes several ways in which this choice relates to Shaked’s being embedded in the Israeli context and Zionist ideology of the 1950s and 1960s, for example by following the common account of the origins of modernism in Hebrew poetry in Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s. According to Pinsker, Shaked fully acknowledges this bias, which is an authentic expression of his personal history. Pinsker writes, “The time has come, though, not only to criticize the limitations and theoretical problems of this national-teleological model of literary history (and this has been done amply), but more importantly, to move beyond it.”<sup>29</sup> Much of the negation of Ahad Ha’am by literary historians must be attributed to the political rejection of Ahad Ha’am by the Herzlian Zionist narrative. In attempting to read Ahad Ha’am’s literary activity separately from that narrative, this dissertation also responds to Pinsker’s call.

Finally, this dissertation relies and builds on the biographical and documentary material in three works that are part of a reappraisal of Ahad Ha’am at

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Shachar Pinsker, “The Challenges of Writing a Literary History of Early Modernist Hebrew Fiction: Gershon Shaked and Beyond,” *Hebrew Studies* 49 (2008): 291-298.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 297.

the turn of the twenty-first century. Yosef Goldstein's biography is extremely detailed and helpful in reconstructing Ahad Ha'am's movements across Europe, especially in the busy period leading up to the publication of *Ha-Shiloah*.<sup>30</sup> Shulamit Laskov's documentary history, illustrating Ahad Ha'am's life through countless letters and other writings of Ahad Ha'am and others, clarifies Ahad Ha'am's personal relationships, which often cast his public writings in a new light.<sup>31</sup> Steven Zipperstein's *Elusive Prophet: Ahad Ha'am and the Origins of Zionism* is a definitive biography and provides great insight into Ahad Ha'am's internal world and political significance. In his introduction, Zipperstein claims that far more than other Zionist leaders, Ahad Ha'am's impact has been difficult for scholars to describe.<sup>32</sup> Zipperstein seeks to "reread Ahad Ha'am's life without the pieties of the past." Zipperstein's rereading focuses on Ahad Ha'am's nationalist activities and ideology, but there is still a need for a parallel rereading of Ahad Ha'am's literary activity. This dissertation is a contribution to that project.

### **Engaging Periodical Studies**

In the last fifteen years, scholars in fields including English, comparative literature, cultural studies, and digital humanities have addressed themselves to the particular theoretical and practical issues associated with analyzing periodicals. The

---

<sup>30</sup> Yosef Goldstein, *Ahad Ha'am: Biografiyah [Ahad Ha'am: A Biography]* (Keter, 1992).

<sup>31</sup> Shulamit Laskov, *Hayyei Ahad Ha'am: pesifas mitokh ketavav u-khetavim aherim [The Life of Ahad Ha'am: A Mosaic from His Writings and Other Writings]* (University of Tel Aviv, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> *Elusive Prophet*, xviii.

coalescence of these efforts under the name “Periodical Studies” began with a 2006 article by Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, “The Changing Profession: The Rise of Periodical Studies.”<sup>33</sup> They attribute the academy’s renewed engagement with periodicals primarily to two factors. The first is the cultural turn in the humanities and social sciences, which has broadened interest in print culture beyond the canonical genres and media. The second development underlying the rise of periodical studies is the expanded access to primary sources made possible by various digitization efforts. For example, the *Modernist Journals Project*, a joint effort of Brown University and the University of Tulsa, seeks to digitize and make publicly available English-language periodicals that appeared during the years 1890-1922. Thomson Gale and ProQuest have made available over 100 years of issues of the *London Times* and the *New York Times*, respectively. These projects and others like them have made available massive amounts of primary source material that were previously difficult to access; also, digital indexing, search functionality, and other tools have made possible modes of analysis that would be impossible to conduct with printed texts, especially when dealing with large corpora, as is often the case with long-running periodicals.

The same factors that have led to productive work in periodical studies in English favor applying this approach to Hebrew literature. In recent decades Hebrew literary studies have also experienced the “cultural turn.” The linguistic studies that dominated the early and mid-twentieth century have given way to analyses based on

---

<sup>33</sup> Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, “The Changing Profession: The Rise of Periodical Studies,” *PMLA* 121, no. 2 (2006): 517-531.

the living conditions of authors and readers and the means of production of literary works.<sup>34</sup> And while the availability and sophistication of digital versions of Hebrew periodicals do not approach those of their English counterparts, digitization has made available numerous Hebrew periodicals that were previously all-but-inaccessible to scholars. The *Early Hebrew Newspapers Project* of the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem and the *JPress-Historical Jewish Press* initiative of Tel Aviv University and the National Library of Israel have made available many Jewish newspapers and journals that appeared from the middle of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. Google's partnership with university libraries has led to the digitization of numerous Hebrew periodicals, albeit in an unsystematic way. Some of these materials are freely available, while others are included in scholarly services, such as the HathiTrust Digital Library.

Latham and Scholes emphasize that the nature of periodicals themselves dictates different techniques of reading and analysis:

We have often been too quick to see magazines merely as containers of discrete bits of information rather than autonomous objects of study. The rapid expansion of new media technologies over the last two decades, however, has begun to transform the way we view, handle, and gain access to these objects. This immediacy, in turn, reveals these objects to us anew, so that we have begun to see them not as resources to be disaggregated into their individual components but as texts requiring new methodologies and new types of collaborative investigation.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> For example, both Allison Schachter's *Diasporic Modernisms: Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century* (2011) and Shachar Pinsker's *Literary Passports: The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe* (2011) address the migration of writers among the various Hebrew literary centers of Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century.

<sup>35</sup> Latham and Scholes, "The Changing Profession," 518.

An overview of those new methodologies is provided by Scholes and Clifford Wulfman in a book chapter helpfully titled, “How to Study a Modern Magazine.”<sup>36</sup> Their technique for analyzing a periodical involves 1) forming an idea of the implied reader of the periodical and comparing it to actual circulation, 2) specifying the periodical’s history and physical format, 3) analyzing the contributors and contents of an issue—including the kinds of pieces published and the space given to each, and 4) considering the role of the editor.<sup>37</sup> They advise studying a periodical as a whole object, taking into account advertisements, images, and other design elements. For a periodical with multiple issues, all of these elements can be traced to see if they change over time. Patrick Collier writes, “At its best, close-reading in a periodical reveals how its multiple internal forms—letterpress, advertising, text, image, paper, page design—interact in a historical moment to give order and meaning to a multiplex reality; and close reading places that individual process of meaning-making in the context of the conventions of meaning-making around it, within and beyond the periodical itself.”<sup>38</sup>

This dissertation utilizes the Periodical Studies approach by taking relatively minor publications, *Kaveret* and *Pardes*, and non-canonical contributions in the well-known *Ha-Shiloah* as subjects for analysis. I do not read these essays, stories, letters, etc. in isolation, but in juxtaposition with the other writings and elements of the periodicals. The dialogue among different pieces in the same periodical is a rich text.

---

<sup>36</sup> Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman, *Modernism in the Magazines: An Introduction* (Yale University Press, 2010), 143-167.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-148.

<sup>38</sup> Patrick Collier, “What Is Modern Periodical Studies?” *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 6, no. 2 (2015): 108.

Most significantly, I consider Ahad Ha'am's activity as an editor and take the periodicals of the Odessa circle into account as part of Ahad Ha'am's literary legacy.

### **Plan of the Dissertation**

Ahad Ha'am's career as a periodical editor began with *Kaveret*, the single volume published anonymously by Ahad Ha'am's nationalist faction in 1890. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I argue that Ahad Ha'am used the tools available to him as an editor to craft a distinct message from a set of diverse and often conflicting contributors. Despite Ahad Ha'am's reputation as a rigid authoritarian, *Kaveret* places conflicting voices side by side, even on the central question of cultural Zionism, the ideology the periodical is ostensibly designed to spread. Numerous contributors to *Kaveret* display a concern with their moment in history and especially Jewish history, but some laud progress while other lament the traditional structures that have been lost. Multiple authors speak about the spirit of the Jewish people, but they disagree on whether that spirit resides in religious practice, Hebrew language, family ties, or other characteristics. Ahad Ha'am selects and arranges these contributions so that dialogue, not any specific doctrine, emerges as the unifying theme.

This diversity of voices is reflected in *Kaveret*'s Hebrew style. Some writers lean toward the neo-Biblical style characteristic of the early nineteenth century. Others draw frequently from the vocabulary and expressions of traditional Jewish religious texts. Some of *Kaveret*'s writers sprinkle their Hebrew with transliterations, calques, and borrowed grammatical forms from European languages. Although the Hebrew style of Ahad Ha'am and his circle came to be grouped together as the

Odessa nusach, the Hebrew in *Kaveret* is not uniform. Ahad Ha'am does not impose a normative Hebrew but allows the differing styles of the contributors to communicate the diversity of his intellectual camp.

The influence of Ahad Ha'am as an editor on the cohesiveness and quality of dialogue in a periodical is apparent when one examines a comparable periodical that was not edited by Ahad Ha'am. The second chapter argues that *Pardes* (1892-1896), edited by another member of Ahad Ha'am's intellectual circle in Odessa, Yehoshua Ravnitsky, lacks the unifying themes and inclusivity of Ahad Ha'am's periodicals, despite sharing the nationalist ideology and many of the same contributors. The example of German-style Reform Judaism shows that Ravnitsky allows his contributors to discredit and level personal attacks against other Jews. Ahad Ha'am, as a contributor to *Pardes*, offers an alternative view, rejecting the German reforms while rhetorically including Reform Jews in his conception of Jewish culture. The chapter attempts to show that on the subject of the Haskalah, the European Jewish Enlightenment, *Pardes* includes multiple opposing viewpoints, but Ravnitsky as the editor is unable to provide a unifying theme or framing. The result is chaotic and disorienting. Again, as a contributor, Ahad Ha'am lays out a moderate theoretical course, but the absence of his editorial voice and sensitivity is readily apparent.

*Kaveret* and *Pardes* served as preparation for Ahad Ha'am's most impactful contribution to modern Hebrew literature, the monthly journal *Ha-Shiloah*, which is the subject of the final two chapters. In Hebrew literary history, Ahad Ha'am's reputation for small-mindedness stems in large part from a dispute that erupted in the 1890s in the pages of *Ha-Shiloah* between Ahad Ha'am and a group of "young

writers,” led by Micha Yosef Berdichevsky. In the programmatic statement that opens the first volume of *Ha-Shiloah*, Ahad Ha’am states his intention to publish only literature that relates to the self-understanding of the Jewish people. He directs those seeking purely aesthetic literature to seek it in other languages. The young writers accuse Ahad Ha’am of creating a “tear in the heart,” by forcing a divide between their Jewish and humanist identities. This dispute became the defining frame for the next era of Hebrew literature, but the memory of the dispute quickly departed from the reality of Ahad Ha’am’s and Berdichevsky’s positions in their original periodical context.

To show how that distortion took place, the third chapter traces the reception of the Ahad Ha’am-Berdichevsky controversy in modern Hebrew literary criticism. As the center of Hebrew studies moved from Europe to Palestine, Ahad Ha’am’s less settlement-focused Zionism is rejected in favor of Theodor Herzl. This rejection of Ahad Ha’am’s politics impacted literary criticism, where Ahad Ha’am becomes the avatar of “old world” thinking, provincial and restrictive. He is contrasted with Berdichevsky, who represents progress, creativity, and universalism. In recent years, this binary opposition has been questioned by studies that have shown the nationalist implications of Berdichevsky’s positions. But Ahad Ha’am has not received a similar reevaluation.

A rereading of the essays and letters published by Ahad Ha’am, Berdichevsky, and their supporters in their original context in *Ha-Shiloah* finds that Ahad Ha’am’s positions are not as rigid as they were later portrayed. For example, while he is widely said to have disdained and rejected belles lettres, he actually

acknowledges their role in Hebrew literature and expresses concern over his inability to identify literary contributions of sufficient quality. Ahad Ha'am's writing also shows significant concern for emotional and spiritual expression, contrary to his stern rationalist reputation.

The most thorough undermining of the Ahad Ha'am-Berdichevsky binary comes through reading the belletristic selections published by Ahad Ha'am in *Ha-Shiloah*. The final chapter of this dissertation shows that the fiction in poetry in *Ha-Shiloah* do not conform to the stereotype that Ahad Ha'am restricted Hebrew literature to didactic Jewish subjects. Ahad Ha'am selected numerous literary contributions whose primary concerns are aesthetic, romantic, or modernist. Authors in *Ha-Shiloah* explore themes of nature and madness, separate from any nationalist context. Ahad Ha'am's publication of Berdichevsky's own works in *Ha-Shiloah* belies the notion that Ahad Ha'am sought to exclude the young writers and their concerns from his vision of Hebrew literature.

This chapter, and the dissertation as a whole, conclude that Ahad Ha'am's place in Hebrew literary history should be judged not only on his explicit declarations, but on the evidence of his work, including his work as an editor. To Israel Cohen's metaphors of the mirror and the melting pot, I would add one more: the mosaic.<sup>39</sup> The art of the mosaic is in selecting and arranging discrete pieces. In a

---

<sup>39</sup> This metaphor was suggested by cultural studies, where the metaphor of the melting pot for the coming together of individuals of diverse backgrounds has given way to the metaphor of the mosaic. For example, see Abraham J. Karp, *Jewish Perceptions of America: From Melting Pot to Mosaic* (Syracuse University Press, 1976). More recently, the mosaic metaphor has been problematized by other approaches to multiculturalism and identity, like Homi Bhabha's "hybridity." See summary in Melanie U. Pooch, "Cultural Diversity in a Globalizing Age," *DiverCity*

modern Hebrew periodical, the solicitation, selection, and editing of contributions, together with the overall design of the periodical, is an act of creation, resulting in a cohesive work with independent literary value and meaning. Ahad Ha'am's creation of *Ha-Shiloah* expanded the possibilities of Hebrew literature, in both form and content. His work anticipated or helped to foster aspects of modernism in Hebrew literature, which he was then accused of suppressing. Any discussion of Ahad Ha'am's significance in his own time must set aside the received critical account. Reading *Ha-Shiloah* shows the value of periodical study in capturing a clear, nuanced view of a literary moment.

---

– *Global Cities as a Literary Phenomenon: Toronto, New York, and Los Angeles in a Globalizing Age* (Transcript, 2016), 37-56.

## Chapter 1 — *Kaveret*: Ahad Ha'am's First Editorial Message

In the winter of 1889-1890, Ahad Ha'am compiled and edited the literary collection *Kaveret*, but he refused to list himself as the editor or publisher. At the time, he recalls, "I did not consider myself a writer, and I did not want to put my name out in public."<sup>40</sup> This is a transitional moment in Hebrew literature; by the time the first volume of his collected works, *Al parashat derakhim* (*At the Crossroads*), was published in 1895, Ahad Ha'am was one of the most respected and influential writers of Hebrew in Europe. A younger contemporary, Moshe Glickson, wrote:

Not even five years since he appeared, as a temporary visitor, as "Ahad Ha'am," on the literary stage, and already he had managed to add to the treasury of literature important analytic essays, enduring works of national and social thought, which have since become permanent assets in our spiritual treasury.<sup>41</sup>

Glickson writes with the characteristic enthusiasm of the Hebrew Revival and the awe that was often directed towards Ahad Ha'am by his admirers, but Glickson overlooks a pivotal aspect of Ahad Ha'am's literary activity that begins with *Kaveret*: his work as an editor of periodicals.

*Kaveret* is Ahad Ha'am's first attempt to form a collection of literary works of diverse genres, Hebrew styles, and ideological perspectives into a cohesive whole. But he did more than that. Ahad Ha'am selected and juxtaposed pieces in such a way that their shared elements and tensions reflect on each other. Facing the onset of

---

<sup>40</sup> "לא נחשבתי בעיני כסופר ולא חפצתי להוציא את שמי לרשות הרבים." Ahad Ha'am, "Pirkei zikhronot" ["Remembrances"], in *Kol kitvei Ahad Ha'am* [*The Complete Works of Ahad Ha'am*] (Dvir, 1947).

<sup>41</sup> עוד לא מלאו חמש שנים מיום שיצא בפעם הראשונה, כאורה לשעה, כ'אחד-העם', אל הבמה "הספרותית, וכבר הספיק להכניס אל אוצר הספרות דברי עיון חשובים, יצירות קיימות של המחשבה הלאומית והחברתית, שנעשו מאז נכסי צאן ברזל באוצרנו הרוחני." Moshe Glickson, *Ahad Ha'am: hayyav u-fo'olo* [*Ahad Ha'am: His Life and His Work*], (Haaretz, 1927).

modernity, for example, some of *Kaveret*'s contributors express enthusiasm for progress, while others lament the break with traditional structures and norms. In Ahad Ha'am's composition, these views sit side by side, creating for the reader an equivocal impression that emerges from the periodical as a whole, though it is not put forward by any single author. That multivalent nusach, even more than the explicit pronouncements of Ahad Ha'am's essays, is the literary ideology clearly identified with the Sages of Odessa, and its emergence and clarity in *Kaveret* should be attributed to Ahad Ha'am's skill as a periodical editor.

To give a sense of *Kaveret* as a whole, this chapter begins with a description of its historical context and an overview of its form and content. It then shows how Ahad Ha'am develops cohesive messages out of a cacophony of conflicting sources in several key areas, beginning with the attitude toward the sense of epochal change in the Jewish community at the end of the nineteenth century. The concept of the "*ruah*," a Jewish national spirit, serves as a flexible common ground to bring these views together, and it serves as the cornerstone of *Kaveret*'s vision of Jewish nationalism. Finally, *Kaveret* shows that at this stage the Hebrew style of the Odessa circle is far from uniform, while certain shared commitments—a *ruah* of the language—point towards the formation of a unified style. Ahad Ha'am uses his position as the editor of *Kaveret*—and the unique potential of a periodical—to lay the foundations for Hebrew culture in the twentieth century.

## The Origins of Benei Moshe and Kaveret

Yehoshua Eisenstadt, who would take the pen name “Barzilai,” was born into a rabbinical family in the Minsk region of Russia in 1855. He received a traditional religious education and was even considered an “ilu’i,” a Talmud prodigy, but he was attracted to the Haskalah from a young age and became active in Hibbat Zion, the burgeoning Jewish nationalist movement. In the summer of 1887, Barzilai traveled to Palestine to purchase a piece of land for a relative, and he took the opportunity to observe first-hand the progress of Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel, the primary focus of Hibbat Zion. He determined that the movement’s efforts were insufficient and that new energy was needed to promote the economic and social development of the new agricultural settlements. In December 1887 Barzilai returned to Russia and visited Odessa, hoping to reinvigorate the activities of the Hovevei Zion, as the supporters of Hibbat Zion called themselves. But Barzilai discovered that the Hovevei Zion organization was in no position to effect dramatic change: it lacked legal status in the Russian Empire, its funds were limited, and its loose organization was rife with internal conflict, especially between religious Jews and secularists.<sup>42</sup>

Barzilai formed a new plan; he would establish an elite secret society, on the model of the Freemasons and other such clandestine organizations that were prevalent

---

<sup>42</sup> The history of Benei Moshe is based on Shmuel Tchernowitz, *Benei Moshe u-tekufato* [*Benei Moshe and Its Era*] (Ha-Tzefirah 1914); Joseph Salmon, “Ahad Ha’am and Benei Moshe: an ‘Unsuccessful Experiment?’” in Jacques Kornberg, ed., *At the Crossroads*, 98-105; Esther Stein-Ashkenazi, “Agudat Benei Moshe: merkezh be-Varsha ve-zikatah li-tenu’at Hibbat Tziyon” [“The Organization Benei Moshe: Its Center in Warsaw and Its Connection to the Hibbat Zion Movement”], *Ha-Tziyonut* 11 (1986): 29-64; Yosef Goldstein, “Benei Moshe: sippuro shel misdar hash’a’i” [“Benei Moshe: The Story of a Secret Society”], *Tsiyon* 57 (1992) 175-206; and Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet*.

in both Russia and Palestine at the time. The society would cultivate highly committed, educated activists to promote the revival of Jewish nationalism among the Jews of Europe. He knew that such a group required an inspirational, charismatic leader. A businessman named Abraham Elijah Lubarsky introduced Barzilai to the central figure of his small circle of intellectual, idealistic Jewish nationalists: Asher Ginsberg, who would soon take up the pen name “Ahad Ha’am” (“One of the People”). For more than a year, Ahad Ha’am’s small coterie of followers debated whether to form this new organization. They wanted to exert control over the direction of Hovevei Zion, but they were wary of the potential embarrassment of a failed attempt. During these deliberations, Ahad Ha’am wrote the seminal essay “Lo zeh ha-derekh” (“This Is Not the Way”), arguing for the primacy of cultural nationalism and rebuilding the Jewish spirit over the fundraising and settlement activities that dominated Hibbat Zion. The essay circulated among the potential initiates in the new society. In February 1889, on the Hebrew date identified by Jewish tradition as the day of Moses’ birth, the society, Benei Moshe, was established. The next month, “Lo zeh ha-derekh” appeared in the Hebrew newspaper *Ha-Melitz*, the first essay published under the name “Ahad Ha’am.”

Benei Moshe began with eight members, Ahad Ha’am’s Odessa circle, and they were soon joined by Moshe Leib Lilienblum, the well-known writer and secretary of the Odessa Chapter of Hovevei Zion. The group met with the approval of Leon Pinsker and other prominent leaders of Hovevei Zion. In his business travels to Bialystok, Vilna, and elsewhere, Barzilai recruited prominent men to Benei Moshe. Ahad Ha’am also recruited, with the goal of eventually having members of Benei

Moshe fill all the positions of influence in Hibbat Zion. New members were given initiation texts specifically prepared by Ahad Ha'am. They swore an oath and participated in elaborate rituals. Although members were obliged to maintain the secrecy of the group, its existence and influence quickly became an open secret in Hibbat Zion circles.

The success of Benei Moshe in its first months was primarily in attracting the interest of promising potential members. But ideological differences among the members posed new challenges. Traditionally observant members of Benei Moshe worried that the group would advocate a divisive rupture with Jewish religious norms. And even though the aims and the very existence of Benei Moshe were ostensibly secret, as it grew in reputation and influence, rumors of its secular nationalism led ultra-Orthodox communal organizations to oppose it. Against the backdrop of these controversies, the leaders of Benei Moshe decided to publish a collection of articles that would broaden and clarify its ideology with respect to nationalism, religion, and other issues. Articles were prepared during the summer of 1889, Ahad Ha'am edited the collection, and it was published in Odessa in 1890 under the title *Kaveret* (*Beehive*).<sup>43</sup>

Although its connection to Benei Moshe was unattributed, *Kaveret* is a vital document for describing the aims of the group's leadership at its inception. It includes contributions from several members of Ahad Ha'am's inner circle in Odessa, including Eisenstadt, Lilienblum, Zalman Epstein, and Yehoshua Ravnitsky. Though dominated by essays, it includes examples of fiction, memoir, satire, and poetry. A

---

<sup>43</sup> Goldstein, "Benei Moshe: sippuro shel misdar hash'a'i," 183-184.

few of the selections, including Ahad Ha'am's essay "Heshbon ha-nefesh" ("Accounting of the Soul") and Mendele Mokher Sforim's story "Shem ve-Yafet ba-agalah" ("Shem and Japheth on the Train"), have been anthologized and canonized as important works of the period.

### **Kaveret Description and Overview**

*Kaveret* appeared in a quarto edition (eight pages per sheet), with the sheets numbered at the bottom of the first page of each sheet. The main text is 112 pages, with four pages of book advertisements at the end. With a cardboard cover, the book measures 21 x 15 cm. On the title page, the title and publication information are given in both Hebrew and Russian. A small number of glosses in the main text and some information in the advertisements are also printed in Russian. The editorial address, which was Moshe Leib Lilienblum's home address, is printed in Russian and German. There is little decoration in the volume, aside from a border at the top of each page and a decorative mark at the end of each contribution. The advertisements are framed within more elaborate borders. The book was printed and produced by Aba Dukhno, a publisher of Hebrew and Yiddish books in Odessa.

A survey of the authors and contributions in *Kaveret* provides significant information about the cultural background and literary ideology of the periodical, as well as Ahad Ha'am's selection and organization of pieces as the editor. The complete contents of *Kaveret* are as follows:

- **"Shalom! (In Honor of the 'Safah Berurah' Society in Jerusalem)" by Shlomo Ha-Alkoshi. 2 pages.** This letter celebrates the founding in Jerusalem of the organization Safah Berurah, dedicated to the revival of the Hebrew language. "Shlomo Ha-Alkoshi" is a pseudonym for Zalman Epstein, a

founding member of Benei Moshe who also served as general secretary of Hovevei Zion in Odessa.

- **“What Does Nationalism Require?” by Moshe Leib Lilienblum. 4 pages.** This essay argues for a nationalism based in a Jewish national spirit. Lilienblum was a widely respected progressive author and editor in Yiddish and Hebrew. He was among the founders of Hovevei Zion in Odessa and an early member of Benei Moshe.
- **“Introspection” by Ahad Ha’am. 7 pages.** This is an historical and philosophical investigation of the reasons for resistance to nationalism among the Jews.
- **“Read Not ‘Your Children,’ Rather ‘Your Builders’” by Levi Yerahmiel Klotzko. 5 pages.** This discusses educational issues related to inculcating Jewish nationalism in children. Klotzko was the son of a prominent rabbi; he became a progressive educator and wrote several Jewish textbooks for children.
- **“Unity” by Ze’ev Wolf Mendlin. 4 pages.** This essay advocates for economic modernization among the Jews and for maintaining traditional Jewish ritual observance. Mendlin was a frequent contributor to the Hebrew press who wrote primarily on economic issues.
- **“Clear and Pleasant Language” by Yehoshua Hana Ravnitsky. 6 pages.** This essay discusses the development of modern Hebrew style and makes prescriptions for Hebrew writers. Ravnitsky was active in the Hibbat Zion movement and published articles in the Hebrew press. He went on to edit the periodical *Ha-Pardes* and led influential publishing ventures with Hayyim Nahman Bialik, Sholem Aleichem, and others.
- **“The Jewish Street and Its Author” by Zalman Epstein. 12 pages.** Epstein discusses the development of modern Hebrew literature and celebrates Mendele Mokher Sforim as uniquely skilled in depicting the present situation of the Jewish people in fiction. Unlike the first entry in the volume, Epstein signs this article with his own name.
- **“Shem and Japheth on the Train” by Mendele Mokher Sforim. 15 pages.** A short story about a Jewish family fleeing pogroms and their unlikely relationship with a Polish peasant. “Mendele Mokher Sforim” is a pseudonym for Sholem Yankev Abromovitsh, who by 1890 was already one of pillars of modern Yiddish literature. In the 1880s he had turned his attention toward writing in Hebrew.

- **“In the Gates of Jerusalem” by Yehoshua Eisenstadt. 10 pages.** An account of the author’s travels in the Land of Israel. Eisenstadt, discussed above, had not yet taken the name “Barzilai.”
- **“Two Worlds” by Zalman Epstein. 6 pages.** This essay contrasts the modern, progressive, secular world of Odessa with the parochial, religious atmosphere of his hometown. He affirms his allegiance to traditional Judaism.
- **“Our Fathers and Us” by Elhanan Leib Levinsky. 6 pages.** This discusses evolution of nationalism over the previous three generations. Levinsky was a grain merchant who was active in Hibbat Zion. After settling in Odessa in 1896, he became a major contributor to Hebrew publications and Zionist activities.
- **“Worn Out Writings” by Ahad Ha’am. 15 pages.** In this satirical, semi-autobiographical account, Ahad Ha’am recounts the travails of a Hebrew writer in the recent past.
- **“Lying in Bed at Night” by Avraham Yaakov Har-Sasson. 2 pages.** This is a brief, literary description of a dream related to the revival of Jewish nationalism.
- **“A Good Start” by Yehoshua Eisenstadt. 4 pages.** This is a review of a Bible textbook for children by L. Y. Klotzko.
- **“Upon the Death of a Sage” by Ahad Ha’am. 7 pages.** Ahad Ha’am reproduces and discusses a letter by Rabbi Mordecai Eliasburg, who advocated cooperation between secular and religious nationalists.
- **“Zion,” a folk song. 3 pages.** Z.W. Mendlin presents this poem as well-known, written thirty years before to be sung to the tune of a poem by Friedrich Schiller. The poem laments the exile of the Jews and expresses hope for their restoration in the Land of Israel.

From these contents, several observations arise. The first is that the circle of intellectuals represented by *Kaveret* is quite small and insular. Nearly half of the contributors were among the founding members of Benei Moshe. Ahad Ha’am and Zalman Epstein each wrote three separate pieces, while Yehoshua Eisenstadt and Ze’ev Wolf Mendlin provided two each. Together these represent more than half of the pieces in the collection. In “A Good Start,” Eisenstadt reviews a children’s Bible

textbook by Levi Yerahmiel Klotzko, another contributor. This impression of insularity is amplified by the advertisements at the end of the volume. One half-page advertisement is for *Ha-Omein (The Foster Parent)*, the same book by Klotzko reviewed by Eisenstadt. There are advertisements for Mendele's *Die Kliatshe (The Nag)* in Yiddish and a collection of Yehudah Leib Gordon's writings, published by Ravnitsky. Nearly all of the advertisements have a direct personal connection to the *Kaveret* contributors. In combination with the narrowness of *Kaveret*'s subject matter and relative lack of concrete engagement with external ideas and events, the effect is claustrophobic. Small differences between contributors take on greater significance.

The contents of *Kaveret* also speak to the relationship of the Odessa circle to literary genre. The subtitle of the collection is "Kovetz Sifruti" ("A Literary Anthology"), but only two selections, Mendele's story and the concluding poem, are obviously literary in the sense of belle lettres. The privileged form here is the short critical essay. The essays mostly comment on the current situation of Russian Jewry, often explained with reference to Jewish history. They approach the question of Jewish nationalism from different disciplinary perspectives: psychology, economics, education theory, etc. While the dominant mode is analytical, most of the essays include a persuasive element. The tenor of this advocacy ranges from sedate to a missionary zeal. Some of the selections in *Kaveret* show the extension of the essay form towards other genres. Yehoshua Eisenstadt's travelogue and book review both adapt the essay form to different rhetorical purposes. Ahad Ha'am's "Worn Out Writings" could be a personal essay, but the irony and pronouncements are exaggerated enough to mark it as satire. Bar-Sasson's dreamscape in "Lying in Bed at

Night” is notably impressionistic, but it draws on common structural elements of the critical essay: the juxtaposition of the past and the present and the move from description to a call to action.

While only one story and one poem are included in the collection, their selection and placement are suggestive. The only poem in the collection, “Tziyon” (“Zion”), appears at the very end, like the closing hymn in a worship service. Z.W. Mendlin introduces the poem as “practically a folk song by now,”<sup>44</sup> and presumably it was familiar to at least some readers. The poem takes the form of an apostrophe to the city of Jerusalem, a device that echoes both the Bible (as in Ps. 137:5, “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand wither.”) and masterpieces of medieval Hebrew poetry, like Yehuda Halevi’s “Tziyon Halo Tishali” (“Zion, Will You Not Ask?”) which begins, “Zion, will you not ask after your captives?” Significantly, both of these traditional texts, like the poem presented here, relate to the Jewish people’s exile and hope for return to the Land of Israel. Originating decades before this publication, “Tziyon” is more explicitly theological than even the contributions of religious conservatives to *Kaveret*. But while the poem makes repeated appeals to God’s mercy and acknowledges God’s providence over Jewish history, its primary focus is the nation and its relationship to Jerusalem and the Land of Israel. This modern deployment of a traditional genre and theme is subtle and effective. Ahad Ha’am’s placement of the poem at the end of the collection makes for a rousing conclusion, demonstrating the Odessa circle’s ability to employ genres beyond the essay to communicate and persuade.

---

<sup>44</sup> *Kaveret*, 110.

The other departure from *Kaveret*'s standard essay form is the story "Shem ve-Yafet ba-agalah" ("Shem and Japheth on the Train") by Mendele Mokher Sforim. At the time of *Kaveret*'s publication, Mendele Mokher Sforim was already an established literary figure, the collection's most widely-known contributor. Although not as closely allied to Benei Moshe as most of the other contributors, his participation lends prestige to the publication. This was important, given Benei Moshe's strategy of cultivating an elite within Hibbat Zion. Ahad Ha'am places "Shem ve-Yafet ba-agalah" precisely in the center of *Kaveret* (pages 45-59, out of 112). Reading the collection as a whole, the story serves as a climax, a demonstration of the kind of Hebrew culture advocated by many of the essays. The importance of the story is amplified by the selection that precedes it, Zalman Epstein's "Rehov ha-Yehudim ve-sofrah" ("The Jewish Street and Its Author"), which breathlessly praises Mendele as both a transcendent literary talent and a recorder of the harsh social reality of Jewish life in Eastern Europe. "Shem ve-Yafet ba-agalah" is noticeably different from the other selections in *Kaveret*; it is literary, longer, less overtly political, and stylistically distinct. Ahad Ha'am's careful editing of *Kaveret* makes the story a focal point and suggests an aspiration toward literary writing on the part of the Odessa collective, even though *Kaveret* itself lacks further examples.

### **The Rhetoric of Past and Present**

Yosef Goldstein has argued that the early membership of Benei Moshe was more diverse ideologically than Ahad Ha'am expected or preferred.<sup>45</sup> The Odessa

---

<sup>45</sup> Yosef Goldstein, "The Ideological Test of Ahad Ha'am: The Struggle over the Character of *Bnei Moshe*," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 67, no. 2 (2016): 392-407.

circle conceived *Kaveret* in large part to allay the fears of religious traditionalists that Ahad Ha'am was advancing a radical secular agenda. At the same time, Ahad Ha'am needed to include some more progressive voices. And none of this could be allowed to obscure his own somewhat abstract approaches to contentious questions. Reading *Kaveret* as a complete periodical, it becomes clear that there is no unified ideology of Benei Moshe in Odessa. But out of that diversity, Ahad Ha'am facilitates the development of shared impressions and understandings.

The writers in *Kaveret* are intently focused on the ways in which the present historical moment is continuous or discontinuous with the recent and distant Jewish past. Some see the difference between the present and the past as primarily internal: the degradation of Jewish communal norms. Others understand the uniqueness of the present in the context of external forces associated with the onset of modernity. But they all understand the conditions of the present to require extraordinary action. In some ways, this understanding of the present is inherent in Hibbat Zion, as in other Jewish cultural movements associated with modernity, such as Hasidism, Socialism, and religious reform. The existence of Benei Moshe was predicated on the need for action, for the Jewish community to engage in cultural nationalism as it had never done before. The exigency for this change relies on a certain understanding of the present.

Some writers identify the newness of the present moment with a shift in the economic and social conditions of the Jewish people. Klotzko describes the need for new pedagogical methods: "Come and see that recent generations are not like past generations. New conditions of life have led to new modes of education for these

times, times of action and experience, where in everything a man does he longs only for the result, and material benefit is above all.”<sup>46</sup> He makes the general assertion that the present generation (or more precisely, “recent generations”) is fundamentally different from those of the past. He attributes this difference to the “new conditions of life,” which force young people to focus on the “material benefit” of any given pursuit. He goes on to explain that due to economic conditions, beginning at a very young age, “the question ‘What shall I do’ in the future hangs over them in full force,” and as a result, they abandon the study of Torah, which has no immediate economic benefit, and focus their attention on “material needs and self-supporting occupations.”<sup>47</sup>

While Klotzko sees new economic pressures turning young people away from Torah, Ahad Ha’am’s own account of the modern era is more dire still:

It will come to pass, with society becoming broader and broader and more and more complex, bringing into the world new needs, which previous generations neither knew nor imagined; the path of life will fill with obstacles and stumbling blocks on every foothold, and the war of existence will be a great and terrible war where the conquered will outnumber the conquerors by myriads of times.<sup>48</sup>

Ahad Ha’am’s judgement rests on a broad sociological observation: in recent years society has become “broader” and “more complicated.” Ahad Ha’am’s move from the

---

<sup>46</sup> "בוא וראה שלא כדורות הראשונים הם הדורות האחרונים, תנאי החיים החדשים הביאו לדרכי חנוך אחרים לפי הזמן הזה, זמן המעשה והנסיון, אשר בכל מעשה אשר יעשה האדם רק אל התכלית הוא נושא *Kaveret*, 19. את נפשו והתועלת החמרית תתנשא לכל ראש

<sup>47</sup> חיי שעה ודרך ארץ המחיה את “שאלת ‘מה נעשה’ בימים הבאים רובצת עליהם בכל תקפה” *Kaveret*, 19. בעליה

<sup>48</sup> "אך הנה ימים באים וחיי החברה ההולכים הלוך והתרחב, הלוך והסתבך, מביאים לעולם צרכים חדשים אשר לא ידעום ולא שערום הדורות הראשונים; דרך החיים תמלא מכשולים ואבני נגף על כל מדרך כף רגל, ומלחמת הקיום היה תהיה למלחמה כבדה ואיומה אשר ירבו בה המנוצחים על המנצחים. *Kaveret*, 13. רבבות מונים.

rural estate in Ukraine where he was raised to the bustling commercial center of Odessa would certainly have shaped this view. According to Ahad Ha'am, the complication of modern life is not value-neutral; it presents a procession of new obstacles. Individuals are caught in an "existential struggle," in which only very few will succeed. For the masses of poor Jews in the Russian Empire, subsistence was a growing concern. Along with economic changes, Ahad Ha'am identifies the newness of the present with the rise of a scientific worldview. "Now comes the new era, and a spirit of wisdom and understanding passes through the land."<sup>49</sup> The "spirit of wisdom and understanding," the Enlightenment and Haskalah, were necessary precursors to Ahad Ha'am's nationalist program. But he also positions his ideas as a reaction to those changes introduced by modernity.

Nearly all the selections in *Kaveret* respond in some way to the changes brought about by modernity, but they define the present historical moment in different ways. Mendlin writes, "Hope of a spiritual reward no longer avails the children of recent generations."<sup>50</sup> Levinsky specifically identifies the previous seven years as the "era of nationalism": "These past seven years since it began to beat strongly in the hearts of the Children of Israel: let us count them a new era for this idea, an era of nationalism!"<sup>51</sup> Some of the authors speak of "*ha-moderna*" ("modernity"), while others mere speak of the "present generation" or "recent years." They variously identify the difference of the present with economic, social, or

---

<sup>49</sup> "והנה באה העת החדשה ורוח חכמה ובינה עברה בארץ." *Kaveret*, 16.

<sup>50</sup> "תקות גמול רוחני לא תועיל עוד לבני הדורות האחרונים." *Kaveret*, 24-25.

<sup>51</sup> "זה שבע שנים מאז החל לפעם בחזקה בלבות בני ישראל, תקופה חדשה נספור להרעיון הזה, תקופה "של לאומיות!" *Kaveret*, 76.

ideological changes. None of these specific approaches is dominant, but as Ahad Ha'am collects them here, a mode of relating to the present is established, which becomes the justification for their new political and cultural program.

Juxtaposition of the present with a real or idealized past is an extension of the theme of the disorientation in the modern present. In "We and Our Fathers," Levinsky describes the natural, uncomplicated nationalist feeling of his grandfather and father. In Levinsky's account, not only did previous generations support nationalism and Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel naturally and without political upheaval, "Their lives overall were like the waters of the Shiloah, which flow slowly, moderately and cautiously."<sup>52</sup> This idealized existence stands in sharp contrast to the author's own life. In the middle of his religious upbringing, "One spark of *haskalah* fell upon the study house where I was learning, and this spark became a great and terrible fire, which completely consumed all of those thoughts in me."<sup>53</sup> The spark led Levinsky to pursue a secular life and education. But he was drawn back to interest in Jewish peoplehood and even relocated temporarily to Palestine, and he expresses the difficulty of balancing these competing values.

In Zalman Epstein's "Two Worlds," the contrast between the present and the past is represented by the contrast between two physical locations. Epstein begins by describing a cosmopolitan modern city that he calls "Carthage," a stand-in for Odessa. He describes the splendor of the city, its wide streets and magnificent buildings. Carthage is full of people and commerce. Special attention is given to

---

<sup>52</sup> "חיייהם בכלל היו כמו מי השילוח ההולכים לאט לאט במתינות וזהירות" *Kaveret*, 77.

<sup>53</sup> "ניצוץ אחד של השכלה נפל לבית המדרש שלמדתי בו, והניצוץ הזה נהיה לתבערה גדולה ונוראה" *Kaveret*, 80.

Carthage's culture and learning; when its wise men speak, "Their listeners are always taken captive by their language speaking wonders, by their pointed sentences, clear and sharp, by their fine taste and the pleasantness of their speech and argument."<sup>54</sup> Epstein directly connects this spectacular vitality to Carthage's freedom from the past. "The distant past with all its strange and varied colors is not hers."<sup>55</sup> Instead, "Here eyes are cast only to the present and the future."<sup>56</sup>

Epstein contrasts the vitality and progressiveness of Carthage with a woodland shtetl he calls "Lvushishk," an apparent stand-in for Epstein's birthplace, Luban, in the Minsk region of present-day Belarus. In Epstein's account, Lvushishk is fixed in and fixated on the past. "Lvushishk stands in place and its world proceeds as usual, as in days gone by."<sup>57</sup> This reverence for the past is connected to traditional Jewish belief and observance. Unlike Carthage, where learning is exciting and comprehensive, life and learning in Lvushishk are constrained by "sforim," Hebrew holy books, which are the sole focus of study and source of authority for everyday living. According to Epstein, were an outsider to visit and observe the town's devotion to these books and the past, "To him Lvushishk would appear to be a living tombstone on the graves of generations long passed."<sup>58</sup>

This contrast between Carthage and Lvushishk adds dimension to the conflict between the past and the present. It is a conflict between the religiosity of the past and

---

<sup>54</sup> תמיד יוליכו את שומעיהם שבי בלשונם המדברת גדולות, במשפטיהם החרוצים, הזכים והשנונים, *Kaveret*, 70. בטוב טעם ובנועם נאומם והגיונם

<sup>55</sup> "העבר הרחוק עם כל גוניו השונים והמשונים לא לה הוא" Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> "עיניה נשואות רק אל ההוה והעתיד" Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> "לבושישק על מקומה עומדת ועולמה כמנהגה נוהג, כמימים ימימה" *Kaveret*, 71.

<sup>58</sup> "היתה לבושישק בעיניו למצבה חיה על קברות דורות רחוקים" Ibid.

the secularism of the present. It contrasts the insularity and communal solidarity of the past with the universalism of the present. The past is agrarian and pastoral, as opposed to the urban, intellectual present. This contrast would have resonated with many of the Odessa intellectuals and their readers, since many of them left rural communities to seek education and economic opportunity in urban centers.

Given Epstein's bleak depiction of his hometown, it is surprising to learn that ultimately he declares his allegiance to Lvushishk. Despite being buffeted and tempted by "the proofs of healthy reason and the discoveries of the new wisdom" he concludes—almost apologetically—that "the same old Torah, the same ancient books...comfort me from the toil of life, elevate me, show me a purpose, and they are for me an ever-flowing spring, a spring flowing with life and salvation and well-being and hope."<sup>59</sup> This theme, the lack of spiritual sustenance and purpose in the world of secular modernity, is expressed in several selections in *Kaveret*.

Ahad Ha'am has a dual role in *Kaveret*, editor and author. We have focused on how, as an editor, Ahad Ha'am arranges a conversation of overlapping and differing viewpoints to create a cohesive periodical message. As a writer, he demonstrates pluralism and moderation. As we have seen, nearly all of the writers in *Kaveret* invoke a sense of difference and discontinuity between the past and the present. Some use this difference as a justification for political, social, or religious prescriptions. Ahad Ha'am's reflections on historical change are decidedly theoretical and philosophical. Apart from advocating for a specific practical agenda, he reflects

---

<sup>59</sup> "אותה התורה הישנה, אותם הספרים," הוכחות השכל הבריא, והמצאות החכמה החדשה" העתיקים...ינחמוני מעמל החיים, יקרבוני אל על, יראו לי מטרה, והמה לי למעין לא אכזב, מעין נובע חיים וישע ורפאות ותקוה." *Kaveret*, 74.

on the process of historical change itself. In “Upon the Death of a Sage,” Ahad Ha’am discusses the philosophy of Rabbi Mordecai Eliasberg, an active proponent of Hibbat Zion in Russia. What made Eliasberg unusual, and particularly compelling to Ahad Ha’am, was his acceptance of secular nationalists as partners in the work of Hibbat Zion, which most Orthodox religious authorities rejected. Ahad Ha’am saw this as a correct understanding of the flow of history on human opinions and events. With a hint of satire, he explains, “Even if all the rabbis and sages in the world were to gather and raise their voices to heaven even a thousand times, they would still be unable to turn back the wheel of history.”<sup>60</sup> He invokes the “wheel of history,” a symbol of inevitable change, which cannot be impeded or turned back, even by the most powerful application of human authority. This view of history will have far-reaching implications for advancing the cause of Jewish nationalism.

Ahad Ha’am elaborates on this cyclical view of history in his essay, “Introspection.” He cautions the reader to be skeptical of pronouncements that with the onset of modernity, truth and light have triumphed over darkness. “Beliefs and opinions do not proceed *straight ahead* according to understanding, but rather revolve in a circle and rise and fall according to the *will to exist* in the heart of a generation...” (emphasis in original).<sup>61</sup> According to this account, cultural values like religion, rationalism, and nationalism rise and fall in response to larger historical forces. Consequently, these mindsets are slow and difficult to change. “If we see that

---

<sup>60</sup> “כי אם יתקבצו כל הרבנים והגאונים שבעולם וירימו במרום קולם אף אלף פעמים ככה, תקצר ידם” *Kaveret*, 108.

<sup>61</sup> “האמונות והדעות לא לאור התבונה תלכנה דרך *ישרה לפנים*, כי אם סובבות במעגלה ועולות ויורדות” *Kaveret*, 17. “לפי צורך *חפץ הקיום* בלב הדור...”

the “poor Jews” ask for marvels: to renew the spirit of the entire people in a moment, we shall say to them: don’t ask.”<sup>62</sup> This is an admonition to Benei Moshe’s own camp, not to expect too much too quickly from their cultural and political work, as well as a preemptive defense against critics of Ahad Ha’am’s cultural focus who would prefer more radical political action with more tangible results. Ahad Ha’am tempers expectations by situating the disruptive changes affecting the Jewish people within a larger context of the forces of history.

Taken together, the writers of *Kaveret* are intently focused on their historical moment. They experience the present as being significantly discontinuous with the past. For many of them, that discontinuity was introduced with the advent of modernity—the rise of rationalism and the decline of traditional religious belief and structures of authority. Some focus on economic changes, especially urbanization and the increasingly difficult and impoverished existence of Jewish peasantry. A few locate dramatic change in the recent past, over one or two generations or even in the seven or eight years since the wave of pogroms in the early-1880s infused urgency into the Hibbat Zion movement. Whether these changes are viewed as permanent or, as in Ahad Ha’am’s view, cyclical, they are presented as a challenge for the Jewish people. While not all of the authors portray the new historical moment as negative in itself, they are unified in seeing it as potentially disastrous for the Jews. Their account of historical change provides the justification for Benei Moshe’s creation and activity.

---

<sup>62</sup> ואם נראה כי 'היהודים האמללים' מבקשים להם גדולות: לחדש רגע אחד רוח הגוי כלו, — נאמר “*Kaveret*, 17. להם: אל תבקשו

## **Ruah and Jewish Continuity**

As arranged by Ahad Ha'am, *Kaveret* does describe a response to the disjunction between the past and present for the Jewish people. It is the concept of "ruah" ("spirit"), which nearly all of the authors reference as a thread of continuity, even under the dramatic recent conditions of historical change. This spirit is variously described as "the spirit of Torah" ("ruah ha-Torah"), "the spirit of Judaism" ("ruah ha-Yahadut"), "the spirit of the people" ("ruah ha-am"), "the spirit of the nation" ("ruah ha-goy"), "the national spirit" ("ha-ruah ha-le'umi"), and the "spirit of nationalism" ("ruah ha-le'umiyut"). The authors deploy these terms to suggest different approaches to identifying the essence of Judaism: some are religious, some secular. Some are expressly nationalistic, while others are communal or even ethnic. All the discussions of a "spirit" contemplate an *essence* of Judaism or the Jewish people. It is this essence, *Kaveret* argues, that has remained consistent over the long scope of Jewish history. Preserving and nurturing this essence is the ultimate end of *Kaveret's* and Benei Moshe's cultural nationalist program.

The essay that addresses the "Jewish spirit" most directly is Moshe Leib Lilienblum's "Mah ha-le'umiyut doreshet?" ("What Does Nationalism Require?"). When Benei Moshe was founded, Lilienblum was already a revered figure among Jewish intellectuals and nationalists in the Russian Empire. Born into a strictly religious family in Lithuania, Lilienblum came into contact with the ideas of the Haskalah and advocated ideas that put him at odds with the religious norms of his community. In 1869, at the age of 26, he moved to Odessa, and he gradually lost faith in traditional Jewish faith and practice. He became a critic and journalist, editing the

Yiddish newspaper *Kol Mevasser*. In 1873 he published *Hata'ot ne'urim (The Sins of Youth)*, a memoir that described his gradual alienation from the normative Judaism of his youth. That work was extremely influential in Haskalah circles and formed the basis for Lilienblum's wide reputation. Following the pogroms of 1881, Lilienblum turned his attention from Haskalah to nationalism, and he became one of the founders of Hibbat Zion. He was a founder of the Hovevei Zion chapter in Odessa and served as its secretary at the time of Benei Moshe's founding and the publication of *Kaveret*.<sup>63</sup> Ahad Ha'am gives Lilienblum, the most well-known figure among the inner circle of Benei Moshe, the honor of having the first substantive essay in *Kaveret*.

In "Mah ha-le'umiyut doreshet?" Lilienblum begins by asking whether nationalism has traditionally been a strong value among Jews. He brings evidence on both sides; on one hand, the Bible strictly enforces the separation between Jews and other peoples. Protecting the integrity of Jewish culture from outside influences is a repeated theme in the Bible, a priority based mostly but not entirely on the fear of religious syncretism. On the other hand, Lilienblum argues, it is also the case that the ancient Israelites did not strictly enforce some of the key aspects of nationalism: they gave their children foreign names, they spoke languages other than Hebrew, and when lamenting the fall of Jerusalem, Jews have always emphasized distress at the destruction of the Temple, rather than the loss of sovereignty in the Land of Israel.

---

<sup>63</sup> Moshe Leib Lilienblum, *Ketavim otobiyografiyim (Autobiographical Writings)* (Mossad Bialik, 1970).

However, Lilienblum encourages the reader to see beyond this apparent lack of regard for nationalism. For Lilienblum, nationalism has both external and internal elements. Language, dress, and given names are externals. The internal element is “the spirit of the people” (“ruah ha-am”), which is based on “its character and tendencies, on its worldview...on its laws and its way of life.”<sup>64</sup> While this spirit is mostly an abstract quality, it includes the “laws” of the people. On this point Lilienblum agrees with the religious conservatives in Benei Moshe. As Lilienblum expands on his notion of the Jewish spirit, his claims are increasingly religious. He calls God “the ideal of the national spirit,”<sup>65</sup> since according to Jewish tradition, God has no external form, a model of abstract holiness and goodness. He identifies the Jewish spirit with the Torah and even with Jewish law in all its fine detail. He calls the Torah “the essence of the national spirit”<sup>66</sup> and even invokes a Hasidic saying, adapted from the Zohar: “Israel, Torah, etc. are one.”<sup>67</sup> This is a notable abridgement of the phrase, “Israel, Torah, and the Holy One Blessed be He are one.” Lilienblum may eliminate the reference to God merely because he wants to emphasize the identity of Torah with the spirit of Israel. Or perhaps Lilienblum displays his Lithuanian heritage, recoiling at the esoteric theology of the Zohar and Hasidism. Even having cast his lot with the modernizers many years earlier, the particulars of the writer’s Jewish religious background influence his nationalist views.

---

<sup>64</sup> “בתכונתו ונטיותיו, במבטו על התבל...במשפטיו ובנימוסי חייו” *Kaveret*, 8.

<sup>65</sup> “האידעאל של הרוח הלאומי.” *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> “התמצית של הרוח הלאומי.” *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> “ישראל ואוריתא וכו’ חד הוא.” *Kaveret*, 9.

Lilienblum writes about the contemporary movement for Jewish nationalism and the revival of the Jewish national spirit, “Clearly, it is impossible to preserve the national spirit without being loyal to that spirit, and if we strive to renew in ourselves the spirit of our nation, we must first know the ways of that spirit and act in accordance with them.”<sup>68</sup> Lilienblum’s prescription here is somewhat obscure. He talks about the need to observe the “ways” of the national spirit, but he does not make clear whether those “ways” are identical with traditional Jewish religious law. He claims that “the pure spirit of our people is preserved for us in the Holy Scriptures and also in the Mishnah and Aggadah, together with the words of our ancient ancestors spoken before the rise of Hellenism.”<sup>69</sup> Lilienblum defines this selection of texts as arising from a time when Jews lived in their own land, unencumbered by oppression from external forces. But by including the Mishnah and excluding the Talmud and later Jewish legal discourse from the core of the national spirit, he leaves open the practical question of how precisely Jews should live in keeping with the national spirit he describes. Lilienblum does succeed in this brief essay in establishing the “national spirit” as the locus of continuity between the present and the Jewish past, extending as far back as the Bible. He also makes the strengthening of the national spirit among Jews a primary goal of Jewish nationalism.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> "מובן, כי שמירת רוח הלאומי אי אפשר מבלי להיות נאמן להרוח ההוא, ואם נאבה לחדש בנו את רוח "לאומנו עלינו לדעת תחלה את הליכות הרוח ההוא ולהתנהג על פיהן Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> רוח עמנו בטהרתו שמור אצלנו בכתבי הקדש וגם במשנה ואגדה, ביחוד בדברי קדמונינו שנאמרו עד " Ibid. The Mishnah is an early codification of Rabbinic oral law, edited in the Land of Israel in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. "Aggadah" refers to the non-legal material in ancient Rabbinic literature—legends, proverbs, history, etc.

<sup>70</sup> There are traces here of Lilienblum’s conflict with Ahad Ha’am over the political focus of Hibbat Zion. While Ahad Ha’am famously argues in “Lo zeh ha-derech” that cultural revival must precede settlement in Palestine, Lilienblum published a sharp

As with the theme of juxtaposing past and present, the idea of the Jewish national spirit is expressed differently by the different authors in *Kaveret*. Klotzko describes a national spirit that is more explicitly based in traditional Jewish texts and practice: “By the light of the Holy Scriptures, the religion of Israel, and its history, the children shall see the life of the nation; the national spirit shall dwell only in those who study the Holy Scriptures and those who know the spirit of Talmud.”<sup>71</sup> He even specifies “the spirit of the Talmud” as an essential element of the national spirit. Ze’ev Wolf Mendlin takes a primarily economic perspective; he sees the national spirit as a unifying force, counteracting the divisiveness of competition under capitalism. He criticizes those who undermine that national spirit by advocating change in traditional religious practices. He cautions, “The writers are especially guilty of this...in their derision of some practical commandments, which greatly help our unity.”<sup>72</sup> This admonition serves as a defense against religious conservatives who would accuse Ahad Ha’am and Benei Moshe of undermining traditional practice in precisely this way.

Yehoshua Eisenstadt imagines a national spirit whose content goes beyond normative religion. “For the bonds of nationalism are many. The language, the land, the religion, the natural inclinations: all these are born upon the knees of the

---

critique of that essay in *Ha-Melitz* and continued to hold that the national spirit can only be fully realized in the Holy Land. See Yosef Goldstein, “Ahad Ha’am – Lilienblum: pulmus ide’ologi o ma’avak ishi u-foliti?” (Ahad Ha’am and Lilienblum: Ideological Conflict or Political and Personal Confrontation?), *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Div. B, vol. 1 (1989): 244-250.

<sup>71</sup> באור כתבי הקדש, דת ישראל ודברי ימיו יראו הבנים חיי הלאום; רוח הלאומי תשכון אך בלומדי “ כה”ק וביודעי רוח התלמוד *Kaveret*, 22.

<sup>72</sup> ביחוד יחטאו בזה לעמנו הסופרים...בלעגם על איזה ממצוות המעשיות, אשר רבות הועילו “ *Kaveret*, 25. לאחדותנו

nation.”<sup>73</sup> In Eisenstadt’s account, heavily influenced by Ahad Ha’am and “Lo zeh ha-derekh,” religion only came to dominate the consciousness of the Jewish people because their community was formed without the stability and connection of its own land. His focus on the land is in keeping with Eisenstadt’s self-identification as a part of an “eretzyisraeli” (“Land of Israel,” “ארציִשראלי”) faction within Benei Moshe.<sup>74</sup> He concludes his essay by recommending the book under review (the children’s Bible textbook by Klotzko) for Jews to give to their sons and daughters, “that they should reflect on it always and draw from it the real spirit of Israel, religious and nationalist together.”<sup>75</sup> Eisenstadt introduces a new term, “ruah Yisrael” (“the spirit of Israel”) consisting of both religious and nationalistic elements. This would seem to be an inclusive position, but by separating the religious and the nationalistic, he actually refutes writers, including some of those mentioned above, who argue that the whole content of Jewish nationalism is the Jewish religious tradition.

Despite these differences of emphasis and interpretation, the idea of a “national spirit” stands out as a unifying element of the nationalism of Ahad Ha’am’s Odessa circle. The national spirit is the thread of continuity between the present day and the recent and even distant Jewish past. Strengthening the national spirit strengthens the communal bonds among Jews, but it also preserves and strengthens the connection of the Jews to Jewish history, a connection which in *Kaveret*’s description is very much under threat as a result of modernity. *Kaveret* sets up the

---

<sup>73</sup> כי הנה רבים המה קשורי הלאומיות. השפה, הארץ, הדת, הנטיות הטבעיות, — כל אלה נולדים על “ברכי האומה.” *Kaveret*, 99. “Born upon the knees” is a Biblical idiom for adopting as one’s own. See Gen. 30:3.

<sup>74</sup> Goldstein, “Ahad Ha’am – Lilienblum,” 245.

<sup>75</sup> “למען יהגו בו כל הימים ושאו ממנו רוח ישראל אמיתי, דתי ולאומי כאחד” *Kaveret*, 102.

Jewish national spirit as a countervailing force against the secularism and universalism of modern Europe.

### **Ruah and the Hebrew Language**

If the national spirit is the key to bridging the divide between the Jewish past and present, a central component of that spirit is the Hebrew language itself. As a part of his cultural nationalist program, Ahad Ha'am was a major advocate of the revival of the Hebrew language. As a writer and editor, his influence on the development of modern Hebrew was such that it has been said that "all who speak and write Hebrew today, though they may never have read him are influenced in their speech and writing by Ahad Ha'am."<sup>76</sup> That influence was not achieved entirely through the example of his own Hebrew writing, though Ahad Ha'am's style is exceptional for its clarity. As a periodical editor, Ahad Ha'am brings together a range of Hebrew styles, reinforcing trends and demonstrating flexibility and potential. Through *Kaveret* as a whole, Ahad Ha'am orchestrates the development of the stylistic aspect of the Odessa nusach.

The selection in *Kaveret* that addresses Hebrew language most directly is Yehoshua Hana Ravnitsky's "Safah berurah u-ne'imah!" ("Clear and Pleasant Language!") Ravnitsky begins by noting the diversity of Hebrew styles among contemporary writers; taking up the theme of the importance of the present moment, he positions his essay as guidance for writers "in the new period of our literature."<sup>77</sup> He identifies two main camps or tendencies among Hebrew writers: the first are the

---

<sup>76</sup> Shalom Spiegel, *Hebrew Reborn* (Macmillan Company, 1938), 282.

<sup>77</sup> "בתקופת ספרותנו החדשה." *Kaveret*, 27.

“melitzim,” whose Hebrew is precisely faithful to the language of the Bible, imitating the syntax and diction of the prophets especially and often employing phrases and even whole verses as they appear in the Bible. The second camp follow “ha-signon ha-pashut” (“the plain style”) marked mainly by its strict avoidance of melitzah-style biblical citation. Melitzah is the older style, characteristic of Hebrew writers from the birth of modern Hebrew at the end of the eighteenth century, through the middle of the nineteenth century. Ravnitsky accuses these writers of taking their imitation of the language of the Bible to be the most important value in writing, privileging form over content, “as if only that [melitzah] is the essential thing, the goal and the end; that is the *content* and the idea just its shell” (emphasis in original).<sup>78</sup> Not only that, but in their desire to achieve a beautiful and elegant style, they misuse verses whose meanings are complicated but which satisfy the formal needs of the author. These writers go on at great length unnecessarily, in order to demonstrate their mastery of melitzah. Ravnitsky concludes that this style of language can only exist in a literature “in the stage of childhood.”<sup>79</sup>

Turning to the second camp of writers, Ravnitsky claims that “ruah ha-zeman” (“the spirit of the age”) has caused Hebrew literature to develop and mature. The new generation of Hebrew writers have experience with other languages and their literatures, “Their field of view widened, and they began to have new thoughts and opinions on the world and all that fills it, according to the spirit of the age.”<sup>80</sup> With

---

<sup>78</sup> *Kaveret*, “כמו רק היא [המליצה] עיקרו של דבר, מטרתו ותכליתו, היא *המוך* והרעיון לקליפתה” 28.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. “במצב הילדות”

<sup>80</sup> “התרחב חוג מבטם ויחלו להגות דעות ולחשוב מחשבות חדשות על התבל ומלוואה לפי רוח הזמן” Ibid.

these new thoughts and wider experiences to express, the new generation has found the phrases and verses of the Bible too narrow and confining. They have decided to break free of melitzah, and “they decided to speak in the language of human beings.”<sup>81</sup> This is what Ravnitsky calls “safah berurah” (“clear language”), the language that seeks to describe directly the thoughts and conditions of the present. Ravnitsky sees much benefit in this development. He acknowledges that the contemporary world is vastly different from the one known and described by the biblical prophets. The modern world is full of new things and concepts, for which living languages have words and terms that biblical Hebrew lacks.

But the writers who follow the new style also err at the extreme. Ravnitsky accuses them of focusing on the content of their writing, to the exclusion of form and style. “Most of the ‘simple’ writers often speak in an extremely *simple* style, so that they *strip* the “beautiful language” of all its honor and glory” (emphasis in original).<sup>82</sup> They ignore and even actively avoid employing the linguistic style of Biblical Hebrew. This is a serious flaw, Ravnitsky argues, because aside from the importance of the Bible’s content, “it [the Bible] and only it gives a soul to our language that is dead in the people’s mouth.”<sup>83</sup> In this time when Hebrew is no longer a spoken language, the Bible serves as a repository of Hebrew expression that flowed from a living and active Hebrew-speaking culture. This is where Ravnitsky’s discussion of Hebrew language intersects with the broader doctrine concerning the Hebrew national

---

<sup>81</sup> “בהרו לדבר בלשון בני אדם.” *Kaveret*, 29.

<sup>82</sup> הסופרים “הפשוטים” עפ”י רוב ירבו לדבר בסגנון פשוט ביותר, עד כי יפשיטו מעל “השפה היפה” “את כל כבודה ותפארתה.” *Ibid.* Ravnitsky plays on the fact that the words “simple” (“pashut”) and “strip” (“yafshit”) share the same Hebrew linguistic root.

<sup>83</sup> “הוא רק הוא נותן נשמה לשפתנו המתה בפי עם.” *Ibid.*

spirit. He invokes “ruah ha-safah” (“the spirit of the language”). Each language, he claims, has its own particular essence, and the spirit of Hebrew is accessible in the present only through the language of the Bible. Without paying keen attention to the spirit of the language as expressed in the Bible, a writer’s Hebrew is unduly influenced by his or her native language.

Not only do the writers of the newer approach fail to capture the spirit of the language, they sometimes do active damage. Ravnitsky laments the numerous grammatical errors that litter contemporary periodicals. As both minor and established writers freely flaunt the rules of biblical grammar, he worries, “Our poor language like a breached city without a wall or a fence, everyone doing with her what is right in his own eyes.”<sup>84</sup> This kind of linguistic diversity risks adulterating the spirit of the Hebrew language. He argues that when writing in modern European languages, Jewish authors are able to express themselves within the accepted rules, the spirit of the language. To preserve the spirit of Hebrew, Ravnitsky cautions writers, “Do not interpret our language incorrectly, and do not create new sayings that are foreign to her spirit.”<sup>85</sup>

Ultimately, Ravnitsky’s stylistic prescription is a moderate one. Recognizing the distance of the modern world from the cultural context of the Bible, he does not think that writers should confine themselves to what they can express through direct quotation and rearrangement of biblical verses. He calls on writers to adapt Hebrew to the needs of the present age, “that it should meet all the needs of the writer in our day,

---

<sup>84</sup> ותהי שפתנו העניה כעיר פרוצה אין חומה ואין גדר, איש כל הישר בעיניו יעשה לה” *Kaveret*, 30.

<sup>85</sup> “לא יגלה פנים בלשונונו שלא כהלכה ולא יברא ניבי שפתים הזרים לרוחה” *Kaveret*, 31.

and he will be able to clearly express in it all the meditations of his spirit.”<sup>86</sup> While abandoning the melitzah style, however, the other extreme must also be avoided: “However it is our responsibility to do all this with utmost watchfulness and care, so as not to damage its power or its spirit, and so that this elevation does not become a diminution.”<sup>87</sup> Again here, the “spirit” of the language is the essential element that must be preserved, despite the changes made necessary by the new historical moment.

To see how this theory of the spirit of Hebrew style functions in practice, we can look to the language of Ravnitsky’s own essay. In focusing on the language of the Bible and identifying the spirit of Hebrew with that language, Ravnitsky omits any mention of Rabbinic or post-biblical Hebrew. This is a telling omission, as Ravnitsky received a traditional yeshivah education and is very familiar with Rabbinic literature.<sup>88</sup> He does not resist post-biblical influences in his own writing. He occasionally employs Aramaic words or phrases, as when he accuses young writers of treating Hebrew as “afra de-ara” (“dust of the earth,” “עפרא דארעא”), a common expression for something of little value. When Ravnitsky describes how the melitzah is too confining, insufficient for the expressive needs of modern writers, he adds that “a handful [of grain] can’t satisfy a lion.”<sup>89</sup> This colorful expression is drawn from the Talmud, where it appears in a completely unrelated context.<sup>90</sup> Ravnitsky deploys

---

<sup>86</sup> “למען תהיה דרושה לכל חפצי הסופר בזמננו ויוכל להביע בה את כל הגות רוחו באר היטב” Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> “אולם עלינו לעשות כל זאת בהתבוננות וזהירות יתירה לבלי לגעת אל עצמה ואל רוחה ולא תהיה לה” Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Years later, he would collaborate with Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik on *Sefer ha-Aggadah (The Book of Legends)*, a definitive anthology of non-legal traditions from a wide range of Rabbinic sources.

<sup>89</sup> “אין הקומץ משביע את הארץ” *Kaveret*, 28.

<sup>90</sup> See Berakhot 3b.

it here to beautifully illustrate the resistance of the young writers to the constraints of melitzah—the writers are like young lions in their power and energy, and they indeed argue that expanding the bounds of Hebrew language and literature is necessary for their sustenance. Ravnitsky’s use of this Talmudic phrase is analogous to the procedure of melitzah, drawing on Rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic rather than the Bible. This is also the key characteristic of Mendele Mokher Sforim’s paradigmatic nusach Hebrew style.

Ravnitsky also expands Hebrew beyond quotations from the Bible by incorporating foreign idioms. He describes the older Hebrew style as adding melitzah to melitzah until “one can’t see the forest for the trees.”<sup>91</sup> In describing how the resistance of young writers to melitzah causes them to ignore the spirit of Hebrew found only in the Bible, Ravnitsky says that they “throw the baby out with the bathwater.”<sup>92</sup> Both of these proverbs were common in German, which Ravnitsky knew. These idioms are particularly notable, given the tendency of Ravnitsky and all of writers in *Kaveret* to rely on expressions from Hebrew sources. Of course, Ravnitsky employed biblical expressions as well, in a fashion that borders on melitzah. Earlier I quoted Ravnitsky’s concern that as a result of misguided innovation, “Our poor language will be like a breached city without a wall or a fence, everyone doing with her what is right in his own eyes.”<sup>93</sup> The first part of the sentence borrows a phrase from Proverbs 25:28, “Like a breached city without a wall

---

<sup>91</sup> “מרב העצים לא נראה היער.” *Kaveret*, 29.

<sup>92</sup> “ישפכו ביחד עם מי הרחצה גם את הילד.” *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> “ותהי שפתנו העניה כעיר פרוצה אין חומה ואין גדר, איש כל הישר בעיניו יעשה לה.” *Kaveret*, 30.

is a man without restraint for his spirit.”<sup>94</sup> The second half incorporates a phrase from a verse that appears twice in the Book of Judges (17:6 and 21:25): “In those days there was no king in Israel; each man did what was right in his own eyes.”<sup>95</sup> What elevates this use of biblical language beyond the melitzah style Ravnitsky criticizes is that the context and meaning of the original verse does contribute to the meaning of Ravnitsky’s text. The original “breached city without a wall” in Proverbs is a “man without restraint for his spirit.” Given the rhetoric of “spirit” in this volume and the theme of the tension between the desire of the modern individual and collective norms, knowledge of the Bible verse enriches the text here, beyond the superficial appropriateness of the words. The same can be said for the phrase from Judges. In the Bible verse, the expression “each man did what was right in his own eyes” referred to a chaotic time, when there was no king in Israel. Ravnitsky deploys this phrase to speak to his own time, in which the Jewish communal scene was also fragmented and chaotic, without a centralized authority to provide order. In fact, at the end of this essay Ravnitsky calls for an organization of Hebrew writers to guard the spirit of the Hebrew language.<sup>96</sup> The use of the biblical language here provides depth. The biblical context of both of these verses might be seen to provide an ironic comment on the cultural situation of the present. This kind of ironic citation is also highly characteristic of Mendele Mokher Sforim and the self-aware synthetic Hebrew style of the nusach.

---

<sup>94</sup> “עיר פרוצה אין חומה איש אשר אין מעצר לרוחו.”

<sup>95</sup> “בימים ההם אין מלך בישראל איש הישר בעיניו יעשה.”

<sup>96</sup> *Kaveret*, 32.

The Hebrew style throughout *Kaveret* mostly follows Ravnitsky's prescriptions. Nearly all of the authors incorporate phrases and sometimes whole verses from the Bible, but not in the quantity or with the performative intent of the melitzah style. Authors will sometimes incorporate language from the Talmud or other Rabbinic texts, and these selections tend to be well known. For example, Zalman Epstein describes the travels of the character Mendele Mokher Sforim on a summer day: "The Blessed Holy One removed the sun from its pouch, and the world was hot."<sup>97</sup> This midrash (interpretation) is found in the Talmud (Bava Metzia 86b), but it would have been well-known to *Kaveret*'s readership because the biblical commentator Rashi quotes it in his comment on Genesis 18:1. Another common source of intertexts for *Kaveret*'s authors is the prayer book. Describing a bright, clear morning, Levinsky borrows a description from the morning blessing for the natural world, "the sun cast its rays to brighten the earth and those who dwell on it."<sup>98</sup> Ahad Ha'am criticizes those who endlessly plan and debate courses of action with regard to nationalism, "until they know the end of a work, conceived from the beginning."<sup>99</sup> This phrase, from the Shabbat hymn "Lecha Dodi," would be familiar to readers of nearly any Jewish background. Here the quotation is somewhat ironic, comparing the nationalist minutiae to God's plan for the Sabbath in Creation.

A clear innovative direction in the style of *Kaveret* is the incorporation of Aramaic words and phrases. Sometimes this occurs in direct citations of Rabbinic

---

<sup>97</sup> "הקב"ה הוציא חמה מנרתיקה וחם לעולם." *Kaveret*, 42.

<sup>98</sup> "השמש שלחה קרניה להאיר לארץ ולדרים עליה." *Kaveret*, 80.

<sup>99</sup> "עד שידעו סוף מעשה במחשבה תחלה." *Kaveret*, 96.

texts; Lilienblum quotes the Talmud, “One who is strict—we are strict with him,”<sup>100</sup> to justify the special opprobrium he brings on those who follow secular customs (for example, giving their children Russian names) *specifically* to avoid the stigma of Jewish particularism. Sometimes an Aramaic term is used for a specific concept in Jewish law. Klotzko describes educational practices that are decided according to the principle that in a situation where there is no settled law, “pok ḥazi mai ama davar” (“go see what the people are doing,” “פוק חזי מאי עמא דבר”).<sup>101</sup> Often, a brief Aramaic word or phrase is used when a clear and common Hebrew alternative is available. Within the space of a few sentences, Levinsky uses “margala be-fomei” (“[he] regularly said,” “מרגלא בפומיא”) and “*Shekhinta be-galuta*” (“God’s presence in exile,” “שכינתא בגלותא”).<sup>102</sup> The use of Aramaic in these cases does not add anything that could not be said in Hebrew. It does, however, imply a connection to Rabbinic texts and the Jewish religious heritage. For this reason, one might think that the writers who want to emphasize religion as a component of the national spirit would use Aramaic more frequently. That does not appear to be the case. (Ahad Ha’am, for example, is one of the most liberal users of Aramaic.) This suggests that more than a religious ideology, these Aramaic insertions represent cultural common ground for the audience of *Kaveret*, whose Hebrew learning came almost entirely from the study of traditional religious texts.

Expanding the resources of the Hebrew language, the writers of *Kaveret* frequently borrow words from European languages. Ravnitsky uses the word

---

<sup>100</sup> “קפדינן בהדיה — מאן דקפיד.” *Kaveret*, 9. See Pesahim 110b.

<sup>101</sup> *Kaveret*, 20.

<sup>102</sup> *Kaveret*, 78.

“puristim” (“פוריסטים,” “purists”) to characterize the adherents of the melitzah style, but marks the word as “be-la’az” (“בלע”ז), a Hebrew acronym for “be-lashon am zar” (“in a foreign language”).<sup>103</sup> Throughout the collection, similar transliterated words are used without being marked. Sometimes the words have no precise Hebrew parallel, as in “filipika” (“פיליפיקא,” “philippic”), “polemika” (“פולימיקא,” “polemic”), or “ego’ismus” (“אגאיזמוס,” “egoism”). In other places, there seems to have been a very near synonym available in Hebrew: for example, “ha-ide’al” (“האידיעאל,” “the ideal”), “hellenismus” (“העללעניזמוס,” “Hellenism”), or “eksploitatziya” (“עקספלוואטאציא,” “exploitation”). The use of European words is a marker of modernity, an openness to new concepts that have no precedent in Hebrew culture. But the evidence of *Kaveret* shows that this technique was controversial, and some authors avoid using borrowing and transliteration in this way. For some, this may have seemed an abrogation of the obligation to maintain the “spirit” of Hebrew.

None of these aspects of Hebrew style can lay exclusive claim to defining the Odessa nusach. It would be accurate to say that the juxtaposition of all these linguistic approaches is itself the style of the Odessa nusach. Ahad Ha’am’s circle always included writers of different educational backgrounds and different levels of facility with traditional Jewish texts and European language and literature. Ahad Ha’am is known for his superior Hebrew style, but as an editor, he did not impose a uniform style on the contributors to *Kaveret*.

---

<sup>103</sup> *Kaveret*, 27.

## Conclusion

In their discussion of the methodology for studying a modern and periodical, Scholes and Wulfman advise using the contents of the publication to form a profile of the implied reader.<sup>104</sup> From what we have seen, the implied reader of *Kaveret* is a Jewish man with a Hebrew education. In addition to Hebrew, his Jewish education and experiences include at least familiarity with well-known parts of the Bible and the prayer book. He likely has knowledge of Rabbinic texts and traditional Jewish practice, but while it is possible that he continues to practice in the traditional way, it is unlikely that he holds to the traditional tenets of Jewish belief. He likely has some secular education and lives in contact with the secular world. He may already be aware of or involved with the cause of Hibbat Zion. He may or may not be politically active, since part of the program of the periodical is to spur the reader to action. While theoretically he could live anywhere in Europe, the parochialism of the arguments here suggests that its effect would have been felt most strongly by those in Odessa and similar urban centers in the Russian Empire. Of course, this description matches all of the founders of Benei Moshe, as well as those whom Barzilai and Ahad Ha'am gathered to their cause in the organization's early months.<sup>105</sup> It also clarifies some of the limits of this group's appeal, limits which would put it at a disadvantage later in the 1890s when called to compete with the political Zionism of Theodor Herzl.

---

<sup>104</sup> *Modernism in the Magazines*, 146-147.

<sup>105</sup> An exception might be the members of the Benei Moshe Jaffa branch, which was quite active.

Ahad Ha'am's achievement as the editor of *Kaveret* is that it does present a distinct cultural and linguistic vision, an Odessa nusach. It emphasizes the disjunction between the present moment and the Jewish past. As a response to that disjunction, it develops the concept of a national spirit, an essential continuous element capable of providing cohesion and a cultural agenda for Jews in the present. That national spirit and its cultural consequences are inextricably bound with the Hebrew language. Writing in Hebrew, while preserving the pure "spirit" of Hebrew, is portrayed as a core value of Jewish nationalism. The Hebrew style modeled in *Kaveret* is a moderate one; it draws widely from ancient Hebrew texts, both biblical and Rabbinic. But it is also open to foreign vocabulary, idioms, and literary values.

These commonalities are clear, despite the real disagreements among *Kaveret's* contributors. Some believe that Jewish religion—some formulation of traditional belief and practice—is essential to the national spirit of Judaism. Others see the arcana of Rabbinic literature and their practical applications as vestiges of the Jewish people's forced alienation from nationalism. For some writers, the return to the spirit of Jewish nationalism is necessarily tied to settlement in the Land of Israel. Others focus on cultural renewal where the Jews are already living. In the circle of Ahad Ha'am, those who favor a secular, non-immigrationist approach would eventually predominate. But in these early days of Benei Moshe, *Kaveret* shows that these debates were still very much alive among the Sages of Odessa. The diversity of political voices is mirrored the group's Hebrew and literary style, which would have a lasting impact on the development of modern Hebrew language and literature.

As an editor, Ahad Ha'am brings these voices together, and the diversity becomes part of the message. *Kaveret* is his first periodical endeavor, and indeed, the actual diversity and goals here are limited in scope. But in *Kaveret*, Ahad Ha'am begins to display the tools of selection, editing, and juxtaposition that would enable him to achieve his greatest influence as the editor of *Ha-Shiloah*.

## Chapter 2 — A Lack of Editorial Vision: Reform and Haskalah in *Pardes*

In “Lo nahat be-Yaakov” (“There Is No Good in Jacob”), the first fiction selection in the first volume of *Pardes* (1892), Mendele Mokher Sforim’s narrator comments on the spread of the Haskalah, the intellectual movement among the Jews of Eastern Europe and Russia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that promoted secular education and European culture: “When the enlightenment of the new generation spread like a plague in our country and struck the children of our people, the House of Israel, the Holy One, Blessed be He, in His mercy did not allow this destroyer to enter our borders.”<sup>106</sup> The narrator believes his own community to be unaffected, but he hears rumors of young Jews “mitberlinim o mitztarfatim” (“Berlin-ing or French-ing themselves,” “מתברלינים או מצטרפתים”)—imitating the progressive customs of Western Europe, reading secular literature, and even removing their yarmulkes and going about bare-headed.<sup>107</sup> Soon after, a circle of young maskilim (proponents of the Haskalah) is discovered in the narrator’s town; a young man has been hiding “heretical” books beneath the tractate of Talmud he pretends to read. “Oy vavoy! The evil is coming! The evil is on its way!” The townspeople fear for the safety of their children, lest they be tempted away from the traditional path of Judaism.<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> בשעה שהשכלת הדור החדש נתפרצה כמגפה בארצנו ונגפה את ילדי עמנו בית ישראל, לא נתן “*Pardes*, vol. 1, 51.

<sup>107</sup> “מתברלינים או מצטרפתים.” Ibid. A yarmulke is a headcovering traditionally worn by religiously observant Jewish men.

<sup>108</sup> “אוי ואבוי! הקליפה ממשמשת ובאה! הקליפה הגנה זה באה” *Pardes*, vol. 1, 52.

The young men are brought before Rabbi Benjamin, the religious and spiritual leader of town, with the expectation that he will shame them and show them the error of their ways, “that they don’t know their right from their left.”<sup>109</sup> Surprisingly, Benjamin greets them with a friendly disposition. Through allegories, he attempts to persuade them of the importance of maintaining the traditional Jewish way of life. They are like Eve, who eats from the Tree of Knowledge and develops shame at her natural state, even in the Garden of Eden. The downtrodden Jewish community is like a tree during winter, showing few signs of life, but capable of flourishing again when the conditions are right.

The young men are affected by Benjamin’s words, but they ask: “What shall we do if our souls long for science, to understand and be wise and to see life like all other human beings?”<sup>110</sup> Benjamin allows them to study secular wisdom and science under two conditions: that their learning not destroy their Jewishness and that they do not draw others with them into secular learning, which would only cause them distress. The young men accept Benjamin’s conditions. Benjamin laments the poverty and suffering of the young Jews of his day, how the lot of Jewish community requires them to constrain themselves.<sup>111</sup> The respect shown to Benjamin by the bold young men and Benjamin’s compassion for them is a vision of tolerance and coexistence between the traditional Jewish community and a young generation of Jews open to the influence of the wider culture.

---

<sup>109</sup> “שאינם יודעים בין ימינם לשמאלם.” Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> “מה נעשה אם נפשנו חשקה במדע, להבין ולהשכיל ולראות חיים כשאר בני אדם.” *Pardes*, vol. 1, 54.

<sup>111</sup> *Pardes*, vol. 1, 55.

For the circle of Jewish intellectuals in Odessa at the end of the nineteenth century, the survival of the Jewish community was inextricably connected to the vitality of Jewish culture. In theorizing Jewish culture, a key concern was the proper attitude toward *haskalah*, new beliefs and practices that had become increasingly prevalent among Jews in the wake of the European Enlightenment. Was *haskalah* a “plague,” a “destroyer” undermining Jewish faith and solidarity? Was it a path to inevitable assimilation? Or was *haskalah* a personal and communal benefit: bringing sophistication and intellectual rigor to areas of Jewish life that had been dominated by superstition, parochialism, and blind adherence to tradition? In what ways is *haskalah* opposed to, compatible with, or even necessary for the program of Jewish nationalism? These questions were debated and dramatized extensively in the Hebrew literature of the period, and particularly in the flourishing periodical press.

*Pardes* (1892-1896) is a literary journal founded and edited by Yehoshua Ḥana Ravnitsky, a member of Ahad Ha’am’s circle of intellectuals in Odessa. Ravnitsky was an intellectual disciple of Ahad Ha’am, but he could not match Ahad Ha’am’s achievements as a periodical editor. *Pardes* has a similar cultural agenda to Ahad Ha’am’s *Kaveret*; they share many contributors in common and were directed to the same audience. But unlike the periodicals edited by Ahad Ha’am, *Pardes* is chaotic. Overlapping and opposing views leave the reader without a clear understanding of the periodical’s attitude toward key ideas, including *haskalah*. Ad hominem attacks on ideological opponents create a divisive discourse, rather than one that encourages the engagement of all Jews in a collective national project. These failings in *Pardes*, such a close comparator to Ahad Ha’am’s periodicals in so many

respects, highlight the unique and deliberate effects Ahad Ha'am was able to achieve elsewhere in the role of editor.

An example of the failure of *Pardes* to accommodate the diversity of Jewish belief and practice is its treatment of German-style Reform Judaism, what Russian writers customarily called "tikkunim ba-dat" ("religious reforms"). The authors in *Pardes* reject Reform Judaism as extreme and assimilationist. They accuse its proponents of bad faith and cynically luring Jewish youth to abandon their people and traditions. As a contributor to *Pardes*, Ahad Ha'am also rejects the theory and the specific path of the reforms in Germany, but his analysis is entirely different in tone. He gives a sympathetic account of the reformers' cultural context and goals. Ahad Ha'am's openness to dialogue, which finds little echo in the rest of *Pardes*, is used in his own periodicals to create openings for holders of different ideological positions to join him in the project of cultural Zionism.

Ahad Ha'am's editorial method of creating dialogue required more than bringing together contributions with different views of a subject, as *Pardes*'s treatment of *haskalah* shows. Ravnitsky publishes pieces that define *haskalah* in different ways, and there is debate over specific educational and cultural reforms, such as the institution of government-appointed "crown rabbis." There is a broad consensus in *Pardes* is to accept large-scale changes in Jewish religion and society as the result of the *Haskalah*. But politically, there is pressure to maintain a strategy of non-confrontation with conservative religious and social groups, in order to sustain the broad appeal of Jewish nationalism. There is no core theme in *Pardes* to unify these positions. In *Kaveret*, Ahad Ha'am develops the idea of the "*ruah*," the national

spirit, which is flexible enough to include all the factions of Jewish society. In his contributions to *Pardes*, Ahad Ha'am suggests that such a unifying theme for the debates over *haskalah* might be the nationalism of *Hibbat Zion*. In his own essays, Ravnitsky supports this view. But as an editor, Ravnitsky is unable to use that unifying theme to make *Pardes* an organic whole, as Ahad Ha'am does as editor of *Kaveret* and *Ha-Shiloah*.

### **Pardes and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitsky**

Yehoshua Hana Ravnitsky was born in Odessa in 1859 and received a traditional Jewish education. After marrying, he became interested in modern European culture and taught himself Russian, German, and French. He was an active participant in the circle of Jewish intellectuals in Odessa, writing articles for the Hebrew and Yiddish press. He was a local leader in the *Hibbat Zion* movement. In addition to founding and editing *Pardes*, in 1893 Ravnitsky founded *Olam Katan* (*Small World*), devoted to disseminating Hebrew literature for children. Ravnitsky published Bialik's first poem, "El ha-tzipor" ("To the Bird"), in the first volume of *Pardes*, initiating a lifelong collaboration between the two. In 1901 they helped to found the *Moriah* publishing house, dedicated to producing new editions of Hebrew classics.<sup>112</sup> Bialik and Ravnitsky collaborated on *Sefer Ha-Aggadah* (*The Book of Legends*), an anthology of stories, interpretations, and other non-legal material drawn from the large corpus of Rabbinic literature, which was extremely popular and influential. Following the Russian Revolution, Ravnitsky emigrated to Palestine in

---

<sup>112</sup> "Moriah" is a Biblical name for the mountain on which the ancient Temple stood in Jerusalem.

1921 and settled in Tel Aviv. He helped to found the *Dvir* publishing house as a successor to *Moriah* and continued to publish on Hebrew literature and Jewish education until his death in 1944.<sup>113</sup>

*Pardes* is a literary anthology, founded and edited by Ravnitsky and published in Odessa. Its first volume appeared in 1892, followed by a second volume in 1894, and a third and final volume in 1896. In many ways *Pardes* was a successor to *Kaveret*, the subject of the previous chapter. As Ahad Ha'am took on increasing responsibilities with the publisher Aḥiasaf, he did not produce a volume of *Kaveret* after the first one appeared in 1890. *Pardes* filled this gap. Ravnitsky drew on many of the same contributors that had been involved with *Kaveret*, and the subjects and style of the periodical are substantially the same. The first two volumes begin with a letter to the editor by Ahad Ha'am, followed by an essay by Ravnitsky related to Jewish nationalism. Ahad Ha'am also contributes short essays under the title "*Peirurim*" ("Crumbs").<sup>114</sup> Mendele Mokher Sforim (S.Y. Abramovitz) contributes the largest part of the fiction in the volumes. The first and third volumes include humorous stories by Elḥanan Leib Levinsky. Other prominent fiction contributors include Reuven Brainin and Ben Avigdor (Avraham Leib Shalkovich). *Pardes* includes poetry from Y.L. Gordon, Yehalel (Yehuda Leib Levin), and Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik. Other contributions include polemical and critical essays on issues of Jewish nationalism, education, and culture. Several selections—notably those of

---

<sup>113</sup> "Dvir" is a Biblical term for the holiest inner sanctum of the ancient Temple.

<sup>114</sup> For the third volume, Ahad Ha'am was too busy with other work to write a letter to the editor or his customary contribution to *Pardes*. See letter to Ravnitsky, 3 Jun. 1896, *Iggerot Ahad Ha'am* [*Letters of Ahad Ha'am*], vol. 1 (Moriah, 1923), 96-100.

Moshe Leib Lilienblum and Simon Dubnow—discuss issues of ancient or recent Jewish history. Ravnitsky also published a few scientific essays on general subjects, such as basic physics or the nature of death. The third volume includes selections from the letters of S.D. Luzzatto, Y.L. Gordon and Sh. Y. Fuenn. The second and third volumes include a section called “Letters from Eldad and Meidad,” in which Ravnitsky and Sholem Aleichem adopt pseudonyms to offer sharp critiques of contemporary Hebrew authors and publications.<sup>115</sup> Finally, each volume of *Pardes* concludes with a section of book reviews by Ravnitsky, writing under the pseudonym “Bar Katzin.” Since *Pardes* and *Kaveret* are so similar in structure and take their contributions from the same pool of writers, the significant differences between them can be ascribed to the difference between Ravnitsky and Ahad Ha’am as editors.

*Pardes* was printed in Odessa by Aba Dukhno, the Hebrew and Yiddish printer who also produced *Kaveret*. It is printed in an octavo format (16 pages per sheet), with each sheet numbered at the bottom of the first page. The main typeface is Hebrew, though there is an additional title page in Russian, and glosses, quotations, and citations appear throughout the volumes in Cyrillic and Latin typefaces. The decoration in *Pardes* is minimal, limited to small graphics at the end of some contributions (usually when a contribution ends in the middle of a page). There are no advertisements in the first two volumes. The third volume ends with two pages of book advertisements in Russian and Hebrew, promoting Ravnitsky’s various publishing ventures, among others.

---

<sup>115</sup> This was a continuation of their popular column, “*Kevurat Sofrim*” (“קבורת סופרים,” “Burying Writers”), which appeared from 1892-1893 in the newspaper *Ha-Melitz*.

## Approach to German-Style Reform Judaism

The approach of *Pardes* to German-style Reform Judaism shows how Ravnitsky departs from Ahad Ha'am's practice as an editor. Ravnitsky allows insults and derision toward Reform leaders, as well as criticism of the ideology of Reform Judaism and its practical reforms. As editor of *Kaveret* and *Ha-Shiloah*, Ahad Ha'am refused to publish such personal attacks. As a contributor to *Pardes*, Ahad Ha'am places the German reforms in historical context and allows that they are well-intentioned, albeit harmful. This difference in approach between Ravnitsky and Ahad Ha'am partly explains how Ahad Ha'am's periodicals were able to support dialogue across opposing positions in the Jewish world.

There is no singular essay in *Pardes* primarily or even substantially devoted to the subject. Reading selections from Ahad Ha'am and the other prominent writers of this generation, it would be easy to conclude that Reform Judaism simply was not significant in the worldview of the Odessa Sages. However, that conclusion would be incorrect. Tikkunim ba-dat (religious reforms) and the customs of "western" reformers are frequently discussed, often in conjunction with larger questions of *haskalah* and modernity. Often these references take the form of a paragraph, a sentence, or even a footnote. Reading the periodical as a unified text allows the reader to assemble these traces into a cohesive cultural ideology and attitude toward modernization.

The Reform Movement in Judaism arose in Germany in the first half of the nineteenth century. With the advent of modernity, the ghetto walls—the social and legal barriers that separated Jews from their Christian neighbors—literally and

figuratively began to fall. Enlightenment ideas (humanism, rationalism, science, critical text study) led some Jews to question the tenets of traditional Judaism and the basis for many Jewish laws and practices. Jews sought citizenship and political rights, and this emancipation was granted in an increasing number of European states throughout the nineteenth century. As a consequence of emancipation or in order to achieve it, Jews wished to seem less alien to their neighbors and for Judaism to more closely resemble the Christianity practiced by the non-Jews around them.

In the 1820s and 1830s, this reform was primarily centered on worship and the synagogue service. Synagogues introduced organ music, sermons, and prayer in the vernacular, rather than Hebrew. Many prayers professing doctrines objectionable to the reformers—such as the inferiority of non-Jewish nations, the ingathering of exiles to Zion, and the reestablishment of the sacrificial cult—were eliminated. The Reform Movement emphasized a universal, moral vision of Judaism, in contrast to what they perceived as the rigid legalism of the existing rabbinical establishment. Rejecting the divinity of the Talmud and the Jewish laws derived from it, the reformers discarded many traditional Jewish ritual practices. With reforms codified at rabbinical conferences in the 1840s, this new approach had become dominant in Germany, and it was sometimes referred to as “German” Judaism, as well as “western,” “neolog,” or “Reform.”

In Eastern Europe, where Jews faced greater political disabilities and modern education was less widespread, reform proceeded more slowly. The “Vienna rite”—worship involving organ music and secular prayer, but not abrogating Jewish law—spread to Hungary, Austria, and elsewhere. In Galicia, schools teaching secular

subjects were established in Tarnopol, Brody, and L'viv, paving the way for religious reform. Conditions in the Russian Empire were even less conducive to reform, but there were some developments. In 1841, a group of Jews from Galicia founded the Brody Synagogue in Odessa. The service was beautified, some repetitive medieval prayers were eliminated, and sermons were given in German. Reform-oriented synagogues were also established in Warsaw and Vilna. The rationale for Reform found an audience among prominent Russian Jews. Moshe Leib Lilienblum and the poet Y.L. Gordon (both contributors to *Pardes*) argued vociferously against the legal authority possessed by rabbis.<sup>116</sup>

In *Pardes*, some contributors refer to the controversy surrounding the Reform Movement decades earlier, in the 1840s to 1860s, when polemics between reformers and their orthodox opponents were common. In his essay “Le-veirur re’ayon Hibbat Zion” (“Clarifying the Idea of Hibbat Zion”), Epstein traces the history of the idea of Jewish nationalism in the modern era. He claims that after emancipation, when Jews in the West were no longer forced to live in isolated, self-sufficient communities, “it was enough for a period of a few generations to cut off the aged tree, the national essence of Israel, from its roots and give Judaism a new form, which the Children of Israel had never imagined.... They also exchanged their beliefs with new beliefs....and so the Children of Israel became ‘of the Mosaic religion.’”<sup>117</sup> He notes

---

<sup>116</sup> The definitive history of Reform Judaism’s European origins is Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Wayne State University Press, 1995).

<sup>117</sup> “די היה לתקופת דורות אחדים לעקור את העץ הזקן, את עיקר לאומית ישראל, משרשו ולתת... ובכן ליהדות צורה חדשה, אשר לא שערוה בני ישראל מעולם... ימירו גם את אמונתם באמונות חדשות... ובכן.” *Pardes*, vol. 2, 194.

that the reformers rejected the doctrine of hoping for return to Zion and advocated the use of the vernacular in place of Hebrew in prayer and study. Without these and without the spirit of nationalism, they were left with only “houses of worship empty of people, though magnificent to look at, with ‘priests’ wearing vestments, and foreign customs.”<sup>118</sup> For Epstein, as with many Russian writers, the grandeur of Reform “temples” in Western Europe is a potent marker of difference from the Judaism they consider authentic. They are an imitation of Christian churches, a theme Epstein reinforces by referring to Reform rabbis as “priests.”<sup>119</sup>

Epstein argues that without a nationalist vision for the Jewish future, Reform Judaism will not be able to sustain Jewish engagement rooted in an arid, tragic past:

In vain will these good “priests” toil to glorify and extoll their people’s past: here and there they will find a few who will turn to see the excellent drama, the great tragedy of millennia. But the great majority, especially the youth who desire life, will look coldly on that whole structure: “So it is good,” they will say, “that our departed ancestors were a people. They suffered and knew for what they suffered, to their credit: But what is it to us? We have no special national character, language, literature...land—not a trace; the priests themselves have denied us a future, by saying that there isn’t one, nor a need for one. And faith? Do we not know what the very priests themselves believe? And so the way is open to a different field, to them, to the nations, for there they live, there they aspire to a future, there is an open range to work and develop....”<sup>120</sup>

---

118 בתי תפלה רקים מאדם ונהדרים למראית עין, יש “כהנים” לבושי בגדי שרד, יש איזו מנהגים “*Pardes*, vol. 2, 195. הצונים.”

119 This charge is not completely unfounded, as many Reform rabbis did adopt titles used by Christian clergy, such as “reverend.”

120 “לשוא יגעו “הכהנים” הטובים ההם לפאר ולרומם את העבר של עמם: פה ושם עוד ימצאו איזו יחידים, אשר יסורו לראות את המחזה המצוין, את הטרגדיה הגדולה של אלפי שנה, אבל הרוב הגדול, וביחוד בני הנעורים החפצים חיים, יביטו בקר רוח על כל הבניה ההיא: “טוב אפוא, יאמרו, אבותינו נוחי נפש היו עם, המה סבלו וידעו בעד מה הם סובלים, הן וכבוד להם: אולם אנחנו מה? צורה לאומית מיוחדת אין לנו, שפה, ספרות... ארץ - אין שם זכר, עתיד שללו הכהנים בעצמם ממנו, באמרם כי איננו וכי אין בו גם צורך, ואמונה? הלא יודעים אנו איך יאמינו הכהנים בעצמם ובכבודם, ובכן הדרך פנוי

This critique focuses on Reform's inability to appeal to Jewish youth. Here they are the ones who note the lifelessness of the religion, without land, language, or national aspirations. They specifically accuse the "priests" (Reform rabbis) of having "robbed" them of their future. They doubt the sincerity of the rabbis' faith.

Ultimately, Epstein claims these conditions will cause Jewish youth to seek vitality and development among non-Jews. He concludes, "These are the words of the people of Israel in the West, and all the 'Wisdom of Israel' that our priests have created there, in all its glory and precious value, moths will consume it in the libraries, and it will not save the remnant of this people from the terrible annihilation that lies in wait to wipe it from the earth."<sup>121</sup> This severe, condemnatory language is emblematic of the disdain and skepticism of reform prevalent among Eastern European Jews.

Epstein's historical description is bolstered by the letters of Samuel David Luzzatto (Shadal) included in *Pardes*'s third volume. Luzzatto was an Italian scholar and Bible commentator. He embraced some aspects of the Haskalah—he translated prayers into Italian and taught at a modern rabbinical seminary in Padua—but his philosophy was traditional. He insisted on the election of Israel as a chosen people and the divine origin of the Torah's text. He was opposed to Greek philosophy and rationalism, which is evident in his criticism of German-style reform. In a letter to the

---

לשדה אחר, להם, להעמים, יען כי שמה יחיו, שמה ישאפו לעתיד, שמה יש כר נרחב לעבוד... ולהתפתח." *Pardes*, vol. 2, 195.

<sup>121</sup> אלה הם דברי אנשי ישראל בהמערב, וכל "חכמת ישראל" אשר בראו שם כהנינו, בכל תפארתה " *Ibid.* "Hokhmat Yisrael" ("Wisdom of Israel") is a Hebrew term for Wissenschaft des Judentums, the discipline of academic Jewish studies that emerged in Germany with the onset of the Haskalah.

Italian scholar Isaac Samuel Reggio dated Nov. 26, 1838, he equates rationalism with a desire for assimilation:

The vigorous desire of rationalism in our day is to see the members of our covenant gain equality with their neighbors, the cultured nations; to see that the study of Judaism be considered wisdom like Christian theology, that synagogues be transformed into temples like those of the Protestants; and that education and customs, the life and death of the Jews should imitate and equate to those of the Christians.<sup>122</sup>

According to Luzzatto, this desire for assimilation showed a lack of national pride and appreciation for the “originality and divinity” of Judaism. It was also related to the reformers’ desire for emancipation: “To the rationalist Jews, emancipation is the greatest good. Their hearts are amazed at the progress of all the nations and are pained and despise the idleness of their brethren, idleness whose source they ascribe to poor education and to the study of and reverence for the ancient Rabbis.”<sup>123</sup>

Luzzatto attributes to the reformers a condescending view of their “unenlightened” co-religionists, whom they viewed as uneducated and uncivilized. This attitude also contributed to skepticism of reform among less-wealthy, less-educated Jews of Eastern Europe. In a letter from 1855, Luzzatto expresses a desire for “reform” in Jewish education, but he is not speaking of German-style reform, but rather “internal reform,” “not d’emprunt [by borrowing], not by copying, not like that of those abroad, who did nothing but imitate the Protestants, and who are essentially complete

---

<sup>122</sup> חפצו היותר נמרץ של הרציונליזם בימינו הוא לראות את בני בריתנו משתוים לשכניהם העמים “ המתורבתים; לראות שיהיו למודי היהדות נעשים חכמה כהתאולוגיה הנוצרית, בתי-הכנסת יהפכו להיכלים כאותם של הפרוטסטנטים; והחינוך והמנהגים, החיים והמות של היהודים יתחקו וישתוו לאותם של הנוצרים.” *Pardes*, vol. 3, 107.

<sup>123</sup> האמנספיציה היא הטוב היותר גדול בעד היהודים הרציונליסטים. לבם משתאה על התקדמות כל “ העמים וכואב ובוזה להתעצלות אחיהם, התעצלות שמקורה הם מוצאים ברוע החינוך ובלמוד וכיבוד הרבנים הקדמונים.” *Ibid*.

rationalists, and even Spinozists.”<sup>124</sup> Luzzatto reduces the innovations of the reformers to a mere “imitation” of Protestantism, going so far as to accuse them of following the excommunicated seventeenth-century Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza in his rejection of the divine origin of the Torah and a theistic conception of God.

Ravnitsky’s publication of these decades-old letters sanctions the personal attacks on the advocates of reform. As a whole, German-style Reform Judaism is portrayed in *Pardes* as an imitation of Protestant Christianity, implemented for the purpose of assimilation. Reform is characterized by large, ornate worship spaces and rabbis with secular education who are not traditionally observant. The reformers reject nationalism and the hope for the ingathering of Jewish exiles in Zion. They have little interest in the revival of Hebrew. On the contrary, they conduct worship, deliver sermons, and study Jewish texts in the vernacular. They may not, in fact, believe in the theistic God of Judaism at all, but rather subscribe to a strict rationalism. Their version of Judaism is dry and academic, and it is destined to wither, as future generations abandon Judaism for complete assimilation into Christian society. Ravnitsky himself calls Reform Jews “a title page without a book or a shell with nothing inside.”<sup>125</sup>

Ahad Ha’am’s alternative approach to Reform Judaism in *Pardes*, which is expressed across several of the short philosophical sketches he published under the

---

<sup>124</sup> לא d'emprunt, לא משום קופיות, לא כאותה של אנשי חוץ-לארץ, שלא עשו דבר אלא התחקו על “*Pardes*, vol. 3, 119. הפרוטסטנטיזם, ואשר בעיקרם הגם רציונליסטים גמורים, ואם תרצה שפינוזיסטים

<sup>125</sup> “שער בלי ספר או קליפה בלי תוך.” *Pardes*, vol. 3, 11.

title “Peirurim” in the first two volumes. In one of these sketches, “Le-toldot ha-ḥiyuv ve-ha-shlilah” (“Towards a History of Positive and Negative”), Ahad Ha’am’s assessment of the external appearance of Reform matches the other contributors’. He identifies Reform with “magnificent synagogues with sermons full of deadly deep waters.”<sup>126</sup> But, crucially, Ahad Ha’am does not claim that the Reform Movement arises merely to achieve emancipation or imitate Protestantism. Instead, he claims that Reform is a *response* to the rise of *haskalah*. Ahad Ha’am claims that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a new positive value emerged among Jews, “the need for citizenship and faith in its attainment through European enlightenment.”<sup>127</sup> Those who pursued this goal “mercilessly tore down all the strongholds of their people, with great joy and trumpets of victory.”<sup>128</sup> The gleeful iconoclasm and triumphalism often ascribed to religious reformers are attributed to this group of radical maskilim, whose primary goal was emancipation. In Ahad Ha’am’s account, this movement gave rise to a countermovement, which tried to fill the “void” left by the destructive maskilim. Religious reform is one aspect of that countermovement. Ahad Ha’am considers it an inferior response, but he does not ascribe to reform destructive intentions or a cynical desire for assimilation or emancipation. On the contrary, religious reform has an independent, Jewish impetus—to foster Jewish existence and community in response to radical change brought about by the *Haskalah*.

---

<sup>126</sup> “בתי כנסיות מהודרים עם דרשות מלאות מים שאין להם סוף” *Pardes*, vol. 1, 70.

<sup>127</sup> “צורך לחיי אזרח ואמונה בהשגתם על ידי השכלת אירופא” *Ibid*.

<sup>128</sup> “הרסה ולא חמלה כל מבצרי בת עמה בשמחה רבה ובתרועת נצחון” *Ibid*.

In another “Peirurim” essay, “Shtei reshuyot” (“Two Dominions”), Ahad Ha’am discusses the results of conflict between the spirit of the present and the demands of the past. The norms of the present inevitably penetrate daily life, he says, and at first it is not apparent that they stand in opposition to the past. Eventually, the outdated customs give way entirely. A different situation arises when advocates for radical change, in keeping with the needs of the present, highlight the conflict with the past. This creates psychological tension, and people whose traditions are challenged cling even more strongly to them. He summarizes the progression:

Priests of the present, who want to negate the past, must work toward their goal in reverse, to put off the open confrontation until the present has completed its work in secret, and strength of the past has already waned in the inmost hearts enough for it to be completely overthrown. If they do not do this, but rather hasten to reveal the tear in the soul of society before it is sufficiently wide, in their hope to thereby hasten the end of the past and end its rule prematurely — they surely miscalculate. Not only will their hope not come to pass, but also by these actions they extend the days of the past and by their own hand they build a barrier to defend it from the present, by allowing society to get used to their confrontation and view the conflict between them as an “old objection.”<sup>129</sup>

Under this theory, agitating for traditional beliefs and practices of the past to be replaced in the spirit of a new age is counterproductive; once the conflict between the past and the present is made salient, human beings will adapt to living with the contradiction, and once the contradiction is normalized, the old custom will never

---

<sup>129</sup> "כהני ההוה, הרוצים בבטול העבר, צריכים להשתדל בשביל מטרותם, להפך, להרחיק זמן פגישה הגלויה עד לאחר שהשלים ההוה את מלאכתו בסתר, וכחו של העבר נחלש כבר בעמקי הלבבות במדה הדרושה למפלתו הגמורה. ואם אינם עושים כן, אלא הם מצדם מקדימים לגלות את הקרע שבנפש החברה קודם שנתרחב כל צרכו, בתקותם להחיש על ידי זה קץ העבר ולהעביר ממשלתו בלא יומו, - הרי הם טועים בחשבונם, ולא לבד שתקותם לא תבוא, אלא שבמעשיהם אלו הם מאריכים עוד ימי העבר ובידיהם הם בונים חיץ סביבו לשמרו מפני ההוה, בהביאם את החברה להתרגל בפגישתם להביט על הסתירה 'שביניהם כעל 'טענה ישנה'." *Pardes*, vol. 2, 65.

simply give way to the new. Ahad Ha'am is not specifically speaking about religious reform here, but the applicability of his concept is clear. Religious reformers invoked the mores of the present to discard many traditional Jewish beliefs and practices. Following Ahad Ha'am, their error was not in the specific changes they advocated, but in fighting for those changes, rather than simply allowing the new norms to take hold over time, as they inevitably would have.

Just a few pages later, in a sketch entitled "Ḥiku'i ve-hitbolelut" ("Imitation and Assimilation"), Ahad Ha'am provides the most direct discussion of German-style Reform Judaism found in the pages of *Pardes*:

This practical movement is considered by many, including many of the "reformers" themselves, a coarse step toward assimilation. But they are mistaken. When the self-negation reaches a level that those who practice it no longer feel any internal connection with the "inheritance of the ancestors" and truly want to be free of it or free others from it by assimilation into a foreign culture — then they also no longer feel the need to raise that inheritance to the level of perfection it requires, according to their terms: instead, they are inclined to leave it as it is, until it ends and is lost on its own. Until then they imitate the actions of their ancestors by chance, in a type of artificial, momentary "self-negation," as if they are not the ones acting, but rather the spirit of the "ancestors" had entered them at that moment to perform those actions in the way it had earlier been accustomed.<sup>130</sup>

Although Ahad Ha'am identifies the Reform Movement as a clear step toward assimilation, he allows that this perspective is shared by only some of the reformers

---

<sup>130</sup> התנועה המעשית הזאת נחשבה אמנם בעיני רבים, ובתוכם גם איזו מן "המתקנים" עצמם, כפסיעה גסה לצד ההתבוללות. אבל טעות הוא בידם כשהתבטלות הגיעה כבר למדרגה כזו, שאין בעליה מרגישים עוד שום קשר פנימי עם "נחלת-אבות" ורוצים באמת להשתחרר או לשחרר אחרים ממנה על ידי התבוללות בחברה נכרית, - אז אינם מרגישים עוד גם את הצורך להרים נחלה זו למדרגת-השלמות הדרושה לה, לפי מושגיהם: אלא אדרבא, נוטים יותר להניחה כמו שהיא, עד שתכלה ותאבד מאליה, ועד אז הם מחקים מעשי אבותיהם, כשהמקרה מביאם לכך, באיזה מין "התבטלות" מלאכותית, לשעה קלה, כאלו לא הם המה העושים, כי אם רוח "האבות" היא שנתלבשה בהם באותה שעה ועושה מעשים אלו. *Pardes*, vol. 2, 73-74. "באותו אופן שהיתה רגילה לעשות לפנים.

themselves. This is a significantly more generous assumption than we have seen from the other Eastern writers. As in the previous example, Ahad Ha'am claims that the efforts of the reformers unintentionally impeded their own aims. By severing the connection between Jews and their national heritage, they eliminated the motivation to participate in the project of reforming Judaism in keeping with modern ideals. Instead, these disconnected Jews prefer to go through the traditional motions, until those traditional beliefs and practices recede and disappear on their own.

Ahad Ha'am then addresses himself to Abraham Geiger, the leading rabbi and scholar of the German Reform Movement. Geiger claimed that Hebrew writing was not an authentic expression of Jewish existence in the modern era, but rather placed the writer in the domain and under the influence of Rabbinic literature and legislation. Ahad Ha'am strongly objects, claiming that through the "reform" of the Hebrew language, Jewish nationalist writers have developed a Hebrew that is able to express the complexity of the present. He then uses Geiger's disregard of the reform of Hebrew to make a larger point about German-style reform:

When we then see Geiger and his followers devoting their whole lives and their powers to the reform of another part of the inheritance of the ancestors, by their terms, and they are not willing to accept here what they accept there — Surely this is a reliable sign for us, that here is a place where their Hebrew essence is alive. It has not died within them, but only receded, and their true internal desire (whether or not they admit it to themselves and others) is: "to reveal the independent spirit [of their Hebrew essence] in the same ways the one they imitate reveals his."<sup>131</sup>

---

<sup>131</sup> וכשאנו רואים איפוא את גיגר זה עצמו וסיעתו מקדישים כל ימיהם וכחותיהם לתקונו של חלק אחר " מנחלת-האבות, לפי מושגיהם, ואינם יכולים להסתפק פה במה שמסתפקים שם, - הרי זה לנו אות נאמן, כי פה הוא מקום חיותה של ישותם העברית, אשר לא מתה בלבם, כי אם נצטמצמה, וכי חפצם האמתי והפנימי (בין שמודים כן לעצמם ולאחרים או לא) הוא: "לגלות את רוחה העצמית באותן הדרכים שעושה. *Pardes*, vol. 2, 74. "כן המחוקק לרוחו.

Again Ahad Ha'am betrays a slight sympathy toward the reformers. Their Hebrew essence is not dead, only "receded." Although their reforms move in the direction of assimilation, their ultimate desire is to express their particular (not universal) Jewish essence. He suggests that they are not willing to admit this motivation, or perhaps are not even aware of it themselves.

Considering as a whole the engagement of *Pardes* with German-style Reform Judaism, we see that Ahad Ha'am's positions stand noticeably apart from the other writers, even the ones who were part of his circle in Odessa. The common stance was to deride the reformers as cynical (if not wicked) assimilationists. The set images associated with reform are ornate temples, where prayers and sermons are delivered in vernaculars. Reform rabbis and their followers are accused of having no Jewish loyalty or spirit. While Ahad Ha'am also references some of those details, he allows that the German reforms may have been undertaken out of an authentic effort to express Jewish identity. He draws a distinction between the reforms themselves, some of which may indeed have been made necessary by the onset of modernity, and the way in which they are advocated and implemented, which he finds counterproductive.

Outside of the periodical context, it would be difficult to detect this distinction between Ahad Ha'am and the other writers of his circle. Direct references to German-style reform are few and brief, and they appear often in the context of unrelated discussions. The repetition across various essays allows for the emergence of an "attitude" towards reform from *Pardes* as a whole. Ravnitsky allows that attitude to be dominated by personal animus and hyperbole. Ahad Ha'am's selections show the possibility of a different level of engagement, criticizing while keeping open the

possibility of identification and dialogue, which Ahad Ha'am is able to instill in his periodicals from the position of editor.

### **Pardes and Haskalah**

Ahad Ha'am's editing of *Kaveret* is distinguished by the concept of the "ruah," the national spirit to which all the various debates and efforts contribute. The discussion of the Haskalah in *Pardes* has no such unifying theme. Ravnitsky publishes diverse views of *haskalah* across selections and genres, but authors use the term to refer to numerous overlapping and separate ideas. Some writers relate to the Haskalah as an intellectual movement in the recent Jewish past, arising among the Jews of Germany at the end of the eighteenth century. They invoke Moses Mendelssohn's translation of the Bible into German (1783) and the "Me'asfim" ("Gatherers")—the circle associated with *Ha-Me'asef* (*The Gatherer*), the first modern Hebrew periodical, dedicated to the use of Hebrew and bringing modern education to the Jews of Europe. There are echoes of the radical Haskalah of mid-nineteenth century Galicia, where maskilim engaged in bitter polemics with the Hasidim. Different authors address the attempts of the Russian government to reform education and religious practice among the Jews, in order to integrate them better into Russian society.

But aside from the Haskalah as a movement, *haskalah* is also used in *Pardes* to refer to an informal intellectual and social orientation. The "maskilim" are those who read European languages and engage with non-Jewish culture. They reject the detailed stringencies of Jewish law and the rabbis, and many have abandoned Jewish religious practice altogether. They may or may not be sympathetic to the cause of

Jewish nationalism. By this description, nearly all the contributors to *Pardes* are to some extent maskilim. How they describe and delimit *haskalah*, then, is an important insight into this circle's self-identity.

Zalman Epstein discusses the origins of the *Haskalah* in an essay discussing the development of the Jewish nationalist idea. At the end of the eighteenth century, Jews in Western Europe stopped waiting for a miracle to bring an end to the Jewish exile. Instead, they turned to “enlightenment” to effect improvement in the state of their community.<sup>132</sup> But their encounter with the larger European culture was highly destabilizing: “Since the wall separating the ghetto from the expanses of the world was destroyed to such an extent, its few inhabitants were unable to stand against the lightning flash of the new way of life, and as they went captive before it, they turned a rebellious shoulder to their people's origin.”<sup>133</sup> The commitment to Jewish nationalism rapidly declined, and Jews turned to new beliefs and customs, “to give Judaism a new form, which the Children of Israel had never imagined.”<sup>134</sup> By the 1840s and 1850s, a positive, more moderate *haskalah* was able to take root in Eastern Europe. There, the universalizing, secularizing force of enlightenment culture was less forceful, and traditional Jewish ways of life were more vibrant and deeply rooted. Under these conditions, *haskalah* could lead to positive development in the Jewish community:

Yes, light and dark are mixed up here. In order for this people to renew its strength, it must turn towards the spirit emanating from the center

---

<sup>132</sup> *Pardes*, vol. 2, 193-194.

<sup>133</sup> “כיון שנהרס במדה ידועה הקיר המבדיל בין הגיטו ומרחביה של העולם, לא יכלו יושביה המעטים “...עמוד נגד ברק זהרם של החיים החדשים, ובלכתם שבי לפניהם פנו כתף סוררת למקור מחצבתם *Pardes*, vol. 2, 194.

<sup>134</sup> “לתת ליהדות צורה חדשה, אשר לא שעררה בני ישראל מעולם.” *Ibid.*

of world culture, from the West; yet even when this spirit comes to its boundaries, it will not destroy the depiction of its national form, it will not cut off from its roots the ancient trunk, the content of “Israel-ness” in its fullness and completeness. Rather it will lift up its spirit, remove from it the sickness of the ghetto that clings to it and give it new life, to go upright on its historic path and to clear futures for it on the basis of its glorious past.<sup>135</sup>

This more moderate form of *haskalah*, influenced by secular ideas and education but not seeking to uproot the traditional structures of Jewish life, is the strain associated with Epstein’s own origins, which is conducive to the development of Jewish nationalism.

The contributors to *Pardes* sometimes disagree outright about the functioning of *haskalah* in recent Jewish history. One example is the institution of the crown rabbinate, functionaries of the Russian government placed in positions of responsibility and authority over Jewish communities. Rabbis were required to maintain Jewish population registers beginning in the 1820s, but in the 1840s, the Russian government instituted a plan to impose major educational and cultural reforms on the Jewish population. Maskilim enthusiastically supported these efforts. They saw in the government’s efforts an opportunity to spread *haskalah* among the masses of Russian Jews. Orthodox Jewish elements opposed the assault on traditional norms, and they largely ignored the “crown rabbis” appointed in their communities, while religious authority continued to be invested in traditionally-educated leaders known as “spiritual rabbis.”

---

<sup>135</sup> כן, אור וחושך משמשים פה בערבוביא, ולמען אשר העם הזה יחדש כחותיו צריך הוא לשום פניו “ 135 להרוח הנאצל ממרכז הקולטורה העולמית, מהמערב; אבל גם בבוא הרוח הזה למחיצתו לא ישחית את קלסתר צורתו הלאומית, לא יעקר משרשו את הגזע הישן והנושן, את תוכן הישראלות בכל מלואה ושלמותה, רק ירומם את רוחו, יסיר ממנו את חלאת הגיטו אשר נדבקה בו ויעניק לו חיים חדשים, ללכת *Pardes*, vol. 2, 197. “רומם על דרכו ההיסטורי ולפלא לו עתידותיו על יסוד העבר הנאדר אשר לו.

Shmuel Yosef Fuenn was a leading maskil in Vilna, beginning in the 1830s. He campaigned actively to reform the educational system and rabbinical leadership in Russia. When a modern rabbinical seminary was established by the government in 1847 for the purpose of educating modernizing rabbis, Fuenn was appointed its instructor in Jewish studies. The third volume of *Pardes* presents two of Fuenn's letters from 1840-1841, without introduction or comment. The letters are a window into Fuenn's organizational efforts in service of government-sponsored reform. In a letter to an unidentified recipient, he laments the low level of education and sophistication of the Russian Jewish community. Their strange clothes and customs create a barrier between them and non-Jews—they are considered a nuisance. This contributes to widespread Jewish poverty, and the situation is not improving: “Here, they are still on the same level of *haskalah* that they were centuries ago.”<sup>136</sup>

To improve the situation of the Jews, Fuenn calls for leadership by the rabbinate. Modern, educated rabbis will be able to institute the cultural and educational changes needed to support the advancement and integration of the Jews. Fuenn also calls for rabbis to provide strict supervision of teachers of children and preachers (*maggidim*), who have more direct contact and influence in the lives of ordinary people. To install these modern rabbis, Fuenn turns to the government and advises that they be placed in charge of the legal, educational, and ritual leadership of their communities.<sup>137</sup> He calls for an “*allgemeine konsistorium*” (“general consistory”) to set norms for all the Jewish communities of Russia.

---

<sup>136</sup> “הנה המה עוד על מדרגת השכלתם באשר היו בשנות מאות לפנים.” *Pardes*, vol. 3, 151.

<sup>137</sup> *Pardes*, vol. 3, 154.

For rabbis supervising large territories, Fuenn lists the following qualifications: 1) Talmud scholar and deep knowledge of Judaism; 2) ability to publicly preach, based in modern education and ethics; 3) fluency in at least three languages (besides Yiddish); and 4) the equivalent of a secular “gymnasium” education. Fuenn admits that the Russian Jewish community does not possess many rabbinical candidates who meet his criteria, so he suggests bringing them in at first from Germany and Western Europe. Once appointed, these rabbis would have the following duties: 1) examining and appointing local rabbis; 2) examining and approving preachers and teachers; 3) supervising all the Jewish schools in his district; 4) supervising the synagogues and worship, “so that the worship of Israel may be pure and quiet and they shall not ruin it with foolish customs or frivolous talk”<sup>138</sup>; 5) to examine all Jewish books before they are brought to the Russian censors; 6) to commission Hebrew books for educational purposes; 7) to preach in the largest synagogue several time a year on the themes of morality and humanism; and 8) to examine all potential grooms prior to marriage, to confirm that they are educated in the obligations of Judaism and the state and have a profession and means of supporting a family.<sup>139</sup>

By presenting these fifty-year-old letters without editorial comment, Ravnitsky avoids taking a position on Fuenn’s prescriptions for radical change in Jewish communal life and education. It seems likely that Fuenn’s elaborate suggestions are presented with some ironic distance. While some (though not all) of

---

<sup>138</sup> “למען תהיה עבודת ישראל טהורה ושקטה ולא יחללוה במנהגי הבל בדבורי של מה בכך,” *Pardes*, vol. 3, 155.

<sup>139</sup> *Pardes*, vol. 3, 154-156.

the requirements and responsibilities he recommends were put into place, the effect on the Jewish community was not as dramatic and positive as Fuenn expected. One government-appointed crown rabbi makes an appearance in *Pardes*, in a satirical story by Elhanan Leib Levinsky, “Ha-Golem shel sof ha-me’ah” (“The Golem of the End of the Century”). In the story, a rabbi immersed in mysticism and esoteric Jewish knowledge endeavors to create a golem, an artificial being of great power, as was legendarily created by Rabbi Judah Loew to protect the Jewish community of Prague in the sixteenth century. Despite the rabbi’s piety and arcane learning, his golem fails to come to life. A character representing nationalist maskilim suggests that the rabbi add to the golem some earth from the Land of Israel. This fails as well. Finally, the crown rabbi suggests that there is only one power in the modern world capable of creating and sustaining life: gold. When the mystic rabbi mixes gold dust into the golem, it comes to life. But instead of obeying the rabbi’s commands and serving the community, the “gold man” asserts his superiority over all other men. Eventually, he takes control of the entire community.<sup>140</sup>

Levinsky’s satire touches several aspects of Russian Jewish life. The rabbi, steeped in mysticism, halakhah, and superstition, is completely ineffectual. The implied criticism is in keeping with the maskilic critique of the traditional rabbinate. The nationalist makes great claims for the earth from the Land of Israel, but it is completely ineffective. Here we see the divide among Jewish nationalists between those, like Ahad Ha’am, who advocated reviving and strengthening Jewish culture in Europe, and those whose efforts were focused on settlement activities in Israel.

---

<sup>140</sup> *Pardes*, vol. 3, 186-192.

Levinsky is firmly in the camp of Ahad Ha'am. Levinsky's satire is harshly critical of the power of gold in the Jewish community. This theme is rarely taken up by the critical essays in *Pardes*, but the corrupting influence of wealth is a repeated theme in the fiction selections.<sup>141</sup>

Levinsky's sharpest satire is reserved for the crown rabbi, the appointee in whom Fuenn invested so much hope. Contemplating the golem's creation, the crown rabbi imagines how it could be advantageous for him in the upcoming elections, and how he could put it to work helping with mundane tasks.<sup>142</sup> When the question arises of adding earth from the Land of Israel to the golem, Rabbi Shlomi'el engages in deep halakhic research. But the crown rabbi "was like the simple son and the one who doesn't know to ask, and he looked on everything like a chicken among men."<sup>143</sup> Not only does the crown rabbi possess little Jewish religious knowledge, he lacks the most basic background of the nationalists: "He certainly heard in his youth, in the house of his father the tailor, that there is a 'Land of Israel' – but from when he entered the city school until he completed his studies in the sixth class of the intermediate school, and especially since he 'became a rabbi,' he had completely forgotten the teaching of his rabbi in *heder* (religious school for children) and the teaching of his father's house. He had not heard the name of that land, and he almost didn't believe it existed."<sup>144</sup> It

---

<sup>141</sup> For example, Mendele Mokher Sforim, "Ba-Yamim ha-heim" ["In Those Days"], *Pardes*, vol. 2, 173-188. A.Z. Rabinovitsh, "Ba-Tzeil ha-keseif" ["Sheltered by Silver"], *Pardes*, vol. 2, 217-234.

<sup>142</sup> *Pardes*, vol. 3, 187.

<sup>143</sup> "הוא היה כתם וכשאינו יודע לשאול, ויביט על כל אלה כתרנגול בבני-אדם" *Pardes*, vol. 3, 188.

<sup>144</sup> "הוא אמנם שמע בילדותו, בבית אביו החייט, כי ישנה 'ארץ-ישראל' - אבל מאז נכנס לבית-ספר העירוני ועד שגמר את חק למודיו במחלקה הששית של בית-הספר הבינוני, והעיקר מאז 'יצא לרבנות' שכח לגמרי את תורת רבו בחדר ותורת בית אביו, ולא שמע את שם הארץ ההיא וכמעט שלא האמין

is the crown rabbi who suggests the primacy of gold as a force in modern society, and the gold ring he contributes to the golem's creation "one of his lovers gave him as a memento."<sup>145</sup>

Coming close after Fuenn's historical letter in the same volume of *Pardes*, Levinsky's satire fosters the reader's skepticism in the grand claims made for modern progress and *haskalah*. The aims of the critics and theoreticians are grand, and certainly *Pardes* has a strong theoretical orientation, but implementation and effects are never assured. With Levinsky's story, *Pardes* undermines some of its offerings, or at least hedges its expectations for the power of *haskalah* to transform the religious and social conditions of Russian Jewry. This ambivalence is pervasive in *Pardes*. In a letter, S.D. Luzzatto decries "cultured" rabbis for whom newspapers and "new books" have supplanted the Talmud.<sup>146</sup> Menashe Margalit, a graduate of the state-sponsored rabbinical seminary in Zhitomir, who was nonetheless known for the depth of his Talmud learning, calls for Jewish educational institutions that will likewise combine sacred learning with secular wisdom: "We need to establish advanced houses of study for the wisdom of Talmud on this basis, that together with holy studies and the teachings of our religion the heritage of Jacob, there should be integrated also secular studies and words of wisdom that broaden a person's understanding."<sup>147</sup>

---

במציא אותה." *Pardes*, vol. 3, 188. "Heder" is the traditional setting in which Jewish children began their religious education.

<sup>145</sup> "נתנה לו מתנה לזכרון אחת אהובותיו" *Pardes*, vol. 3, 189.

<sup>146</sup> *Pardes*, vol. 3, 104.

<sup>147</sup> "אנו צריכים לקבוע בתי מדרש גבוהים לחכמת התלמוד על בסיס זה שיחד עם למודי הקדש ותורת "דתנו מורשה קהלת יעקב יהיו הולכים שלובים גם למודי חול ודברי חכמה המרחיבים דעתו של אדם." *Pardes* I, 265. On Margalit, see *Ha-Shiloah* vol. 17 (1907), 90-92.

Once again, Ahad Ha'am's selections reframe the debate to theorize this ambivalence and formulate an intellectually honest and Jewishly authentic approach to *haskalah*. He begins his letter to the editor in the first volume of *Pardes* by analyzing the famous dictum of Y.L. Gordon, "Be a man when you go out and a Jew in your tent." Ahad Ha'am points out that in relations with the non-Jewish world, it is impossible for a person to present himself as a "man" in the abstract. If he is not identified as a Jew, he must be Russian, German, etc. "Our writers knew this secret, but they plotted to hide it under their tongue, and in order to draw the heart of the people after the foreign forms they loved, they hid them under the form of 'man.'"<sup>148</sup> This is a remarkable claim: that the early maskilim appealed to universal humanism knowing that drawing Jews away from Jewish particularity in fact entailed engaging them with a particular foreign culture. According to Ahad Ha'am, this gambit on the part of the *Haskalah* was successful, "and the Children of Israel began to beautify themselves, to curl their hair, to love pretty songs in theaters and churches, and also to chase after wisdom that distinguishes and enriches its bearer."<sup>149</sup> These changes were not inherently destructive, but the *Haskalah* showed no concern for the "Jew in the tent"; Jewish existence and peoplehood were left in a degraded state.

In the first of the "Peirurim" sketches, Ahad Ha'am elaborates on the dynamic of external and internal with relation to the *Haskalah*. He begins by positing a difference between the holy and the profane. With profane things, the means are

---

<sup>148</sup> את הסוד הזה ידעו סופרינו, אבל השכילו להכחידו תחת לשונם, וכדי למשוך לב העם אחרי הצורות " *Pardes*, vol. 1, 9. "הנכריות אשר אהבו, הסתירו אותן תחת צורת האדם

ובני ישראל התחילו להתיפות, לסלסל בשערם, לאהוב זמירות יפות בבתי תיאטראות ובבתי " *Ibid.* "כנסיות, לרדוף גם אחר חכמה המכבדת ומעשרת את בעליה

purely instrumental; only the ends are essentially significant. In matters of holiness, the means to the end, the external appearances, are elevated to the same significance of the end or value they serve. Maskilim wish to remove the “external” legalistic customs of Judaism in order to preserve its abstract values; they wish to remove the “external” aspect of the Bible, the Hebrew language, but preserve the essence of its ideas in foreign translation. According to Ahad Ha’am, the maskilim fail to recognize that in fact the “externals” are the constant in Jewish culture, while the “internal” meanings or interpretations are able to undergo change.<sup>150</sup> He cites Maimonides, who maintained traditional Jewish practice but reinterpreted it in keeping with Greek philosophy, and whose approach was ultimately accepted by the Jewish world. By contrast there are the Karaites, who sought to preserve the essential ideas of Judaism, while radically departing from accepted external practices; their approach was not accepted. According to Ahad Ha’am, the maskilim are following the path of the Karaites, and their reform project is doomed to fail.<sup>151</sup>

In his letter to the editor in the second volume of *Pardes*, Ahad Ha’am offers his corrective to the failure of the the Haskalah. He describes the “heartsickness” of the Jewish people, suffering under the oppressive burden of rigid legalism and rabbinical authority. He asks: “Is it possible to find a cure for this old illness? Can the Hebrew heart still return and shake off its degradation, return and connect with life without intermediaries, and still remain a Hebrew heart?”<sup>152</sup> He claims that the

---

<sup>150</sup> *Pardes*, vol. 1, 61.

<sup>151</sup> *Pardes*, vol. 1, 62.

<sup>152</sup> “היש אפשרות למצוא תרופה למחלה הנושנת הזאת? היוכל עוד הלב העברי לשוב ולהתנער” *Pardes*, vol. 2, 4.

Haskalah has indeed demonstrated a way to renew the heart of the Jewish people: “to leave the parents to themselves and repair the heart of the children with human enlightenment through education and literature.”<sup>153</sup> But the final criterion, that the revived heart remain “Hebrew,” haskalah is unable to fulfill. “Being of foreign origin, it is easier for it to create for its possessors an entirely new heart, rather than heal the old heart of its affliction and leave it with its Hebrew character.”<sup>154</sup> A different movement in Jewish life, utilizing the haskalah tools of education and literature, is required to bridge this gap, and in Ahad Ha’am’s conception that need is filled by Hibbat Zion. The movement for Jewish nationalism is not an adjunct to Judaism, but rather Judaism itself, “the heart’s living ambition for the unity of the nation, for its revival and its free development, according to its spirit, on general human foundations.”<sup>155</sup> Ahad Ha’am offers cultural Zionism as a unifying theme, a common group to bring together the disparate attitudes and practices related to haskalah and modernization.

Ravnitsky follows Ahad Ha’am in advocating moderation. In his opening essay in the second volume of *Pardes*, “Teḥiyat Yisrael u-sefato” (“The Revival of Israel and Its Language”), Ravnitsky offers a stinging rebuke to those within the Hibbat Zion movement who believe that Jewish nationalism requires them to make an emphatic break with all European enlightenment, including science. Rather, “the

---

<sup>153</sup> “לעזוב את האבות לנפשם ולתקן לב הבנים בהשכלה אנושית על ידי החנוך והספרות” *Pardes*, vol. 2, 5.

<sup>154</sup> “בהיותה מולדת חוץ, נקל לה יותר לברוא לבעליה לב חדש לגמרי, מאשר לרפאות את הלב הישן” *Ibid*.

<sup>155</sup> “כלליים” *Ibid*.

sciences cannot wear the garb of an individual or a special national form.”<sup>156</sup> At the same time, the Jewish way of life must be protected against a radical *haskalah* agenda. Ideally, the various factions in the Jewish community would come together in the cause of nationalism, that “the devout and the enlightened would join their efforts to do the holy work.”<sup>157</sup>

In Ravnitsky’s final lead essay, for the third volume of *Pardes*, he points out that for many in the *Hibbat Zion* movement, “It is possible and appropriate to oppose false *haskalah*...*haskalah* that only has a beautiful exterior but is dried up inside, which just schemes to beautify and adorn itself with all kinds of external decorations and inspires one only to chase and seek a life of licentiousness and immorality.”<sup>158</sup> At the same time, “Far be it from the lovers of their people who want its true happiness to turn the heart of the people away from wisdom and sciences, and far be it from the ‘People of the Book’ to cast aspersions on the general culture and the *haskalah* of the enlightened nations.”<sup>159</sup> Ultimately, Ravnitsky concludes that the Jewish people needs *haskalah* in order to thrive: “The spirit of Israel needs to develop and be fulfilled by means of general enlightenment, like the spirit of every person under the sun. The Jew needs to be a man in his tent as well as on his way, not only with regard

---

<sup>156</sup> “המדעים לא יוכלו ללבוש שמלת גבר פרטי או צורה לאומית מיוחדת” *Pardes*, vol. 2, 22.

<sup>157</sup> “ומערכות היראים והנאורים יחד יטו שכם אחד לעבוד עבודת הקדש” *Pardes*, vol. 2, 23.

<sup>158</sup> “אפשר וגם ראוי לתנגד רק להשכלה מזויפת...השכלה שאין לה אלא קליפה יפה ותוכה נחר, המתחכמת רק להתהדר ולהתקשט בכל מיני קישוטים חיצוניים ומעוררת רק לרדוף ולבקש חיים של הוללות ופריצות” *Pardes*, vol. 3, 7.

<sup>159</sup> “חלילה לאוהבי עםם וחפצים באשרו האמתי מהניא את לב העם מחכמות ומדעים, חלילה לבני ‘עם’ הספר” *Ibid.* מדרוש דרשות של דופי נגד הקולטורה הכללית והשכלת העמים הנאורים

to material needs, but also with the general spirit, without losing in so being, of course, his special being.”<sup>160</sup>

Ravnitsky's follows Ahad Ha'am's moderate doctrine with regard to *haskalah*, but he is unable to provide a unifying theme or theory to bring together the discussions of *haskalah* across all of *Pardes*. As a result, *Pardes* can be discordant and scattered. This unfocused approach is noted in a quite negative contemporary review of the first two volumes of *Pardes* by Yosef Klausner, who nonetheless sees some benefit in bringing together diverse voices: “In only one respect does this collection particularly excel: We see in it all the winds blowing in the world of our literature, the new, exciting ideas in the Jewish world.”<sup>161</sup> Ravnitsky is able to collect those “winds” and put them on display in *Pardes*, but Ahad Ha'am's editing, especially as we will see in *Ha-Shiloah*, creates a whole periodical of independent significance. The comparison with another editor from his own small Odessa circle highlights the unique effectiveness and skill of Ahad Ha'am in his periodicals.

---

<sup>160</sup> רוח ישראל צריך להתפתח ולהשתלם בדרך ההשכלה הכללית כרוח כל האדם תחת השמש; היהודי “<sup>160</sup> צריך להיות בתור אדם גם באהלו וגם בצאתו, לא רק ביחס צרכי החומר כ”א גם בדרך הרוח הכללי, מבלי וותר, כמובן, ע”י זה על עצמותו המיוחדת.” Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> רק בדבר אחד מצטין המאסף הזה ביחוד: אנחנו רואים בו את כל הרוחות המנשבות בעולם “<sup>161</sup>” Yosef Klausner, *Ruhot menashvot: bikoret meforetet al shenei sifrei ha-Pardes* [*Winds Blowing: A Detailed Critique of the Two Volumes of Pardes*] (Warsaw, 1896), 92.

### Chapter 3 — The Ahad Ha'am-Berdichevsky Controversy in Context and Hebrew Literary Criticism

On January 28, 1930, observing the third anniversary of Ahad Ha'am's death, Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik gave a brief address at the Ohel Shem cultural center in Tel Aviv. While lavishly praising his mentor's depth of thought, nationalist feeling, and contributions, Bialik devotes fully a third of his talk to defending Ahad Ha'am against his critics. He accuses them of misunderstanding Ahad Ha'am and attributing to him positions he never held: "Because he said 'spirit,' they tried to say that he ignored the material; because he emphasized the spiritual side of Zionism, he ignored the political side; because he spoke about Judaism, he placed all other human needs out of bounds."<sup>162</sup> Here Bialik references two great controversies strongly associated with Ahad Ha'am: first, Ahad Ha'am's cultural Zionism is set against the settlement activity and political Zionism of Moshe Leib Lilienblum and Theodor Herzl; second, Ahad Ha'am's parochialism and demand for an insular Hebrew culture are contrasted with the catholic and humanistic cultural ambitions of a younger generation of Hebrew writers.

Bialik claims that Ahad Ha'am is misinterpreted on both counts: "Ahad Ha'am did not ignore the political side of Zionism, just as he didn't place human needs out of bounds. Ahad Ha'am was the greatest cultural figure among the Hebrew writers of his generation, and he drew not only from Hebrew literature, but from all the sources of modern culture, and all the needs of culture were his needs. But he

---

<sup>162</sup> מכיון שהוא אמר רוח רצו ללמוד מזה, כי הוא מבטל את החומר, מכיון שהוא מדגיש את צד "הרוחניות של הציוניות הוא מותר על הצד המדיני, מכיון שהוא מדבר על היהדות הוא מוציא מן הכלל את הרוחניות של הציוניות." "Ahad Ha'am," *Moznayim* no. 42 (31 Jan 1930): 1-2.

always emphasized the core, the foundation.”<sup>163</sup> If Ahad Ha’am were alive, Bialik imagines, he would particularly rage against those “who distort his views and plant their stakes on isolated passages from his writings.”<sup>164</sup> But even this sharpness would not truly reflect Ahad Ha’am: “Those who were close to Ahad Ha’am during his life and knew the ‘Oral’ Ahad Ha’am along with the ‘Written’ Ahad Ha’am know that this spirit is not the spirit of Ahad Ha’am.”<sup>165</sup>

The idea that Ahad Ha’am rejected general culture in favor of a narrow conception of a strictly Jewish culture goes back to 1896, when Ahad Ha’am founded a new monthly journal for Hebrew literature, *Ha-Shiloah*. In his programmatic essay at the beginning of the first issue, Ahad Ha’am laid out his priorities for the journal: high literary standards and writing across genres that would contribute to the self-understanding of the Jewish people. In the next issue, Micha Yosef Berdichevsky, who Ahad Ha’am had hired to assist with the production of *Ha-Shiloah* in Berlin, responded on behalf of “young writers,” complaining that Ahad Ha’am’s vision for Hebrew literature was too restrictive, causing a “tear in the heart” for young Jews who wished to identify with both Jewish and European cultures. Ahad Ha’am responded, and the back-and-forth between him and Berdichevsky, along with others who joined the dispute in the pages of *Ha-Shiloah*, became a salient event in Hebrew

---

<sup>163</sup> “אחד-העם לא ותר על הצד המדיני של הציוניות, כמו שלא הוציא מן הכלל את צרכי האנושיות.” אחד-העם היה איש-התרבות הגדול ביותר בין הסופרים העברים בדורו והוא לא ינק מן הספרות העברית בלבד, כי-אם מכל מקורות התרבות החדשה וכל צרכי התרבות היו צרכיו, אבל הוא הדגיש תמיד את העיקר, את היסוד.”

<sup>164</sup> “שמשבשים דעותיו ותומכים את יתדותיהם בפסוקים בודדים מספריו”

<sup>165</sup> “אלה שהיו קרובים לאחד-העם בחייו וידעו והכירו גם את אחד-העם שבעל-פה, נוסף על אחד-העם” Bialik refers to the tradition that Jewish law consists of both the “Written Law,” the Torah, as well as an “Oral Law,” received traditions eventually recorded in the Talmud.

literary history. From that point forward, every account of the development of Hebrew literature included this controversy as a milestone. And over time, the collective memory of the sides of the dispute grew ever more polarized. Ahad Ha'am stood for formalism, rigidity, and the past. Berdichevsky stood for romanticism, creativity, and youth.

As Bialik recognized already in 1930, this view is exaggerated and simplistic. By returning to a close study of the text of *Ha-Shiloah*, this chapter aims to correct a record that has been distorted in the two ways referred to by Bialik. Bialik accuses Ahad Ha'am's critics of quoting selectively from his work. Indeed, if read in isolation, some of the most provocative lines from Ahad Ha'am's essays, quoted by countless critics, give a misleading view of his overall approach to culture and politics within the Zionist movement. Bialik also refers to an "Oral Ahad Ha'am" ("אחד-העם שבעל-פה"), a version of Ahad Ha'am's doctrine that does not emerge fully from his writings. While a contemporary "hearing" of Ahad Ha'am might be impossible, this chapter argues that an important aspect of Ahad Ha'am's less polemical and more dialogic side can be discerned through Ahad Ha'am's activity as an editor of *Ha-Shiloah*. Within and among Ahad Ha'am's literary selections in *Ha-Shiloah*, a picture emerges of Ahad Ha'am's literary taste and influence that does not strictly conform to the norms he explicitly advances in his essays. Indeed, by looking at Ahad Ha'am through his intellectual role as editor and publisher, a much less dogmatic portrait of the thinker emerges than his critics would ever have allowed.

To arrive at this argument, this chapter extends the periodical studies methodology to *Ha-Shiloah*, the largest and most significant of the periodicals edited

by Ahad Ha'am. It surveys the treatment of this dispute through major examples of Hebrew literary criticism, to show how the polarized view developed and hardened over time. The essays of Ahad Ha'am, Berdichevsky, and their supporters that appeared in *Ha-Shiloah* are described in detail. This shows that their positions are not as binary or rigid as portrayed in the standard account of Hebrew literary history. Ahad Ha'am's work as an editor calls for a revised account of his significance for the growth of modern Hebrew literature at the turn of the twentieth century.

### **Ha-Shiloah and Ahad Ha'am**

*Ha-Shiloah* was a monthly Hebrew literary journal and considered at the time to be the most prestigious forum for Hebrew writing at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>166</sup> Ahad Ha'am served as its founding editor, and he oversaw the first ten volumes of the publication, from 1896 until his resignation in 1902. From there, *Ha-Shiloah* was edited by Yosef Klausner, a follower and close associate of Ahad Ha'am, through its final volume in 1926. From 1904 to 1909, Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik edited the literature section of the journal, and Yaakov Fichmann served as co-editor for the final two volumes. At the journal's inception, due to the difficulty of obtaining a publishing permit in tsarist Russia, *Ha-Shiloah* was initially printed in Berlin and then in Krakow, though the work of editing the publication was done in Odessa and

---

<sup>166</sup> Accounts of *Ha-Shiloah* drawn on here include: Ali Mohamed Abd El-Rahman Attia, *The Hebrew Periodical Ha-Shiloah from 1896 to 1919 and Its Role in the Development of Modern Hebrew Literature*, PhD diss. (University of London, 1979); Barzilai (Fulman), *Ha-Shiloah, 1896–1927: Bibliografiyah*, i-vi; Goldstein, *Ahad Ha'am: biografiyah*, 211–234; Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet*, 105–169.

Warsaw. *Ha-Shiloah* received permission to publish in Russia beginning in 1907, which it did until finally shifting production to Jerusalem in 1919.

According to the initial plan for the publication, the year of *Ha-Shiloah* would run from October through September, and the journal would be published at the end of every month. Issues for six months would constitute one volume. The page numbers within a volume would run serially from issue to issue, and at the end of each six-month period, a title page would appear with a table of contents. Each issue would consist of at least six quires of large octavo sheets, equaling ninety-six pages.<sup>167</sup> *Ha-Shiloah* was printed in small type, except for the poetry, which received a larger font. The title page was printed with Hebrew on the verso and German on the recto. Initial issues measured 23 cm x 16 cm. Throughout the run of the journal, each issue was packaged in a dark green paper wrapper, which was printed with advertisements and announcements.<sup>168</sup>

The circulation of *Ha-Shiloah* was not very large. It began in 1896 with around 1,115 subscribers. Then, following Ahad Ha'am's critical remarks about Herzl and the First Zionist Conference in Basel, subscriptions fell to 500 and never rose above 700 for the duration of Ahad Ha'am's tenure as editor.<sup>169</sup> *Ha-Shiloah's* status was maintained not by its readership, but by the quality of its contributors, which included nearly all of the major figures in Hebrew letters of its day.

The quality and significance of *Ha-Shiloah* was recognized from its first appearance. The Hebrew periodicals of the mid-1890s were haphazard and often

---

<sup>167</sup> Attia, *Hebrew Periodical Ha-Shiloah*, 59.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>169</sup> Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet*, 167.

petty. Alexander Zederbaum, founding editor of the venerable *Ha-Melitz*, died in 1893, reducing the prestige of that paper and leaving a lacuna in the world of Hebrew culture.<sup>170</sup> In his review of the first issue of *Ha-Shiloah* in the daily *Ha-Tzefirah*, Shimon Bernfeld calls *Ha-Shiloah* the periodical “that we prayed for,” and apologizing for reviewing a work to which he himself was a contributor, concludes, “without prejudice, I will say that it is worthy of reading and the scent of a European periodical wafts from it...”<sup>171</sup> In London, the *Jewish Chronicle* praised *Ha-Shiloah*, even while predicting its swift failure: “Certainly the present effort is a good one. The articles are well written, they are varied and cover much heterogeneous ground.... But I cannot honestly say that the new monthly looks as if it had come to stay.”<sup>172</sup>

Later critics would cement the status of *Ha-Shiloah* as the encapsulation of a key phase in the development of Hebrew literature. In 1966, upon the seventieth anniversary of the appearance of *Ha-Shiloah*, Baruch Karo—who himself contributed some pieces on linguistics to *Ha-Shiloah* as a young man in Odessa—published an appreciation in the Israeli newspaper *Maariv*: “The certain date for the beginning of Revival literature [*sifrut ha-Tehiyah*] is inextricably tied to the appearance of the monthly, *Ha-Shiloah*.” *Ha-Shiloah* was the arbiter and showcase of this “Revival” literature: “the arrival of an issue of *Ha-Shiloah* was the holiday of the month.” More than that, “It is hard to find another periodical, in which were concentrated so many authors, guides, and creators—so it can be seen as a symbol of an era. It also

---

<sup>170</sup> Ahad Ha'am considered an attempt to succeed Zederbaum as editor of *Ha-Melitz*, but negotiations broke down over his desire to relocate the paper to Odessa.

<sup>171</sup> בלי משא פנים אומר, כי ראויה היא למקרא וריה מ"ע אירופאי נודף ממנה... בלי ספק יפלס לו “*Ha-Shiloah*.” *Ha-Tzefirah* 251, 27 Nov. 1896, 1223-1224.

<sup>172</sup> “Books and Bookmen,” *Jewish Chronicle*, 20 Nov 1896, 17.

influenced the style of the era, not just Hebrew style, but the cultural style as a whole. Neither before *Ha-Shiloah* or since has there been a monthly so respected by its readers, no periodical that sees itself as a small sanctuary. And indeed, the readers too viewed the writers as if they were priests at their pulpits.”<sup>173</sup> *Ha-Shiloah* served as a kind of sacred stage for the culture of Ahad Ha’am’s Hebrew nationalism.

During the period of Ahad Ha’am’s editorship (1896-1902), *Ha-Shiloah* cannot be seen separately from his influence. The project came into existence, in part, as an effort by Ahad Ha’am’s supporters to provide him a livelihood in Hebrew letters following the dissolution of his family’s business in the winter of 1895-1896. Kalonymus Ze’ev Wissotzky, the tea magnate, agreed to fund the initial publication of *Ha-Shiloah*, on the condition that Ahad Ha’am would serve as its editor. From the outset, then, *Ha-Shiloah* was meant to represent and advocate the refined literary style and cultural Zionism for which Ahad Ha’am was widely admired.

Ahad Ha’am also insisted that his editorial control be absolute. In his negotiations with Wissotzky it was agreed that with regard to the content of *Ha-Shiloah*, Ahad Ha’am would act “as a man acts with his own.”<sup>174</sup> He edited the journal by himself, until he brought on Ravnitsky as an assistant only a year before his resignation. As an editor, Ahad Ha’am made extensive corrections and changes to

---

קבלת חוברת ” / ”. תאריך מסויים לראשית ספרות התחיה קשור רק בהופעת הירחון, ‘השלח’<sup>173</sup> קשה למצוא עוד כתב-עת, שריכוזו בקרבו מספר רב כל-כך של סופרים, ” / “ . ‘השלח’ היתה חג החודש מדריכים, ויצורים, — עד שיש לראותו לסמל של תקופה. והוא גם השפיע על סגנון הדור, לא רק על הסגנון העברי כמשמע, אלא על הסגנון התרבותי בכללו. לא היה לא לפני ‘השלח’ ולא אחריו ירחון מכובד כל-כך על קוראיו, לא היה כתב-עת הרואה עצמו כמין מקדש מעט. ואמנם, גם הקוראים ראו בסופרים כאילו כוהנים עומדים על דוכנם.” *Yovelo shel ‘Ha-Shiloah,’ Maariv*, 14 Sep 1966, 34.

<sup>174</sup> “כאדם העושה בתוך שלו” Wissotzky letter to Ahad Ha’am, 22 May 1896. Quoted in Goldstein, *Ahad Ha’am: biografyah*, 216.

authors' submissions, forcing both Hebrew style and content to conform to his literary taste. He described his method of editing in a letter to Bernfeld:

Apart from general literary revision—by which I mean the correction of language and style according to the rules of grammar and logic (which many of our writers disregard)—I try to get rid of pointless verbiage, of anything spiteful or personal, of exaggerated self-praise or eulogies.... Most of the articles that I print in *Ha-Shilo'ah* I treat as though they were my own. I cut and alter as much as may be necessary.... Sometimes I have to excise whole pages.... There is no other way of editing a Hebrew paper of decent standard.<sup>175</sup>

In his treatment of writers, Ahad Ha'am has been described as “a relentless taskmaster—rigid, even brutal.”<sup>176</sup> Often he would respond to submissions with extensive descriptions of the edits he required; sometimes he simply made the changes on his own authority, claiming that communicating via letter over every change was not possible. Many writers were willing to submit to this treatment for the honor of being published in *Ha-Shiloah*. Others reacted angrily to Ahad Ha'am's presumptuous editing; following the appearance of the first issue of *Ha-Shiloah*, several threatened to cut ties with Ahad Ha'am over the subject.<sup>177</sup> The control that Ahad Ha'am exerted over the style and content of *Ha-Shiloah* was unprecedented among Hebrew periodicals and gave the journal the “organic” unity that Ahad Ha'am would specifically call for in “Te'udat *Ha-Shiloah*,” his statement of purpose.

Of course, the final way in which *Ha-Shiloah* expresses the ideology of Ahad Ha'am is through Ahad Ha'am's own contributions. Because of the extreme amount

---

<sup>175</sup> *Iggerot Ahad Ha'am [Letters of Ahad Ha'am]* (Dvir, 1956-1960), vol. 2, 308. Translated in Attia, “Ahad Ha'am, Editor of Ha-Shilo'ah,” in *At the Crossroads: Essays on Ahad Ha'am*, ed. Jacques Kornberg (SUNY Press, 1983), 31.

<sup>176</sup> Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet*, 119.

<sup>177</sup> Goldstein, *Ahad Ha'am: biografyah*, 226.

of editing he put into each issue, Ahad Ha'am complained that he did not have time to write pieces of his own. When pressed by the publisher to include more of his own material, he protested that it was not the custom of European periodicals for the editor to write as well.<sup>178</sup> But Ahad Ha'am did write for *Ha-Shiloah*. In addition to contributing several significant essays, his regular feature, "Yalkut katan" ("A Small Satchel"), offered brief views on current affairs and cultural issues.

To view the pieces that appeared above Ahad Ha'am's name as the only expressions of his sensibility in *Ha-Shiloah* would be to ignore the greatest part of his efforts and accomplishments. For all the reasons outlined above, the entire project of *Ha-Shiloah* should be seen as a product of Ahad Ha'am, throughout the period of his editorship. Within the perspective of editing and not just writing, Ahad Ha'am's influence on *Ha-Shiloah* and the course of Hebrew culture contained in its pages transcends the narrowness of views he expressed only in his written contributions.

### **Ahad Ha'am, Berdichevsky, and the "Young Writers"**

In accounts of the development of modern Hebrew literature, *Ha-Shiloah* is most often cited as the venue for a controversy between Ahad Ha'am and a group who identified themselves as "young writers," led by Micha Yosef Berdichevsky. The dispute began with "Te'udat *Ha-Shiloah*" ("The Mission of *Ha-Shiloah*"), Ahad Ha'am's programmatic essay that opened the first issue of *Ha-Shiloah*. In it, Ahad Ha'am laid out his vision for the journal, the genres and subjects he intended to publish, and—importantly here—those he intended to exclude. Berdichevsky

---

<sup>178</sup> *Iggerot Ahad Ha'am*, vol. 1, 150.

objected to several aspects of this vision, particularly the exclusion of Hebrew writing on general humanistic topics not connected to the Jewish experience. His response to *Ahad Ha'am* ("Al parashat derakhim") appeared in the second issue of *Ha-Shiloah*.

From there, the controversy spread out over a number of essays and letters. Supporters of Berdichevsky and *Ahad Ha'am* contributed arguments on both sides. *Ahad Ha'am* balanced the familiar experience of being the subject of a literary polemic (as he had been in his earlier disputes with Moshe Leib Lilienblum) with his new role as an editor. He gives the young writers space in *Ha-Shiloah*, over multiple essays and letters to the editor, to express their views, even when they come to criticize him directly.

Although this dispute is very well known, it is remembered primarily through a handful of evocative quotations and oversimplified assertions. *Ahad Ha'am* calls for a literature that will "teach us to understand the internal world" of the Jewish people.<sup>179</sup> It is said that he rejected any literature without a didactic nationalist message. Berdichevsky protests, "the place is too narrow for us."<sup>180</sup> Berdichevsky is credited with advocating aesthetics and individuality and moving Hebrew literature away from the *nusach* towards modernism. This shorthand account flattens the dispute and encourages a schematic, binary interpretation of the controversy. It developed as a result of the accumulated biases of generations of critics. The original pieces by *Ahad Ha'am* and Berdichevsky in their original periodical context show that neither held views as rigid as were later ascribed to them. The standard account

---

<sup>179</sup> "ללמדנו דעת את העולם הפנימי." *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 1, 2

<sup>180</sup> "צר לנו המקום." *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 1, 158

completely ignores the role Ahad Ha'am played as editor in shaping the presentation of the entire dispute.

### **Critical Reception of the Ahad Ha'am-Berdichevsky Controversy**

The debate that unfolded between Ahad Ha'am and Micha Yosef Berdichevsky in the pages of *Ha-Shiloah* in 1896 has been called "one of the most crucial controversies in modern Hebrew letters"<sup>181</sup> and "a convenient date for the opening of the culture wars," "concerning nothing less than the future of modern Hebrew literature."<sup>182</sup> The salience and significance of this controversy in Hebrew literary history are due not only to the writings themselves and their reception by their original audience, but to more than a century of critical retellings, which have canonized the "Poesy Debate" as both a symbolic and actual turning point in the development of Hebrew literature: from the positivism of Ahad Ha'am to the subjectivity of Berdichevsky, from "naive" realism to the emergence of internal modernism, from the dominance of nationalist literature to a literature that could be personal and universal. These binary oppositions obscure the actual positions taken by Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky in *Ha-Shiloah*. But this flattened, stereotypical view developed into a standard account of this controversy, which has had a profoundly negative effect on the evaluation of Ahad Ha'am's role in the development of modern Hebrew literature.

Ahad Ha'am was a pivotal figure in Zionist politics as well as Hebrew letters, and the attitude toward his politics strongly influenced the account of his role in the

---

<sup>181</sup> Gluzman, *Politics of Canonicity*, 15.

<sup>182</sup> Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon*, 12.

development of Hebrew literature. The standard account of the controversy between Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky is not an unbiased description of dynamics in Hebrew culture at the end of the nineteenth century, but rather a retrojection of anti-Ahad Ha'am sentiment borne by Herzlian Zionists in the first half of the twentieth century. The evolution of this ideological critical history can be shown in three phases. The first period, from roughly the turn of the twentieth century to the 1930s, is the period of living memory, when literary history and criticism were written by contemporaries of Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky, that is, by the writers who themselves may have taken part or taken sides in the conflict. The second phase, the State of Israel period of the 1940s to 1980s, saw the consolidation of a dominant Zionist narrative in the Hebrew literary academy. With the valorization of Ahad Ha'am's ideological opponents—among them Herzl and the young pioneers of the Second Aliyah—Ahad Ha'am and his Eastern European milieu fell further into disfavor. In this period the dichotomies hardened, as Ahad Ha'am came to represent everything that the young Israeli critics wanted to reject. Recently, in a period characterized as Post-Zionist, Hebrew literary study has widened to include comparative literature methodologies and perspectives. As criticism has turned from monolithic histories of Hebrew literature to more specific theoretical studies, possibilities have opened up for the reinterpretation of the Ahad Ha'am-Berdichevsky controversy, but these continue to be influenced strongly by the standard narrative. Tracing these developments in literary criticism in their ideological context is necessary to develop a reinterpretation of the controversy that is rooted in the original sources and not colored by the Zionist attitude toward Ahad Ha'am.

## Early Critical Accounts

When Ahad Ha'am stepped down as the editor of *Ha-Shiloah* in 1903, his replacement was Yosef Klausner, a frequent contributor to the journal and committed member of Ahad Ha'am's Odessa circle, who had recently completed university studies in Germany. Klausner would edit *Ha-Shiloah* for the rest of its existence, from 1903 to 1919 in Russia and from 1919 to 1926 in Palestine. In 1920, when Klausner published an initial version of what would become a definitive, comprehensive history of modern Hebrew literature from the Haskalah until the early-twentieth century, he was not an impartial observer. He had been a close associate and acolyte of Ahad Ha'am for many years. But as editor of *Ha-Shiloah*, Klausner had sided with Berdichevsky on the practical question of the openness of Hebrew literature. Klausner's signature change as the editor of *Ha-Shiloah* was to loosen the very restrictions at issue in Ahad Ha'am's debate with Berdichevsky, publishing more literature and poetry and contributions without a specific nationalist connection. His personal relationships and involvement in these events evidently influences his critical account.

In his magisterial *History of Modern Hebrew Literature*, Klausner writes that it was the Hebrew writers of the mid-nineteenth century, and not Ahad Ha'am, "who persisted in fighting only against the specifically Jewish defects in the Jew, against the Jew that was in the man, and hardly paid any attention at all to his shortcomings as a human being, to the man that was in the Jew."<sup>183</sup> Ahad Ha'am's vision for

---

<sup>183</sup> Yosef Klausner, *A History of Modern Hebrew Literature (1785-1930)*, trans. Herbert Danby (M. L. Cailinggold, 1932), 128.

Hebrew literature was not so limited. Speaking of “the ideal of a rebirth at once national and human,” he writes, “This is Ahad Ha’am’s synthesis.”<sup>184</sup> This is a surprising starting point, since a synthesis between national and human is precisely what Berdichevsky and the young writers accuse Ahad Ha’am of preventing. The separation of national and human is the cause of the “tear in the heart.” Klausner seems to acknowledge that his praise of Ahad Ha’am is counterintuitive. He explains that Ahad Ha’am’s balance between Judaism and humanism was “imperfect,” placing too much emphasis on Judaism; the perfect balance would tip the scale toward humanism. This gentle criticism maps well onto the minor changes Klausner instituted as editor of *Ha-Shiloah*.

In addressing the controversy over the proper scope of Hebrew literature, Klausner only mentions Berdichevsky in passing. The call for a humanistic literature in Hebrew is attributed to others. Berdichevsky is listed with Mordecai Ehrenpreis as writers who advocated a popular literature in opposition to Ahad Ha’am, “who himself held that while there was a need for such a literature, the time for it was not yet.”<sup>185</sup> Klausner does not address the restrictions Ahad Ha’am announced in “Te’udat *Ha-Shiloah*,” which provoked the reaction of the young writers. He notably affirms that Ahad Ha’am valued aesthetic literature, preempting a common attack on Ahad Ha’am’s vision of Hebrew culture.

This account is quite favorable to Ahad Ha’am—so favorable, in fact, that Klausner only hints at Berdichevsky and the existence of a controversy. Above all,

---

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 138.

this account is favorable to Klausner himself. By attributing to Ahad Ha'am an appreciation for personal and universalist literature, Klausner implies that his inclusion of such literature in *Ha-Shiloah* during his own tenure as editor was not a repudiation of his mentor. By 1920, Ahad Ha'am's influence had waned, and the leading figures in Hebrew literature had turned increasingly hostile to him.<sup>186</sup> Because of Klausner's own strong identification with Ahad Ha'am and the Odessa school, the derogation of Ahad Ha'am was a threat to his status and legacy as well. By glossing over Berdichevsky and minimizing the controversy, Klausner crafts a history in which he can be loyal to Ahad Ha'am without placing himself on what was then perceived as the "losing" side of the cultural debate.

If Klausner interprets the Ahad Ha'am-Berdichevsky controversy in his own image, then a commentator from a different intellectual background should provide a different account. This is precisely the case with Fishel Lachower, a Hebrew literary critic a bit younger than Klausner and with a very different perspective. Writing in Warsaw, he was mentored by David Frishman, a strong advocate of non-nationalist literature in Hebrew. Lachower was a champion of the young modernists—Brenner and Gnessin, following Berdichevsky—over the "Odessa style" of Mendele Mocher Sforim and Ahad Ha'am. He was active in Hebrew publishing, directing the Stybel publishing house in Warsaw, editing Berdichevsky's collected works, and, after moving to Palestine in 1927, working on a multi-volume history of modern Hebrew literature.

---

<sup>186</sup> See Miron, *Bodedim be-mo'adam*, 353-363.

In a 1911 monograph, Lachower accuses Ahad Ha'am of having a "utilitarian" view of literature. "Art is always dragged after something, and for him [Ahad Ha'am] it has no life of its own."<sup>187</sup> This claim that art must have a "life of its own," rather than carrying any political or social message, reflects the position of Lachower's mentor, David Frishman, a proponent of purely aesthetic literature. Lachower writes dismissively, "It is easy for him to give us 'Good Advice' about 'Need and Ability,'" since he measures the need according to the ability."<sup>188</sup> "Good Advice" ("Eitzah Tovah") and "Need and Ability" ("Tzorech v'Yecholet") are two of Ahad Ha'am's essays in the controversy with Berdichevsky. Lachower does not identify them here, implying that these details of the controversy are well known to his reader. Saying that Ahad Ha'am "measures the need according to the ability" is a tendentious reading of the argument in "Tzorech v'Yecholet," which suggests that Ahad Ha'am was out of touch with the Jewish people's actual needs. Lachower relies on his reader to infer that those unfulfilled needs were aesthetic and humanistic, the core values of Lachower's European school of Hebrew literature.

Lachower's corresponding essay on Berdichevsky in 1913 characterizes Berdichevsky chiefly in opposition to Ahad Ha'am. "Ahad Ha'am has one *core* truth, which he develops and wants to arrive at by different paths, but Berdichevsky has many possibilities or rather, many *impossibilities*" (emphasis in original).<sup>189</sup>

---

<sup>187</sup> "היצירה נגררת תמיד אחרי איזה דבר ואין לה אצלו תקומה בפני עצמה" Fishel Lachower, *Ahad Ha'am* (Warsaw, 1910), 11.

<sup>188</sup> "בגלל לו ליעץ לנו 'עצה טובה' על-דבר 'צרך ויכלת', כי הוא מודד את הצורך לפי היכולת" Lachower, *Ahad Ha'am*, 13.

<sup>189</sup> "לאחד-העם יש אמת אחת עיקרית, שאותה הוא עובד ואליה הוא חפץ להגיע בדרכים שונות," Fishel Lachower, "Micha Yosef Berdichevsky," *Netivot: bimah hofshit le-inyanei ha-hayyim ve-ha-*

Lachower contrasts the positivism of Ahad Ha'am, the stability of the national idea, with the contradictions and paradoxes of Berdichevsky's romanticism. This contrast does not obviously favor one over the other. But later in the essay, Lachower's makes his preference clear:

Ahad Ha'am strolls often in the orchard of wisdom, and he is at home in the world of ideas, but he has never discovered the marvelous secret hidden in the orchard and has no part in the mysteries of creation. He has never discovered those same connections, open and hidden, between man and what surrounds him: to the place where he dwells, to the air he breathes, to the sights revealed before him — the relationship that exists against his will between man and nature and the dramas of nature, which is not always sufficiently clear or understood, but is always felt by the poet. Berdichevsky is now nearly the only one among us who fully understands this drama....<sup>190</sup>

Lachower criticizes Ahad Ha'am for his lack of connection to nature and its "secrets."

This is the universalist, humanist, aesthetic experience that Ahad Ha'am is seen as excluding from *Ha-Shiloah*. This mystical appeal to nature is an example of a topic that Ahad Ha'am would seek to marginalize or exclude in Hebrew literature.

Lachower begins his juxtaposition of Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky with a significant image: "Berdichevsky, eternal *bar plugta* [adversary] of Ahad Ha'am, is in a recognized way a continuation of him, his *bar plugta*. Sometimes he is like a later sage dissenting from an earlier sage; he follows in the other's footsteps and anyway

---

*sifrut* [*Pathways: An Open Stage for Topics in Life and Literature*], vol. 1 (1913): 138.

<sup>190</sup> אחד-העם רגיל לטיל בפרדס החכמה וכבן-בית הוא בעולם המחשבה, אבל מעולם לא עמד על הסוד " הנפלא הצפון בפרדס ואין לו חלק במסתרי היצירה. הוא לא עמד מעולם על אותם הקישורים הגלויים והנסתרים, שיש בין האדם למה שמסביב לו: למקום שהוא יושב בו, להאוויר שהוא נושם, למראות המתגלים לפניו — אותו היחס שיש בעל-כרחו בין האדם לטבע וחזיונות הטבע, שלא תמיד הוא אמנם ברור ומובן כל צרכו, אבל מורגש הוא תמיד למשורר. ברדיצבסקי הוא אצלנו עתה כמעט היחידי המבין לכל עמקו את החזיון הזה." *Ibid.*, 139.

stands in some relation to him and his words, but he is a sage and dissents.”<sup>191</sup>

Lachower compares Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky to sages whose disputes are recorded in the Talmud. But a “*bar plugta*,” is more than a Rabbinic colleague—it denotes a regular intellectual sparring partner. And though they argued points of law and interpretation, these partners weren't really at odds. Often they were good friends, and they were aware that their arguments, even when fierce, were a joint effort in the creation of Talmudic discourse. It is a collegial, collaborative image, and one I will return to.

As we see with both Klausner and Lachower, characterizations of the dispute between Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky by their contemporaries are colored by literary commitments and personal relationships. While the critics take sides, they show awareness that Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky participated in a dialogue, grounded in mutual respect and a shared commitment to the development of Hebrew culture. There is relatively less engagement by the critics with the actual texts and arguments of the controversy, with which readers are assumed to be familiar. In Lachower some binary oppositions are beginning to develop—thought vs. creativity, positivism vs. romanticism—but they do not strongly favor one party. This changed dramatically in the next phase.

---

ברדיצבסקי, בר-פלוגתיה התמידי של אחד-העם, הוא במדה ידועה כעין המשך לו, לבר-פלוגתיה. “<sup>191</sup> לפעמים הוא מעין תנא בתרא הפליג על התנא קמא, יוצא הוא בעקבות אחיו ונמצא בכל אופן באיזה יחס לבר-פלוגתיה.” Ibid., 138

## The State of Israel and The Standard Narrative

In the period following the establishment of the State of Israel, depictions of the controversy between Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky in Hebrew literary criticism are more polarized. Ahad Ha'am's positions are caricatured and categorically rejected, while Berdichevsky's are elevated. The framing of debate or disagreement is abandoned in favor of the language of confrontation. The critics do not acknowledge the relationship or collaboration between Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky or any areas of agreement. Instead, the controversy is used to represent how one set of values, associated with Berdichevsky, fully supplanted the opposite values, associated with Ahad Ha'am. These features form what I call the "standard narrative," the accepted understanding of these texts. The standard narrative proliferated in Hebrew literary scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s and continues to influence the study of Ahad Ha'am, in particular, to the present.

In his 1950 comprehensive survey of modern Hebrew literature, Shimon Halkin praises Berdichevsky as "undoubtedly, the most complicated representative of the one hundred and fifty years of Hebraic thinking and feeling we have attempted to trace."<sup>192</sup> Halkin locates in Berdichevsky the desire for individualism to break free from the oppressive strictures of communal authority. That of course made Ahad Ha'am his "opponent." He characterizes Berdichevsky as "vehement in his onslaught upon Ahad Ha'am's conceptions of Jewish communality." Where Ahad Ha'am wishes to cultivate pride in the Jewish past, "Berdichevsky violently rejects that basis

---

<sup>192</sup> Simon Halkin, *Modern Hebrew Literature: Trends and Values* (Schocken Books, 1950), 91-94.

for the Jewish Renaissance.... He is even more violent in his onslaughts upon what he calls the ‘abstract spirituality’ which he feels Ahad Ha’am foists upon Jewry.”<sup>193</sup> “Vehement,” “violent,” “onslaught”—this is not the language of the collegial “*bar plugta*,” but of the metaphorical culture war.

Dov Sadan writes of Ahad Ha’am, “As we know, he locked the gate of the inn to fine literature that has nothing to it but its beauty.”<sup>194</sup> The evocative “locked” speaks in absolutes, and “as we know” (“כידוע”) suggests that by the early 1960s, the standard narrative is established as the critical consensus. It is reasonable to read into Sadan’s individual word choices, since in the very next sentence, he comments on a line from “Te’udat *Ha-Shiloah*” that references “pure poesy—outpouring of the soul on the glory of nature and the pleasure of love and the like.”<sup>195</sup> “It is hard not to point out how much condescension, even contempt there is in the one small word: ‘and the like’ (‘וכדומה’).”<sup>196</sup> Sadan satirizes Ahad Ha’am’s intellectualizing and layers of explanations as a feeble response to Berdichevsky’s outpouring of emotion. He warns that the temporary, limited goals for Hebrew literature that Ahad Ha’am advocates for in “Tzorech v’Yecholet” could easily become permanent and inadequate half-measures.

---

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> “כידוע נעל שערך של האכסנייה הזאת בפני היצירה היפה שאין בה אלא יפיה.” Dov Sadan, *Avnei bedek: al sifrutinu, mosadah va-agafeha* [*Scrutiny Stones: On Our Literature, Its Founding and Its Branches*] (HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1962), 261.

<sup>195</sup> פואיזיא בלבד, השתפכות הנפש על הדר הטבע ונועם האהבה וכדומה — יבקש לו החפץ בלשונות “*Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 1, 5.” העמים וימצאנה במידה מספקת

<sup>196</sup> “קשה שלא לומר, כמה מן ההבטה-מלמעלה, אפילו מן הזלזול יש במלה האחת והקטנה: וכדומה” Sadan, *Avnei bedek*, 261.

Gershon Shaked's *HaSiporet HaIvrit 1880-1980 (Hebrew Fiction, 1880-1980)*

is a monumental work of canonization. Writing in the 1970s, Shaked organizes Hebrew fiction into eras and literary movements, presenting an extensive and would-be definitive selection of the significant Hebrew authors and works. *Hebrew Fiction* also canonizes critical perspectives; Shaked writes about the controversy in *Ha-Shiloah*, “Berdichevsky argues the insult to fine literature from Ahad Ha’am and the right of the individual, the specific, to be an appropriate subject for Hebrew works.”<sup>197</sup> In one sentence, Shaked claims two binary oppositions in the controversy between Ahad Ha’am and Berdichevsky—Ahad Ha’am discounts aesthetic literature and rejects the private subject as a proper object of literature, while Berdichevsky stands up for both. With the word “insult” (“עלבון”), he attributes to Ahad Ha’am some of the same haughtiness and disdain that Dov Sadan claimed. This consolidation represents the entrenchment of the standard account. Going forward, this would be the assumed basis for any discussion of the controversy.

### **Recent Studies**

Since the 1980s, even as authors seek to problematize and theorize the received narrative of Hebrew literary history, the influence of the standard narrative of the Ahad Ha’am-Berdichevsky controversy is pervasive. Works on diverse subjects repeat the standard narrative as fact. A recent study of Ahad Ha’am’s use of the Bible summarizes the controversy:

Ahad Ha’am, as editor of *Ha-Shiloach* (1896-1926), expressed a decided lack of interest in anything not pertaining directly to the

---

<sup>197</sup> ברדיצ’בסקי תבע את עלבונה של הספרות היפה מאחד-העם ואת זכותו של היחיד, הפרט, להיות “ Shaked, *Ha-Sipporet ha-Ivrit*, vol. 1, 167.

Jewish condition or even that which could be described as merely belletristic. For Berdichevsky, Jewry existed in the larger world and should express itself in contemporary idioms and genres—anything of quality produced by a Jew was already Jewish enough to merit attention.<sup>198</sup>

This description displays both rigid binaries and the rhetorical undermining of Ahad Ha'am's position. Ahad Ha'am shows "decided lack of interest," while Berdichevsky is associated with positive terms: "express itself," "contemporary," "quality," "merit attention." The superiority and progressiveness of Berdichevsky's position in contrast to Ahad Ha'am are taken for granted.

Even specialized studies of the development of modern Hebrew literature are biased in unacknowledged ways by the standard account of Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky. Dan Miron's *From Continuity to Contiguity* (2010) offers a particularly stereotypical view of Ahad Ha'am's literary positions. Miron refers to Ahad Ha'am's "explanation of the poverty and irrelevance of current Hebrew belles lettres."<sup>199</sup> Berdichevsky's position is similarly unequivocal, "Berdichevsky called for the total freeing of the Jewish individual from communal strictures, for total intellectual freedom...."<sup>200</sup> In presenting the controversy at the founding of *Ha-Shiloah*, Miron presents uncomplicated dichotomies. For Ahad Ha'am, "Hebrew literature should focus on discursive non-fiction at the expense of its emotive and imaginative parts." For Berdichevsky, "Literature gave expression to the entire personality, or it was not expressive at all.... Hebrew literature had to enlarge the

---

<sup>198</sup> Alan T. Levenson, *The Making of the Modern Jewish Bible: How Scholars in Germany, Israel, and America Transformed an Ancient Text* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 108.

<sup>199</sup> Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity*, 90.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

scope of its emotive part and enrich its contents rather than abrogate and neglect it, as Achad ha'am demanded."<sup>201</sup>

Miron also adopts the disdain for Achad Ha'am that he has described in the Hebrew literary figures of the early twentieth century. The rejection of Achad Ha'am is almost a stylistic tic in *From Continuity to Contiguity*. Bialik "clearly disproved Achad ha'am[s] main literary thesis" that imaginative literature required a spoken language. Bialik's poetry "undermined the very foundations of the philosopher's theory of Hebrew literature and rendered it irrelevant." Miron asks, "What went wrong then in the logic of Achad ha'am's argument?" Achad Ha'am's theories are "inadequate," "reductive," "in error." Berdichevsky, by contrast, "supplied the Hebrew renaissance with its broadest and most sophisticated rationale." "His contribution to contemporary Hebrew literature, particularly his theoretical debunking of Achad-ha'amism, was formidable."<sup>202</sup>

Miron's affinity for Berdichevsky's position is clear, but he does not provide the argumentation here to support these assertions. Instead, Miron relies to a large extent on the reader's acceptance of the standard account of the relative positions of Achad Ha'am and Berdichevsky in their controversy. This is also, in part, a circular appeal to his own authority, since Miron himself, in earlier works such as *Bodedim be-mo'adam* (*When Loners Come Together*, 1987), helped to inscribe the standard binary account of this dispute. That opposition, now established, allows Miron to go further here in critiquing Achad Ha'am and elevating Berdichevsky.

---

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>202</sup> Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity*, 90-97.

Miron might be tied to his position, straddling the second and third periods described here, but even postmodern and post-Zionist criticism of the controversy, while moving away from earlier assessments, is still beholden to an understanding of the controversy that is binary and oppositional. Hannan Hever's *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon: Nation Building and Minority Discourse* (2002) uses the dispute between Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky to set up the opposition between a "major literature" at the center of a cultural discourse—represented by Ahad Ha'am—and a subversive "minor literature"—represented by Berdichevsky. In sketching the outlines of their dispute in the pages of *Ha-Shiloah*, Hever hews closely to the dichotomies of the standard account. Ahad Ha'am "wanted to publish only material with explicitly Jewish content" and "had little regard for belletristic writing." Berdichevsky "protested against Ahad Ha'am's distinction between Jewish and universal values" and "wished to replace Ahad Ha'am's positivism about the Jewish national spirit with the vigor of romantic vitalism."<sup>203</sup>

Hever goes beyond this first layer of oppositions to consider the "representations of power" in the writers' two positions. In "Tzorech v'Yechelet" Ahad Ha'am posits a necessary connection between a collective need and the practical ability of the nation to achieve it. In response, Berdichevsky describes a romantic vision where a national need can exist (like the need for aesthetic literature), without the present ability to fulfill it. This in-between stage is one dimension of the "tear in the heart." According to Hever, Berdichevsky sets up this existential state of a

---

<sup>203</sup> Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon*, 13-14.

heroic individual as a new collective subject. This is a step away from the standard account, acknowledging common ground between the two writers.

Michael Gluzman in *The Politics of Canonicity: Lines of Resistance in Modernist Hebrew Poetry* (2002) goes furthest in breaking down the standard account of Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky. Gluzman uses this controversy to argue that modern Hebrew literature subordinates the private to the public through the imposition of a set of external norms. We would expect this description to apply to Ahad Ha'am, but Gluzman applies it to Berdichevsky as well. One aim of his analysis is to show that rather than a binary opposition, Berdichevsky's opposition to Ahad Ha'am's nationalism "is in itself phrased in nationalist terms." The second aim of the essay is to show that both of these nationalist structures continue to function as regulatory norms in Hebrew literature.<sup>204</sup>

Gluzman begins by showing that Ahad Ha'am's nationalist idea for Hebrew literature enforces exclusions: "of genres, ideas, subject positions, and political views."<sup>205</sup> These exclusions had a real effect on the growth of Hebrew literature; for example, Bialik declined to submit to Ahad Ha'am poems on subjects he suspected would not meet the editor's approval. But Gluzman also defends Ahad Ha'am: "It is noteworthy that Ahad Ha'am does not deny the importance of such topics as love and nature for his readers."<sup>206</sup> As we have seen, critics commonly claim that Ahad Ha'am does deny that importance. But Gluzman is correct, and the clarification demonstrates engagement with Ahad Ha'am's actual argument, beyond the stereotype.

---

<sup>204</sup> Gluzman, *Politics of Canonicity*, 16.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

Ahad Ha'am's advocacy for nationalist norms is well known. Gluzman's innovation is showing how Berdichevsky, in his protest of Ahad Ha'am, sets up similar norms. When Berdichevsky declares to Ahad Ha'am "The place is too narrow for us!", his use of the first person plural, speaking for the collective, is a nationalist move. Gluzman writes, "The call for the inclusion of the private is expressed here not only as the personal need of Berdichevsky-as-writer, but also as a collective need whose fulfillment alone can generate national convalescence."<sup>207</sup> In his advocacy for a collective individuality, the binary of individuality and nationalism collapses. Berdichevsky introduces a new kind of national subject—one with total identification between the private pain of the individual and the nation—but it is still a national subject, with all of the exclusions that implies.

Gluzman explicitly says that despite the standard account of them being diametrically opposed, Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky share many similarities. "For both of them literature is first and foremost a collective, national enterprise. They both describe the exilic condition of the Jews as a sickness. As cultural nationalists, they believe that Hebrew literature's role is to help *cure* the people's malady" (emphasis in original).<sup>208</sup> These similarities led them to jointly enforce the systematic exclusion of any writers who truly rejected nationalist discourse or women writers and others who did not easily fit the mold of a nationalist subject.

In Gluzman we have an example of how the standard account, the binary opposition of Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky, can be meaningfully revised. This

---

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

revision can be taken further. Gluzman collapses the binary by showing that Berdichevsky essentially occupies the position traditionally ascribed to Ahad Ha'am. However, the converse is also true. Reading the debate in context, Ahad Ha'am's positions are not as rigid and dogmatic as they have come to be understood. Revising our understanding of Ahad Ha'am, as Gluzman has done with Berdichevsky, collapses the binary from the opposite direction.

A more thorough revision moves the interpretation of these texts away from the frame of binary opposition entirely. Returning to Lachower's image of the Talmudic discourse and the "*bar plugta*"—the "sparring partner"—we can view this exchange of essays not as an argument or debate at all, but a kind of collaborative discourse. Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky, who had a personal relationship and shared important goals and values, consciously demonstrated a sophisticated literary exchange. Like dance partners, they left openings for each other and improvised around each other. There was no "victory" in this demonstration—the influence of the exchange is due to their combined talents. This shift in perspective makes it possible to appreciate the role of Ahad Ha'am as the editor of the exchange. Ahad Ha'am fosters and presents this entire exchange in *Ha-Shiloah* as an important contribution to Hebrew literature.

### **Texts of the Ahad Ha'am-Berdichevsky Controversy**

While the controversy between Ahad Ha'am and Micha Yosef Berdichevsky that played out in the early issues of *Ha-Shiloah* is recognized as a milestone in modern Hebrew literature, the details of the controversy are widely known only through the critical lenses surveyed above, rather than by engagement with the

primary texts of the controversy. Reading the primary texts in full shows that the positions of Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky were not as rigid or opposed as they are commonly portrayed. Ahad Ha'am displays nuance and flexibility; he expresses concern for the "tear in the heart," the emotional distress experienced by the young generation at being pulled between Jewish and European society; he does not "lock the door" of Hebrew literature to shut out poetry and aesthetic concerns. The inclination toward dialogue and the weaving together of diverse viewpoints that Ahad Ha'am displays as the editor of *Kaveret* and in his contributions to *Pardes* finds expression in *Ha-Shiloah* as well. The essays in context also show that Berdichevsky and the "Young Writers" do not present a unified ideology. They differ on whether humanistic concerns should supplement other kinds of Hebrew writing or supplant them; they have different visions of the proper relationship between Hebrew and European literature; they disagree on the role Ahad Ha'am himself should play in the development of Hebrew literature and culture. In full context, the dialogue between Ahad Ha'am and the Young Writers is diverse and rich, not a black-and-white taking and defending of two sides.

With few exceptions, there was little acrimony among the participants in this dialogue. The image of Ahad Ha'am coldly rejecting the concerns of the young writers and Berdichevsky vanquishing Ahad Ha'am to be left behind is a projection of later critics. Nearly all these men were friends; the young writers revered Ahad Ha'am, and he treated them and their ideas with respect. All of the writers recognized their interdependence in the small community of Hebrew literature. The sources show

how Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky worked together, implicitly and explicitly, to craft their dispute as a literary and cultural demonstration.

In order to demonstrate these characteristics and show how they differ from the standard account, I will describe the main essays and letters that constitute the Ahad Ha'am-Berdichevsky controversy in detail. The distortions of the standard account arise from simplifying Ahad Ha'am's and Berdichevsky's positions and ignoring the elements that do not fit. The standard account evokes a cadre of "young writers" who support the position of Berdichevsky but makes no attempt to distinguish among the positions of the writers in that group. Attending to the complexities of each argument makes it possible to introduce those nuances and distinctions and to discern the overall flow and dynamics of the controversy, which Ahad Ha'am orchestrated as the editor.

### **"Te'udat *Ha-Shiloah*"**

"Te'udat *Ha-Shiloah*" ("The Mission of *Ha-Shiloah*"), the opening selection of the first issue of *Ha-Shiloah*, is Ahad Ha'am's manifesto for the new publication.<sup>209</sup> It is divided into two parts. In the first section, Ahad Ha'am sketches the impoverished state of Hebrew literature and the urgent need for a new literary path in Hebrew that *HaShiloah* will pioneer. In the second, he lays out the plan for the journal: the genres and topics of the contributions he plans to publish. He also comments on his role as editor and appeals to Hebrew writers to participate in the project. In the history of modern Hebrew literature, this statement is remembered as

---

<sup>209</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 1 (1896): 1-6.

embodying all of Ahad Ha'am's stereotypical qualities: authoritarian, rigid, didactic, arrogant. A few lines from the piece that best reflect those traits—as when he advises young men who seek poetic invocations of “the glory of nature or the pleasure of love” to seek them in foreign languages<sup>210</sup>—have been selectively quoted for a century to represent the whole.

A contextualized reading of “Te’udat *Ha-Shiloah*” reveals several elements that diverge from the standard account. Ahad Ha'am displays concern for subjectivity—individual as well as national—and literature's role in mitigating the distress experienced by Jews in their historical moment. He expresses openness and flexibility with regard to the actual future content of the journal. And Ahad Ha'am employs a rhetoric of humility in reflecting on his own positive claims, as well as in acknowledging the need to partner with Hebrew writers in setting the course for *Ha-Shiloah* and Hebrew literature.

Ahad Ha'am begins “Te’udat *Ha-Shiloah*” by distinguishing this journal from the Hebrew literature that came before. It will not be only for an educated elite, he writes, but for the people as a whole. The literature will not be for its own sake, but provide sustenance for the people, “to repair its breaches and rebuild its ruins.”<sup>211</sup> He describes two types of literature: the first is loud and chaotic, exciting and inflaming the reader. It is filled with emotions and desires. This describes the literature of the Haskalah, which was successful in sparking the people's desire for “light.” But to find that substance, the Haskalah mostly directed Jews out to the literature of other

---

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>211</sup> “לגדור פרצותיו ולבנות הריסותיו.” Ibid., 1.

nations. While some of that content was brought into Hebrew literature, Ahad Ha'am sees little reason for modern Jews to content themselves with these "meagre stalks" ("שבליים צנומות," emphasis in original), when they could go directly to the foreign literatures and "eat their fill."

In order for Hebrew literature to thrive, it must become an integral part of "our internal world" ("עולמנו הפנימי," emphasis in original).<sup>212</sup> It can do this by increasing knowledge of this internal world: "the course of development of our people through the generations, the modes of revelation of its spirit in all the areas of life, its spiritual and material state in all lands in the present day, and the open and hidden connections between all of these and the dramas seen in the life of the peoples that surround it and the laws that govern the lives of man and society in general."<sup>213</sup> This knowledge will allow the Jewish people to understand its actual conditions and relationship with the outside world, in order to make progress and repair its communal life.

In Ahad Ha'am's estimation, the existing Hebrew literature is poor in content and style. He claims that, as a result, many have begun to feel "internal emptiness" ("ריקות פנימית"). They need literature with a practical purpose, not just an aesthetic or emotional appeal: "We are already weary of being moved and thrilled and now we also want to understand."<sup>214</sup> This is the need that the new monthly *Ha-Shiloah* will fill. Only a monthly journal, as opposed to the Hebrew dailies that were filled with

---

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>213</sup> "מהלך התפתחותו של עמנו בכל הדורות, אופני התגלות רוחו בכל מקצעות החיים, מצבו הרוחני" "הגשמי בכל הארצות בזמן הזה, והקשרים הגלויים והנסתרים שבין כל אלה ובין החזיונות הנראים בחיי העמים הסובבים אותו ובין החקים השולטים בחיי האדם והחברה בכלל." Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> "כבר נלאינו להתרגש ולהתלהב והננו רוצים גם לדעת." Ibid.

reportage on current events, “is fit to slowly penetrate the mysteries of our life.” The ultimate goal of *Ha-Shiloah* will be “to know ourselves, to understand our life and establish our future with wisdom.”<sup>215</sup>

The second part of the “Te’udat *Ha-Shiloah*” is taken up mainly with Ahad Ha’am’s descriptions of the various types of contributions he intends to publish:

1) Academic articles (“פרקי חכמה”): These will cover various domains relating to the life of the Jewish people—history, religion, sociology, literature. It will draw on general academic subjects like ethics and education, but only to the extent that they shed light on some aspect of Jewish life and civilization. Ahad Ha’am specifically excludes narrow investigations in the new mode of scientific Jewish studies (“חכמת ישראל”), which he believes are only of interest to a small number of specialists and do not contribute to the self-understanding of the Jewish people.

2) Journalism (“פובליציסטיקא”): Descriptions of all aspects of Jewish life in various places, including analysis and proposals on how various conditions can be improved. Ahad Ha’am specifically calls for a focus on the “internal” conditions of the people, as opposed to relations with outside governments and powers, which he suggests receive too much attention from Hebrew writers.

3) Criticism (“בקררת”): Ahad Ha’am wants this section to include not just book reviews, but more ambitious forms of “critique.” He calls for logical and moral critiques of all kinds of cultural products, as well as “ideas and actions.” These critiques must not be merely artful, but also insightful and illuminating.

---

<sup>215</sup> לדעת את עצמנו, להבין את חיינו ולכונן עתידותינו” / “מסוגל לחזור מעט מעט למסתרי חיינו” Ibid., 3. בתבונה.

4) Literary Works (“בללטריסטיקא”): Ahad Ha’am admits that literary works have a stronger effect on people than other forms of writing. He intends to publish “good stories from the life of our people” (“סיפורים טובים מחיי עמנו”), which provide insight into the “internal world” of the people and provoke thought to “broaden nationalist understanding.” However, he excludes works whose value is purely aesthetic, works that *merely* provide pleasure. While these have value, “In our current situation, we think that our poor literature should not waste its little strength on such things, while more urgent and fruitful matters demand their place and strength is lacking.”<sup>216</sup> For this reason, he suggests he will publish relatively little poetry, since poets (other than Y.L. Gordon) fail to incorporate relevant content. He concludes with the controversial suggestion cited above: “Pure poesy—outpouring of the soul on the glory of nature and the pleasure of love and the like—our young men can seek it in foreign languages, and they will find it in sufficient measure.”<sup>217</sup>

Following the division of subjects, Ahad Ha’am notes that his ability to fulfill this program will depend on the Hebrew writers and the availability of suitable submissions. He calls for them to contribute and expresses the hope that *Ha-Shiloah* will become a “literary center” (“מרכז ספרות”), a valuable outlet for good Hebrew writing. Ahad Ha’am notes that unlike the European custom of each journal being associated with a particular ideological camp, *Ha-Shiloah* will be open to a diversity of views. Finally, reflecting on his own role as editor, he promises to ensure the

---

<sup>216</sup> במצבנו עתה, אנו חושבים, שאין לספרותנו הדלה לפזר מעט כחה לדברים כאלו, בעוד שענינים “ Ibid., 5.

<sup>217</sup> ופואיזיא בלבד, השתפכות הנפש על הדר הטבע ונועם האהבה וכדומה — יבקש להם בחורינו “ Ibid. בלשונות העמים וימצאוה במדה הספקת

standards of the journal, in content and style. He will make sure that the contributions create an “organic” whole. But he claims that an editor should not use his power to exclude views with which he disagrees: “All this is not license to lock the door before anyone who comes to tell the public things that are fit to be heard.”<sup>218</sup> Instead, he should argue his ideas as a writer, and allow the readers to evaluate.

Although this essay will come to be known as Ahad Ha’am’s attempt to exclude subjective, emotional writing from Hebrew literature, Ahad Ha’am also has a conception of the “internal.” Several times he invokes the “internal world” to describe the domain that the new Hebrew literature must strive to contribute to and become a part of. And although the object of Ahad Ha’am’s concern is primarily the people as a collective, it is far from a detached, hyper-rational concern. The ultimate question he calls on literature to answer is: “Whether, how, and when will we reach the hoped-for ‘shore,’ despite the powerful ‘surf,’ which tears us limb from limb and casts them one by one into the ‘sea?’”<sup>219</sup> The image of being torn “limb from limb” is particularly notable, since the “tear” (“קרע”) will become closely associated with Berdichevsky and Ahad Ha’am’s opponents, who accuse him of failing to recognize the “tear in the heart” caused by separating a person’s Jewish and European identities. Here we see that Ahad Ha’am also feels a “tear,” but his is caused by the threat and disruption to all of Jewish life brought on by modernity.

Toward the end of the piece, Ahad Ha’am calls on every writer of knowledge and talent to join in his effort, “*heart and soul*” (“כנפשו וכלבבו,” emphasis in

---

<sup>218</sup> “כל זה אינו רשות לנעול דלת בפני מי שיהיה, הבא להגיד בקהל דברים הראויים להשמע” Ibid., 6.

<sup>219</sup> “אם, איך, ומתי נגיע אל ‘החוף’ המקווה, למרות ‘השטף’ העז, הקורע אותנו אברים אברים ונושאים” Ibid., 3.

original).<sup>220</sup> “Heart” and “soul” are precisely what he will be accused of undervaluing, and Ahad Ha’am anticipates this. In the very next line, he responds to the imagined disbelief of his reader, “Yes, ‘heart and soul!’” (“כן, 'כנפשו וכלבבו!'”) And while critics accuse Ahad Ha’am of imposing uniformity, here he specifically welcomes views that differ from his own. “Without any favoritism *Ha-Shiloah* will always give space to words said with wisdom, with good intentions, without trying to antagonize.”<sup>221</sup> He rejects the idea that a periodical should have a specific ideological view from the outset.

In forgoing his prerogative as editor to publish only pieces that accord with his views, Ahad Ha’am expresses the value of dialogue and debate, and he is willing to participate in that discourse on an equal basis. In the first line of the essay, he avers that the need for the new periodical is “as it appears to us” (“כמדומה לנו”), perhaps only according to his own view and open to dispute. Berdichevsky criticizes Ahad Ha’am for this lack of confidence in the rightness of his course. Ahad Ha’am says of editors that they are “only flesh and blood, possessing great knowledge or little, but in any case not free of errors like any man.... His opinion is not more definitive than that of other men, who are no less than him in reason or knowledge.”<sup>222</sup> This contradicts the popular image of Ahad Ha’am as an imperious, arrogant arbiter of Hebrew culture.

---

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>221</sup> בלי שום משא פנים יתן 'השלוה' מקום תמיד לדברים הנאמרים בדעת, בלב תמים, שלא על מנת “ לקנטר.” Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> בשר ודם פשוט, בעל השכלה מרובה או מועטה, אך בכל אופן לא נקי משגיאות ככל אדם... דעתו “ אינה מכרעה יותר מדעת שאר בני -אדם שאינם נופלים ממנו בהגיון וידיעה.” Ibid.

It is possible to dismiss the elements of “Te’udat *Ha-Shiloah*” that diverge from the standard account. One could say that Ahad Ha’am’s invocation of the internal need for literature and the “tear” affecting the Jewish people is rhetorical and not truly felt. One could say that where Ahad Ha’am claims openness to views that oppose his own or speaks of the importance of literary writing to the national spirit, he is merely attempting to preempt objections that he correctly anticipates. One could say that where Ahad Ha’am shows humility regarding the proper role of an editor, it is simply false. These reactions stem from a bias toward the standard account. Instead we can take Ahad Ha’am at his word and judge how well his actual editing of *Ha-Shiloah* reflects these aspects of his stated mission.

There is one more aspect of “Te’udat *Ha-Shiloah*” that is significant for understanding Ahad Ha’am’s role in the development of Hebrew literature. It is common to describe “Te’udat *Ha-Shiloah*” as a fully-formed program. By 1896, Ahad Ha’am was strongly associated with a cohesive doctrine—cultural nationalism—and he was a cultural force at the height of his influence. But in launching *Ha-Shiloah*, Ahad Ha’am faced a great deal of uncertainty, and “Te’udat *Ha-Shiloah*” is explicitly provisional. Ahad Ha’am points out in two separate places that he does not actually know if he will be able to publish the types of literature he describes; that will depend on the talents and interests of the writers. While he is often described as dismissing poetry, he actually says “it is possible that the number of poems in the journal will be small.”<sup>223</sup> Not everything that was “possible” at this stage came to pass in the actual development of *Ha-Shiloah*. This is the problem with

---

<sup>223</sup> “אפשר שימעט מספר השירים במכ”ע זה.” *Ibid.*, 5.

taking “Te’udat *Ha-Shiloah*” to represent the literary legacy of *Ha-Shiloah* and Ahad Ha’am. As we will see, many aspects of *Ha-Shiloah* did not develop to match Ahad Ha’am’s program here. He did publish a variety of literary works, including poems, that did not have explicit nationalist content. For that matter, he also published obscure works of scholarship in Jewish studies and articles about relations with foreign governments, which originally he intended to exclude. A significant part of the severity and parochialism expressed here did not take shape in the actual editing of *Ha-Shiloah*. The reason that “Te’udat *Ha-Shiloah*” has somewhat obscured the actual literature published in *Ha-Shiloah* in accounting Ahad Ha’am’s legacy is the response it provoked from the circle of young writers Ahad Ha’am had come to know in Berlin, particularly Micha Yosef Berdichevsky.

### “Al Parashat Derakhim”

The first and most influential response to “Te’udat *Ha-Shiloah*” appeared in the very next issue—only the second—of *Ha-Shiloah*. Micha Yosef Berdichevsky titles his open letter to Ahad Ha’am “Al parashat derakhim” (“At a Crossroads”),<sup>224</sup> the name of Ahad Ha’am’s collected essays, which had appeared the year before. The title announces from the outset Berdichevsky’s identification with Ahad Ha’am; Berdichevsky adopts Ahad Ha’am’s metaphor, positioning them as fellow travelers, setting the course of Hebrew literature. The title is also a jab, implying that Berdichevsky is taking up a position that Ahad Ha’am has abandoned.<sup>225</sup>

---

<sup>224</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 1 (1896): 154-159.

<sup>225</sup> Berdichevsky makes this attack explicit later in the essay, when he quotes extensively from one of Ahad Ha’am’s earlier essays, collected in Ahad Ha’am’s *Al*

Berdichevsky begins by noting the doubts Ahad Ha'am expresses at the beginning of his own *Al parashat derakhim* about his abilities as a Hebrew writer. Berdichevsky calls those doubts unfounded and claims they caused distress to the younger generation of writers who looked up to Ahad Ha'am. Similarly, Berdichevsky is dismayed at Ahad Ha'am's hedge, "as it seems to us," in the opening sentence of "Te'udat *Ha-Shiloah*." In a time when the whole community of beleaguered Hebrew writers looks to Ahad Ha'am with hope for the possible beneficial effects of *Ha-Shiloah*, "We rightfully demand from anyone who leads us that he goes *certain* of his path" (emphasis in original).<sup>226</sup>

Berdichevsky then moves to the main issue of his critique, Ahad Ha'am's attempt to distinguish between Jewish and external subjects in literature. Berdichevsky argues that separating these categories does violence to the identity of young modern Jews. "By tearing life into two domains, ours and what surrounds us, we widen the internal tear in the heart of our youth."<sup>227</sup> This passage introduces the concept of the "tear in the heart" ("קרע שבלב"), which recurs throughout this discussion to describe the distress caused by the lack of integration between Jewish and non-Jewish aspects of identity.

Berdichevsky brings a string of arguments against the division between Jewish and general/European/humanistic topics. He quotes Ahad Ha'am's suggestion

---

*parashat derakhim*. Berdichevsky and the young writers accuse Ahad Ha'am of abandoning his "earlier doctrine," which they see as much humanistic and progressive.

<sup>226</sup> "ואנחנו דורשים בצדק מאת כל ההולך לפנינו, שילך לבטח דרכו." *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 1, 154.

<sup>227</sup> "בהקריעה שאנחנו קורעים את החיים לשתי רשויות, לשלנו ולאשר מסביב לנו, הרי אנו מרחיבים " את הקרע הפנימי שבתוך לב צעירינו." *Ibid.*, 155.

that Jews turn to foreign literatures for writing on general subjects, but he argues that this will only highlight the poverty of Hebrew literature and eventually lead to young Jews abandoning it entirely. He suggests that making Judaism a separate domain, detached from the “experiences of life,” will lead after one generation “to the abstract Judaism of the West, which makes the Jews two-faced, enlightened men of freedom throughout the year and Jews on the ‘High Holy Days.’”<sup>228</sup> That is, Ahad Ha’am’s attempt to enrich Judaism by focusing on it to the exclusion of general human concerns will have the paradoxical effect of making Judaism lifeless and poorer, accelerating the disintegration of Jewish identity. Berdichevsky appeals to the shared goal of creating an organic national identity for the Jews. “Making ourselves ‘Hebrew-people’ is only possible when we don’t cut our lives in two, saying: Judaism on one side, humanity on the other.”<sup>229</sup>

We saw in *Pardes* that Ahad Ha’am’s attitude toward assimilation and engagement with European culture does not call for Jews to segregate their Jewishness from their humanity the way that Berdichevsky describes. Ahad Ha’am rejects the rigid division of identity expressed in Y.L. Gordon’s “be a man on your way and a Jew in your tent.” Ahad Ha’am calls for the spirit of Judaism to infuse all aspects of life. Berdichevsky’s argument here against a position that Ahad Ha’am does not actually advocate—the total separation between Judaism and universal

---

<sup>228</sup> אל היהדות המערבית המפשטת, העושה את היהודים לבעלי דו פרצופים, לאנשים בעלי השכלה של “אל היהדות המערבית המפשטת, העושה את היהודים לבעלי דו פרצופים, לאנשים בעלי השכלה של” Ibid., 156

<sup>229</sup> לעשות אותנו ‘לבני אדם-עברים’, אפשר רק בעת שלא נחתוך חיינו לשנים, לאמור: יהדות בצד “לעשות אותנו ‘לבני אדם-עברים’, אפשר רק בעת שלא נחתוך חיינו לשנים, לאמור: יהדות בצד” Ibid. זה, ואנושיות בצד אחר

culture—shows how Ahad Ha'am's positions were exaggerated and taken out of context.

Specifically on the subject of poetry and belles lettres, Berdichevsky warns Ahad Ha'am that if the Jewish youth are directed to foreign literatures to find love, nature, inspiration, etc., they will think of Hebrew literature as “dead.” He accuses Ahad Ha'am of underestimating or ignoring the importance of poetry and states that the existence of a nation depends more on poetry than on philosophy. At this historical moment in particular, “At a time when foreign ideas and despairing thoughts come upon us to turn our lives upside-down, the feelings of poetry can come—of the glory of our restoration and our spirit from days of old—and return us to our borders.”<sup>230</sup> Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky agree that the Jewish nation is in a perilous state. While Ahad Ha'am sees aesthetic literature as a distraction or drain on the literary resources needed for the project of national culture, Berdichevsky argues that poetry plays an essential role in keeping the nation together in times of trouble.

Berdichevsky develops an argument that the elevation of thought over poetry is a personal preference of Ahad Ha'am. He traces it back to an earlier essay, “Ha-Lashon ve-sifrutah” (“The Language and Its Literature”), where Ahad Ha'am writes, “In Israel creativity must be subordinated to critical thought, if it wants to be respected by the people.”<sup>231</sup> Berdichevsky believes that Ahad Ha'am's personal preference has led him to mislead the people with regard to the value of poetry. After

---

<sup>230</sup> בעת אשר מחשבות זרות והרהורים של יאוש באים עלינו להפוך קערתנו על פיה, יבואו רגשי “השירה של הדרת שיבתנו, רוחנו העתיק-יומין, וישוב אותנו לגבולנו.” Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> “הנה בישראל מוכרחת היצירה להכנע מפני המחשבה העיונית, אם רוצה היא להכבד על פני העם.” Ibid., 157. “Ha-Lashon ve-sifrutah” is the first part of a longer essay, “Li-She'elat ha-lashon” [“On the Language Question”], *Luah Ahiasaf* (1894): 17-30.

all, essays and discursive works were once foreign to the Jewish people and now have been assimilated. He claims just as philosophy was once the dominant form, poetry is particularly important to the present generation. “Now fine literature fills the hearts of all enlightened people, and this is how the spirituality of most of the world is nourished, and so with us: each generation has its needs, each generation has its path.”<sup>232</sup>

Following this analysis, Berdichevsky turns to the complaint of the young authors. First, Ahad Ha'am has attempted to draw a boundary between the Jewish and non-Jewish aspects of life, a division Berdichevsky rejects. But even within his definition of Jewish subjects, Ahad Ha'am elevates discursive literature over poetry. In light of this narrowness, Berdichevsky rejects Ahad Ha'am's offer for writers to participate in *Ha-Shiloah* “heart and soul.” He famously declares, “As one of the generation's youth living today, who know more or less what is in their hearts and souls, the source of their spirit and their aspirations, I think that ‘heart and soul’ I will say to you today: the place is too narrow for us!”<sup>233</sup> On behalf of the young writers, Berdichevsky declares that they want to be Hebrew men “at once, in one breath” (“בבת אחת, בנשימה אחת”) and feel a great need to repair the tear caused by the division of their identities. The division has caused great damage, “And surely you know the great spiritual damage we have suffered by rejecting the human for the sake of the

---

<sup>232</sup> עתה הספרות היפה ממלאה כל לבות בני אדם הנאורים, ובדרך זה רובא דעלמא נזונים ברוחניותם, “ *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 1, 157-158. “וכן גם אנחנו: דור דור וצרכיו, דוד דור ומהלכו

<sup>233</sup> בתור אחד מצעירי הדור החי היום, שידוע ברב או במעט את אשר בנפשם ובלבבם, את הרת רוחם “ *Ibid.*, 158. “ושאיפותיהם, חושב אנכי, כי 'כנפשם וכלבבם' אדבר אליך היום: צר לנו המקום!

nation or vice versa.”<sup>234</sup> He admits that this reintegration will be difficult, and there is no precedent for it, but he is hopeful it can be achieved.

While the controversy between Ahad Ha’am and Berdichevsky will extend over several more essays and draw in a number of other participants on both sides, the main contours of the debate are set between “Te’udat *Ha-Shiloah*” and Berdichevsky’s “Al parashat derakhim.” On one hand, the “internal world,” and on the other, the “tear in the heart” and “the place is too narrow for us.” But as with “Te’udat *Ha-Shiloah*,” “Al parashat derakhim” does not fully and completely adhere to the canonical narrative.

The standard narrative accuses Ahad Ha’am of subordinating literature to nationalism, of valuing only thought and writing with practical benefit for the cause of Hibbat Zion. In this scheme, Berdichevsky is a voice for universalism and the sovereign individual. But in “Al parashat derakhim,” Berdichevsky makes a practical nationalist argument for integrating Jewish and universal sources in Hebrew literature. Without such a synthesis, Berdichevsky claims, young people will be drawn to foreign sources of inspiration and will view Judaism with disdain. “As for us, is this not the goal of our work, that we become a *people*, bound together by general nationalist feeling and a great historic heritage” (emphasis in original).<sup>235</sup> The tendency to view Ahad Ha’am and Berdichevsky as diametrically opposed obscures the positions and approaches they shared.

---

<sup>234</sup> “ואתה הלא יודע את כל הנזק הרוחני הגדול, אשר סבלנו על ידי דחית האדם בעבור העם או להפך” Ibid., 159.

<sup>235</sup> ואנחנו הלא זאת מטרת עבודתנו, שהיה נהיה לעם, לאנשים שרגש לאומי כללי ונחלה היסטורית “ Ibid., 156. גדולה מאגדים אותם

That same tendency obscures another aspect of Berdichevsky's "open letter" that is rarely remarked on: It is extremely deferential to Ahad Ha'am. From the title of the piece and the opening invocation of Ahad Ha'am's doubts expressed in his own "Al parashat derakhim," Berdichevsky builds his entire argument around quotations from Ahad Ha'am. He quotes extensively not only from "Te'udat *Ha-Shiloah*," but also from Ahad Ha'am's previous published essays, as well as ephemera such as a position paper for the Aḥiasaf publishing house written by Ahad Ha'am and Ahad Ha'am's letter to potential contributors to *Ha-Shiloah*. Rhetorically, these quotations are presented as the source of authority for Berdichevsky's argument. Even in his most direct protest against Ahad Ha'am, Berdichevsky exclaims, "*This is not the way we expected from you*" (emphasis in original).<sup>236</sup> By co-opting the title of Ahad Ha'am's first major essay, "Lo zeh ha-derekh," just as he has taken up the title "Al parashat derakhim," Berdichevsky adds the weight and significance of these phrases to his own criticism, through association with Ahad Ha'am. The open letter ends reverentially, "May it be God's will that our trust in you not be disappointed,"<sup>237</sup> which reads almost as an appeal to Ahad Ha'am as in prayer. This posture of respect belies descriptions of this letter as a declaration of "war" on Ahad Ha'am by the younger generation.

---

<sup>236</sup> "לא זה דרך אשר קוינו ממך." Ibid., 158.

<sup>237</sup> "ויהי רצון שמבטחנו בך לא יכזבת." Ibid., 159.

### “Tzorekh ve-Yekholet”

One of the things that made the controversy between Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky so salient is that it was carried out consistently in the very first issues of *Ha-Shiloah*. As with the previous two, the third issue of the journal included an installment in the debate. Ahad Ha'am's essay “Tzorekh ve-yekholet” (“Need and Ability”)<sup>238</sup> responds to Berdichevsky's “Al parashat derakhim,” but also expands on Ahad Ha'am's theory of cultural production.

Ahad Ha'am begins by responding to Berdichevsky's charge that his use of the phrase “as it seems to us” in the first sentence of “Te'udat *Ha-Shiloah*” to describe the need for a new periodical betrays a lack of confidence. To this Ahad Ha'am responds that, indeed, he didn't know if what he was doing in founding *Ha-Shiloah* was precisely the necessary thing. He was confident in the need he identified, but “I do not know clearly if what I am doing is the same thing that will need to be done in the future.”<sup>239</sup> He explains that there is nothing wrong with admitting uncertainty in choosing a path to achieve a goal. One should not ignore the challenges in a course of action. Rather, one should say, “I will act, even though there is doubt that what I am doing is correct.”<sup>240</sup> Ahad Ha'am rejects the role of visionary leader. Significantly, he expresses uncertainty about his course of action, not his ideology. Ahad Ha'am is much more comfortable in the world of discourse than in translating ideas into action. This helps explain why he centers his cultural

---

<sup>238</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 1 (1896): 268-274.

<sup>239</sup> “איני יודע בבירור, אם מה שאני עושה עתיד להיות אותו דבר שדרוש להעשות” Ibid., 269

<sup>240</sup> “הריני עושה, אע”פ שספק הוא אם אעשה נכונה.” Ibid.

nationalism in Hebrew literature, rather than leading an organized movement to address the “cultural question” in Zionism.

After dispensing with that criticism, Ahad Ha’am turns to the main subject of the essay, the dynamics of need and ability in literature and culture. He starts off by saying that lofty goals are necessary for a human being’s development. But when a person actually sets to work, they are not focused all the time on the distant ultimate goal. He introduces the metaphor of climbing a ladder: while climbing, a person does not look all the way to the top of the ladder, but rather remains focused on the few rungs just ahead. Similarly, when pursuing a cultural goal, Ahad Ha’am advises choosing a “temporary ideal” (“אידיאל זמני”), an intermediate goal that is achievable relatively soon, not in the distant future.

According to Ahad Ha’am, a healthy person may be inspired and motivated at first by a distant goal. But when they set to work, they work toward an achievable intermediate goal. “The ultimate, distant goal descends to the lower section of the heart, from where he can bring it up occasionally to be amused in quiet moments, but on the field of work its younger brother reigns...until it is achieved and is no longer a goal, and its place is taken by another, one step higher, and so on and on.”<sup>241</sup> Through this process, a person moves step by step toward a goal. But this process is disrupted in the case of Israel (the Jewish people), which Ahad Ha’am calls a “sick soul” (“נפש חולה”). Because Israel has lacked the means to make meaningful cultural progress, it has ceased to set intermediate goals, and all of its goals are lofty and

---

<sup>241</sup> האידיאל הקיצוני, הרחוק, יורד אז למדור התחתון שבלב, שמשם יעלוהו לפרקים בשביל “ עד שיושג ויחדל מהיות עוד להשתעשע ברגעי מנוחה, אבל על שדה העבודה ישלוט אחיו הקטן ממנו...עד שיושג ויחדל מהיות עוד.” Ibid., 270. ומקומו יקח אחר, גבוה עליו מעלה אחת, וכן הלאה והלאה

distant. The weaker Israel's actual ability became, the more it abandoned temporary goals, in favor of ever more distant dreams. Ahad Ha'am recognizes this deficiency even in the present day. According to Ahad Ha'am, the young generation of writers declares "Time to act!" ("עת לעשות!"), but they don't do anything; or worse, they attempt things beyond their abilities, about which Ahad Ha'am says, "better it not be done than be done like that."<sup>242</sup>

Ahad Ha'am agrees that an important aspect of the ultimate goal of Jewish national revival is the development of Hebrew language and literature, "That our language should be alive in our mouths and suffice for all our needs."<sup>243</sup> This is the goal that Berdichevsky seems to be asking for. But Ahad Ha'am rejects this goal as an immediate aim for the present moment for two reasons: the Hebrew language is still only "half a language" ("חצי לשון") and simply is not sufficient for a complete modern literature; and, there are not enough writers who are capable of producing original work in Hebrew, as opposed to superficially translating ideas from foreign works.

So, what is the intermediate goal for which Ahad Ha'am believes Hebrew literature has both the need and ability in the present moment? For one, there is the gathering of the "meagre stalks" ("שבליים צנומות") from other literatures, which may be helpful to bring some experience of the wider world to Jews who remain isolated in traditional Jewish institutions. But for the more modern segments of the people, Ahad Ha'am argues that the need for which ability exists is self-knowledge. He urges the

---

<sup>242</sup> "נוה לו שלא נעשה משכך נעשה." Ibid., 271.

<sup>243</sup> "שתהיה לשוננו חיה בפינו ומספקת לכל צרכינו." Ibid.

reader not to dismiss the value of this goal. He repeats some of what he wrote in “Te’udat *Ha-Shiloah*” to describe the many types of inquiry that could be considered “self-knowledge,” and he adds “the very same ‘human needs’ and all the dramas of culture and the questions that have always moved the spirit, in their relationship to Judaism and Judaism’s relationship to them.”<sup>244</sup> Ahad Ha’am takes pains to show that his requirement that Hebrew literature stand in some relation to Jewish life does not exclude as much as Berdichevsky seems to think. He emphasizes this point specifically in a parenthetical: “Indeed, it is hard to find an important drama or important question in human life and society that has no connection to the life of Judaism in the present or the past.” With this gesture toward inclusivity, Ahad Ha’am repeats that “man in his Jewish form” (“האדם בצורתו היהודית”), albeit broadly conceived, is the only proper subject for Hebrew literature at present.<sup>245</sup>

Ahad Ha’am goes on to question whether he has expressed himself clearly, since the young writers seem to have badly misunderstood him. In a biting, sarcastic paragraph, he mimics their complaints, “We need to place human enlightenment and its needs at the same level as the heritage of our ancestors. The place is too narrow for us!” (emphasis in original).<sup>246</sup> In the oft-quoted line from this essay, Ahad Ha’am responds, “We want! We need! — But are we able?”<sup>247</sup> He points out that no one wants to adjust their needs to fit their resources in issues of national life, which they

---

<sup>244</sup> אותם 'הצרכים האנושיים' עצמם וכל חזיונות הקולטורא והשאלות המניעות את הרוחות מימי עולם, “ Ibid., 272.

<sup>245</sup> הן קשה למצא חזיון נכבד או שאלה נכבדת בחיי האדם והחברה שאין להם שום יחס לחיי היהדות “ Ibid., 272.

<sup>246</sup> אנו צריכים להעמיד את ההשכלה האנושית וצרכיה בשורה אחת עם נחלת קדומים שלנו. צר לנו “ Ibid., 273.

<sup>247</sup> “אנו רוצים! אנו צריכים! — אבל היכולים אנו?” Ibid., 273.

regularly do in their personal lives. Ahad Ha'am also defends his boundaries by pointing out that while the young writers claim that they include too small a scope, Ahad Ha'am has not been able to find writers and contributions to fulfill even his limited agenda. He says that if the areas identified in "Te'udat *Ha-Shiloah*" begin to be fully covered by Hebrew writers, he would broaden the boundaries.

While Ahad Ha'am has acknowledged the ultimate need for a literature that encompasses all the aspects of life, both particular and universal, he differs from Berdichevsky on the source of that need. For Ahad Ha'am, the need is national: to have a language and literature like all developed nations that is sufficient for all the intellectual and spiritual needs of the nation. But for Berdichevsky, a comprehensive literature is both a collective national need *and* an individual remedy for the emotional and psychological pain of the "tear in the heart." Ahad Ha'am rejects this view of the "tear" and promises to address it in a future article.

Ahad Ha'am's mastery of the essay form makes "Tzorekh ve-yekholet" clear and compelling. The essay sets the terms for the continuation of this debate, and subsequent entrants will address the question, as always, in Ahad Ha'am's terms. In the opening of the essay, he portrays himself as put upon, "forced" to respond to criticism. But through humor and dramatic turns of phrase, Ahad Ha'am gives the impression that in fact he enjoys this intellectual back-and-forth. After all, "This is not the first time they have called me to judgement before 'public opinion'.... And

even ‘An Open Letter to Ahad Ha’am’ is a thing that has already existed once or twice.”<sup>248</sup>

### **The Other Young Writers**

In descriptions of the controversy with Ahad Ha’am, Berdichevsky’s views are taken to represent the whole group of young writers. But the other young writers who contribute to the debate in *Ha-Shiloah* have significantly different approaches to the questions of Hebrew culture. When the periodical discussion is summarized or excerpted, these “minor” voices disappear. In the context of the discourse edited by Ahad Ha’am, the other young writers show alternatives to Berdichevsky’s views and relate to Ahad Ha’am’s doctrine in different ways. Differentiating these voices more accurately portrays the literary controversy Ahad Ha’am crafted.

After receiving a traditional Jewish education and being drawn to Zionism in Galicia, Ozjasz Thon came to Berlin, where he studied Kant and earned a doctorate in philosophy. While in Berlin, he became acquainted with Berdichevsky, Ahad Ha’am, and Theodor Herzl. During *Ha-Shiloah*’s first year of publication, Thon was a student in the Reform rabbinical seminary in Berlin. In his essay, “Sifrut le’umit” (“National Literature”), Thon begins with a now-familiar critique of the state of Hebrew literature.<sup>249</sup> It does not meet the spiritual needs of the people. The artistic literature “does not touch even with a little finger the mass of questions that these days fill the

---

<sup>248</sup> לא זאת הפעם הראשונה שמזמזים אותי לדין לפני ‘דעת הקהל’... וגם “מכתב גלוי אל אחד העם” “ Ibid., 268.

<sup>249</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 1 (1896): 344-349.

hearts and minds of the European Jew.”<sup>250</sup> Thon reframes the dichotomy from Jewish-universal to Jewish-European. This shift is a sign that Thon’s position is more aligned with political Zionism than Berdichevsky’s.

Thon argues that foreign ideas are not easily absorbed into Jewish literature. He gives the example of Moses Maimonides, who worked to integrate neo-Aristotelian philosophy with the system of Jewish law and thought. For a time, Jewish concepts were framed in the terms of Greek philosophy, but soon, “The people realized that this ‘tree of knowledge’ that they planted in their garden came from outside and was not native, and they paid no attention to this stranger.”<sup>251</sup> In the time of the Renaissance, Europeans were able to integrate classical philosophy and culture, and it helped to transform their society. Why didn’t that occur with the Jews? Thon argues that in order to be durable, connection to external ideas must be “organic.”

Thon gives a brief survey of the history of Hebrew literature, from the Talmud to the present. He suggests that for most of Jewish history, Hebrew literature did meet all the needs of the people. It addressed their whole world from the perspective of belief, and since religion and nation were unified, Hebrew literature was comprehensive. However, after the Haskalah, as the traditional role of religion began to break down, no new Hebrew literature has arisen to replace it. For Thon, creating this new literature must follow the requirements of Jewish nationalism.

---

<sup>250</sup> אינה נוגעת אף באצבע קטנה בהמון השאלות הממלאות בימים אלה את לבו ומוחו של היהודי “ Ibid., 344. האירופי

<sup>251</sup> הכיר העם, כי 'עץ הדעת' הזה אשר שתלו בגנו בא מבחוץ ואיננו יליד בית, ולא שם לב אל הזר “ Ibid., 345. הזה.”

Thon argues that assimilating Jewish youth have little need for Jewish literature—they have already found identity elsewhere. But surprisingly, some Jewish youth are returning to the community to join the cause of Jewish nationalism. He rebukes Ahad Ha'am for not specifically mentioning settlement in Eretz Yisrael. For Thon, this is the motivation for Hebrew literature, “On account of the national feeling that has awakened once again in our hearts, the *need for a national literature* has also awakened” (emphasis in original).<sup>252</sup> He sees the Jewish nationalist movement as a “new era in our people’s culture.” European culture has introduced new needs to Jews and created a need for a new Hebrew-European literature, “which will not lack even one of the areas that together are called literature.”<sup>253</sup>

For Thon, the program proposed by Ahad Ha'am in “Te'udat *Ha-Shiloah*” is inadequate for the task of creating this new literature. He believes it promotes a detailed accounting of the present, without the motivation to move the people forward. Thon sees the literature of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the academic study of Judaism that arose in Germany with the *Haskalah*, as a gravestone, a memorial to show other peoples what the Jews were in the past. He asks, “But Ahad Ha'am, who believes in the existence of our people and wants to revive it—why would he erect a gravestone to what is alive, even if it is a larger and more beautiful gravestone than before?”<sup>254</sup> As an example of what Ahad Ha'am's conception excludes, Thon imagines a Hebrew writer who develops original philosophy in an area unrelated to

---

<sup>252</sup> “לרגלי הרגש הלאומי שנתעורר עוד הפעם בלבנו, נתעורר גם הצורך לספרות לאומית” Ibid., 347.

<sup>253</sup> “אשר לא יחסר בה אף סניף אחד מכל אלה הסניפים אשר בכללם נקראים ספרות” Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> “אולם אחד-העם, שמאמין בקיום עמנו וחפץ בתחיתו — מדוע יציב הוא מצבה להחי הזה, אם גם “ Ibid., 348. “מצבה גדולה ויפה מהראשונה?”

Judaism. It may be that the situation has not yet arisen, but Thon is concerned that this hypothetical philosophy not be excluded from the field of Hebrew literature.

Mordecai Ehrenpreis's "Le'an?" ("Whither?") shares with Thon a desire for a synthesis in Hebrew literature between Judaism and European culture.<sup>255</sup> His prescription for the development of Hebrew literature is the most radical, claiming that what is needed is not a continuation of a work of the Haskalah and recent generations, "but rather the beginning of another effort entirely, different in form and content."<sup>256</sup> He confidently pushes aside the differences of opinion that gave rise to this dispute in the first place: "Everyone knows now how to mark the boundaries of literature and the essence of its character. We only call whole and natural literature that which is a whole and comprehensive view of the spiritual life of a nation at a particular time."<sup>257</sup> The reference to the "spiritual life of the nation" is a direct reference to Ahad Ha'am's doctrine of cultural nationalism.

Like Thon, Ehrenpreis offers a historical view of the development of modern Hebrew literature, but Ehrenpreis begins more recently, with the Haskalah. He treats the literature of the Haskalah with vicious disdain. He calls it a literature of "dilettantes," not directed at any audience or ideal, but only for the writers themselves and their "private enjoyment." He calls Naftali Herz Wessely, for instance, "simply a failure...since the root of his soul was as far from poetry as the east is far from the

---

<sup>255</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 1 (1896): 489-503.

<sup>256</sup> "כ"א התחלת עבודה אחרת לגמרי, חדשה בצורתה ותכנה." Ibid., 489.

<sup>257</sup> "הכל יודעים עתה לסמן גבולות הספרות ועיקר מהותה. ספרות שלמה וטבעית נקרא רק לזאת, שהיא "המבט הכולל והשלם של חיים הרוחניים של איזו אומה בזמן מן הזמנים." Ibid., 490.

west.”<sup>258</sup> He points out that during the French Revolution, when the whole world was being turned upside-down, Haskalah Hebrew writers continued to produce academic Bible commentary, formal neo-Biblical poetry, and such. The next generation, the generation of Smolenskin and Y.L. Gordon, on the other hand, introduced some new ideas, primarily the beginnings of Jewish nationalism. But Ehrenpreis still characterizes this as a destructive move, the rejection of the restrictions of Jewish law, for example. There was little constructive program except to awaken the interest of the Hebrew public.

Ehrenpreis identifies the current moment with the rise of national consciousness: “We have communal needs and communal hopes, for we all aspire to one goal and one collective redemption.”<sup>259</sup> For the first time, Ehrenpreis notices, the shifts in opinion arise first among the community of readers, not with the writers. The state of literature is chaotic; there is demand for books, and much Hebrew writing is produced, but there is little unity among the authors. Ehrenpreis sees the beginning of national aspirations in Hebrew literature, but the writers are not talented enough to find a voice.

This would seem to admit Ahad Ha’am’s main argument in “Tzorekh ve-yekholet,” that the barrier to achieving a comprehensive, European-style literature in Hebrew is a practical lack of ability on the part of Hebrew writers. But Ehrenpreis argues that Ahad Ha’am is missing a fundamental fact: “Ability is never smaller than

---

<sup>258</sup> “בטלן פשוט...ששורש נשמתו רחוק היה משירה כרחוק מזרח ממערב.” Ibid., 492. Wessely was an eighteenth-century Hebrew poet, one of the pioneers of Haskalah Hebrew literature and the neo-Biblical Hebrew style.

<sup>259</sup> “יש לנו צרכים צבוריים ותקוות צבוריות, כי שואפים אנהנו כולנו למטרה אחת ולגאולה אחת.” Ibid., 497.

the need.”<sup>260</sup> When talent is not called upon, it lies dormant and atrophies. But at a time when the need is great, abilities awaken and grow to meet the need. “The need awakens the ability, which expands and widens as necessary.”<sup>261</sup> Even though Ehrenpreis shares Ahad Ha’am’s evaluation of the immediate situation of Hebrew literature, he does not believe that the abilities of Hebrew writing need to be brought around slowly. Instead, he believes they are poised to blossom in response to the urgent need for a national literature.

Ehrenpreis, like Thon, calls for an integration of Jewish and European elements in Hebrew literature. This matches his conception of Jewish life: “We no longer have two domains: all of human culture is holy to us, and no branch of the work of the general spirit is considered by us ‘a base thing’ or ‘external’ wisdom.”<sup>262</sup> He evaluates the efforts of two Hebrew publishing houses, Aḥiasaf and Tushiya, in developing and promoting this synthesis and finds each lacking. Tushiya is committed to bringing European thought into Hebrew through translation, but the works it has chosen to translate are out of date and unlikely to inspire Hebrew readers. Aḥiasaf tries to enrich Jewish self-understanding (Ahad Ha’am’s program), but in so doing creates an unacceptable division between Jewishness and Europeanness.

Of all the young writers, Ehrenpreis displays the most revolutionary zeal. His criticisms of previous generations are not measured. He rejects gradual change in

---

<sup>260</sup> “שהיכולת לעולם אינה קטנה מהצורך.” Ibid., 502.

<sup>261</sup> “הצורך מעורר את היכולת והוא מרחיבה ומגדילה במדה הדרושה.” Ibid., 503.

<sup>262</sup> “אין לנו שתי רשויות יותר: כל הקולטורה האנושית קדושה לנו ושום סניף מעבודת הרוח הכללי” “אינו נחשב עוד בעינינו ל’דבר חול’ או ל’חכמות חיצוניות’” Ibid., 499.

favor of disruptive, even violent, change. “None of the great deeds in the development of the human spirit were done by these cautious steps, but rather by spiritual revolutions, which destroyed a whole world in a single moment. New realities paved the way for themselves with thunder and noise, and they always came by way of graves and swords.”<sup>263</sup>

### “Eitzah Tovah”

After giving space to the young writers to express their views, Ahad Ha’am returns to the discussion with “Eitzah Tovah” (“Good Advice”), which immediately follows Ehrenpreis’s essay at the very beginning of the sixth issue of *Ha-Shiloah*.<sup>264</sup> This placement shows Ahad Ha’am’s conscious shaping of the controversy; he positions his essay as an immediate response to Ehrenpreis and specifically refers to Ehrenpreis throughout his text. Ahad Ha’am engages in meta-commentary, musing that readers may be getting weary of this back-and-forth, which, he adds in a humorous aside, “ultimately will not create ‘humanistic’ writers if there aren’t any and will not uproot them from the world if there are.”<sup>265</sup> This shows that Ahad Ha’am is concerned with the reception of the overall debate he is editing by the readers of *Ha-Shiloah*. It also hearkens back to “Te’udat *Ha-Shiloah*,” where Ahad Ha’am claimed that the fulfillment of his program for the journal depended on the Hebrew writers and the contributions that would be available to him. Here, he suggests that

---

<sup>263</sup> כל המעשים הגדולים בהתפתחות הרוח האנושי לא נעשו ע”י הליכה מתונה כזאת, כ”א ע”י מהפכות רוחניות, שהרסו עולם מלא ברגע אחד. אמתיות חדשות סללו לעצמן הדרך ברעם ורעש, ותמיד באו דרך קברים וחרבות.” Ibid., 503.

<sup>264</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 1 (1896): 504-508.

<sup>265</sup> “סוף סוף לא יברא סופרים ‘אנושיים’ אם אינם ולא יעקרו מן העולם אם ישנם.” Ibid., 504.

regardless of the outcome of this controversy over the proper domain of Hebrew literature, the authors will write in accordance with their own identity and sensibilities. This aside is meant to minimize the significance of this debate, but it obscures two important dynamics. First, the spark for this debate was not the question of what Hebrew authors would choose to write, but what Ahad Ha'am would choose to publish in his prestigious journal. Even if this debate cannot "uproot" the humanistic writers from the world, Ahad Ha'am has the power to exclude them. Second, as one of the most prominent figures in Hebrew literature, and perhaps the most powerful editor and critic, Ahad Ha'am's preferences certainly shaped the Hebrew writers of his day. Feilerberg, Bialik, and others looked to him as a mentor. Of course he had the power to turn them away from humanism, in accordance with his ideology and taste.

Ahad Ha'am begins the substance of "Eitzah Tovah" by questioning whether the kind of comprehensive literature called for by the young writers is, in fact, a "need." He calls a "need" only that which, when taken away, *directly* causes physical or spiritual harm. He compares the young writers to a beggar standing on the steps of a palace. Just as the beggar might desire the palace, the young writers want what they see in the culture of other nations. But that does not rise to the level of a need. There is one case where such a need exists: "'on the border,' at the place where Judaism and general culture touch each other and oppose each other, and we feel in our hearts that painful 'tear,' which cannot be healed except by rejecting one in favor of the other or

combining the two into one, a single whole creation.”<sup>266</sup> Ahad Ha’am neatly co-opts the language of the “tear,” limiting it to the border case of contact between Jewish and non-Jewish culture, which he has considered a proper subject for the national literature from the beginning.

Ahad Ha’am goes on to question the fundamental idea that identity must be all-encompassing. On the contrary, he argues that from the beginning of the diaspora, Jewish identity has been partial. Ahad Ha’am sees no particular reason why that condition should cause distress. He points out that there are many other aspects of life, aside from literature, that Jews experience outside of their own internal culture. “We have never heard that a genuine Jew, even the most nationalist of the nationalists (even one of the young writers), complains that it pains his soul when his thoughts are in a foreign language or he participates in society that has not even a single small impression of a Jewish form.”<sup>267</sup> According to Ahad Ha’am the partial identity is able to protect itself and adapt to the surrounding conditions. Therefore, Jews should attempt to assimilate not *all* external culture, but only those elements that can be taken in and transformed in accordance with Israel’s unique character.

How precisely are foreign ideas assimilated into Jewish culture? Ahad Ha’am explains that for a complete, healthy culture, this process happens naturally. When a new idea enters the culture, over time it is either rejected or accepted and

---

<sup>266</sup> “על הגבול, במקום שהיהדות והקולטורה הכללית נוגעות זו בזו ומתקוממות זו על זו, ואנו מרגישים” בלבנו את ‘הקרע’ המכאיב הזה, שאי אפשר לרפאותו אלא על דחית האחת מפני חברתה או על ידי הרכבת שתיהן כאחת לבריאה יחידה ושלמה.” Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> “לא שמענו מעולם שיהודי אמת, ואפילו לאומי שבלאומים (אפילו אחד מאלה הסופרים הצעירים), יתאונן שמרגיש הוא כאב בנפשו בשעה שחושב מחשבותיו בלשון נכריה או משתתף בחיים חברתיים שאין בהם אף רושם אחד קטן מצורה יהודית.” Ibid., 505.

transformed. Translation is a part of the process, since foreign ideas are less foreign once brought into the national language. But Israel has very limited resources for the “digestion” of external cultural influences. Some needed assimilation can be accomplished by translating texts into Hebrew or writing original works in Hebrew based on foreign culture. But Ahad Ha’am argues that the Hebrew language itself is not a reliable medium to accomplish this transformation. A Hebrew translation is “foreign food in a Hebrew bowl” (“מאכל זר בקערה עברית”).<sup>268</sup> Without a means of integrating foreign ideas within the national spirit, Ahad Ha’am argues that we must actively analyze foreign culture, to determine which elements can successfully be integrated and which should be rejected. This is the true need—to bring together compatible ideas, and those ideas must border or relate to each other in some way. In the end, the proper domain for the absorption of foreign ideas into Hebrew culture ends up matching Ahad Ha’am’s boundaries for Hebrew literature at the outset.

Ahad Ha’am concludes the essay with his “advice” to the young writers. So far, he admits, Aḥiasaf and *Ha-Shiloah* have not had success in achieving the cultural synthesis under discussion. The problem is a lack of transformative writing. Ahad Ha’am encourages the young writers to leave off their polemics and devote themselves to the work of broadening Hebrew literature.

#### **“Tzorekh ve-Yekholet’ be-Sifriteinu ha-Yafah”**

Berdichevsky’s return to the controversy in “Tzorekh ve-yekholet’ be-sifriteinu ha-yafah” (“Need and Ability’ in Our Fine Literature”) notably does

---

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 506.

not directly engage or contradict any of the previous authors.<sup>269</sup> Instead, in an unsystematic way characteristic of Berdichevsky, he brings new observations that weave around the terms of the previous debate. He begins by noting the ascent of “realism” in Hebrew literature, and sets out to describe the meaning of the term. Like most of the contributions of the young writers, he begins with a historical perspective. The Romantics valued elevated language and a certain lightness of tone. As a reaction, literature returned to earth, to mundane descriptions of day-to-day life. With the ascendance of science and the spread of emancipation, creativity diminished, and literature shifted further from imaginative to realistic.

Poetry—or any literary art—cannot come entirely from internal inspiration or entirely from description of the outside world. It does not merely describe; it creates something new. The special domain of poetry is “the secret in what is open” (“סתר שבגלוי”).<sup>270</sup> The role of poetry is to take familiar observations and “refresh their impressions in our hearts, as if they were just now created before us.”<sup>271</sup> Berdichevsky prefers this kind of creation to plain realism.

From here, Berdichevsky addresses himself to the writers themselves. He asks, “Why do you ask if you should write one way or another? If you want realism—get up and write *well* in that style” (emphasis in original).<sup>272</sup> Berdichevsky, clearly weary of the abstract discourse, recalls a time when authors found sufficient material in their surroundings to create whatever literature they desired. He sarcastically

---

<sup>269</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 1 (1896): 461-465.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 462.

<sup>271</sup> “להחדש את רשומם בלבנו כאילו נוצרו זה עתה לפנינו.” *Ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> “למה זה אתם שואלים ודורשים אם צריך לכתוב כך או כך? אתם חפצים בריאליזמוס—קומו וכתבו” “*נכונה* לפי מהלך זה” *Ibid.*

imagines asking the question, “Why doesn’t Hebrew literature have novels?” and receiving the answer that the conditions of Jewish life do not possess the drama and intrigue that novels require. He insists that Jewish life has all of the struggle and contradictions necessary to make literature.

Berdichevsky sees Hebrew literature as sleeping, without great ideas and bold writers. For economic reasons, Hebrew authors write according to the demands of the market and do not themselves understand why they write what they do. Everyone speaks and writes the same: “melamdin [Hebrew tutors], yeshivah students, and peddlers...as if we have no other people or other lives.”<sup>273</sup>

Instead, Berdichevsky encourages Hebrew writers to view poverty as a unique asset and source of inspiration. Every person has a unique struggle: “In everyone, under the cloak spread over them and their lives, there hides a deep spiritual pain, a poetic pain of eternal war.”<sup>274</sup> Poetry is made from struggle and contradiction. While some want to limit writers to the boundaries of existing Jewish culture, the desire to expand and renew values is great. Every person is full of contradictions, “build and oppose, want and refuse, lover and enemy, hope and despair”—these constitute the “tear in the heart.” In this time of unprecedented crisis, some lose hope while some keep faith. Berdichevsky asks with mock disbelief, “Where will we find material for our poetry?!”<sup>275</sup>

---

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 464. “מלמדים, בני הישיבה, והרוכלים...כאלו אין לנו אנשים אחרים וחיים אחרים”

<sup>274</sup> “בכלם, תחת המסוה הפרוש עליהם ועל חייהם, יסתתר צער נפשי עמוק, צער שירי של מלחמה “נצחית.” Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid. “מאין נקח חומר לשירתנו?!” “בונה וסותר, רוצה וממאן, אוהב ואויב, מקוה ומתיאש.”

Much more than in the first response to *Ahad Ha'am*, here we see Berdichevsky's Romantic, emotional inclination. He disdains a realism that creates nothing imaginative and new. He elevates secrets and contradictions. He no longer chafes against the restrictions of *Ahad Ha'am*, but builds his own independent literary doctrine. The influence of *Ahad Ha'am* is still very much apparent, from the title of the piece to the use of binary oppositions. But this short essay shows a more mature Berdichevsky who is not overawed as he was the previous year.

### **The Discourse Breaks Down**

Up to this point in the controversy, the views expressed were impassioned, but civil. The younger writers showed respect for *Ahad Ha'am*, who honored them by publishing their challenging views and responding to them at length. There was a sense of collaboration and shared goals. This dialogue was disrupted by Shimon Bernfeld, who despite being only five years older than Berdichevsky, comes to defend the "old guard" of Hebrew literature against the attacks of the young writers. Shimon Bernfeld was one of the most frequent contributors to *Ha-Shiloah* in its early years. His pieces include many critical essays on recent Hebrew books, as well as longer critical studies on aspects of Jewish literature and history. Two of his more significant contributions in the first two volumes of *Ha-Shiloah* are a study of the French scholar of religion and nationalism, Ernest Renan, and his relationship to Judaism, and an essay on Jewish historiography.<sup>276</sup> His writing was prolix and

---

<sup>276</sup> "Ernest Renan vi-yehuso el ha-Yahadut" ("Ernest Renan and His Relationship to Judaism"), *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 1 (1896): 24-37, 101-116, 197-210; "Dorshei reshumot: hashkafah al kotvei divrei ha-yamim la-Am Yisrael" ("Record Seekers: A Survey of

unexciting, which Ahad Ha'am himself recognized. But Ahad Ha'am valued him highly as a contributor, since he could be relied upon to provide regular contributions as promised and always to meet his deadlines.

In "Heshbonah shel sifroteinu" ("An Account of Our Literature), Bernfeld claims that the controversy in *Ha-Shiloah* has been imbalanced in favor of the young writers.<sup>277</sup> Bernfeld muses on Ahad Ha'am, "perhaps deep in his heart he agrees with some of the arguments of the 'youth.'"<sup>278</sup> On Ahad Ha'am's editorial policy, he comments, "Out of literary humility...he is very careful not to be seen as a 'final authority' or the periodical *Ha-Shiloah* as a kind of literary *Shulchan Aruch*."<sup>279</sup> This is a sharp contrast to the view of later critics, who saw Ahad Ha'am as an arrogant arbiter of Hebrew literature.

On his own behalf, Bernfeld also denies the accusations of the young writers. He does not deny the value of aesthetic literature. "Certainly I don't see aesthetic literature as frivolous, I enjoy it very much. But we must admit that with our aesthetic literature we will not quench the thirst of our young men."<sup>280</sup> Bernfeld follows Ahad Ha'am in claiming that the writers and writing simply do not exist for aesthetic literature to be central to the current Hebrew literature. But this is not an act of exclusion. "We are not a gang of authors, closing the gate before new authors. On the

---

Historians of the People of Israel"), *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 2 (1897): 97-110, 193-208, 394-407, 508-519.

<sup>277</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 3 (1898): 31-41.

<sup>278</sup> "אפשר שהוא מודה בסתר לבו לקצת טענות בני הנעורים." Ibid., 33.

<sup>279</sup> מתוך צניעות ספרותית...הוא נוהר מאד, לבלי יתראה 'כפוסק אחרון' ומה'ע' 'השלח' כעין 'שלחן' " Ibid. The *Shulchan Aruch* is a sixteenth-century code of Jewish law.

<sup>280</sup> "כי בודאי אין הספרות הפיוטית קלה בעיני, ואני מחבב אותה במאוד. אבל אנו מוכרחים להודות, כי " Ibid., 39.

contrary, our literature is like a city laid open without a wall.”<sup>281</sup> Like Ahad Ha’am, Bernfeld challenges the young writers to actually produce the literature that they accuse the old guard of excluding.

This essay is most notable for its vituperative attacks on the young writers. He accuses them of envying Tolstoy, Ibsen, and Nietzsche. Like Berdichevsky and most of the young writers in his circle, Bernfeld studied and lived in Berlin, and he compares the agitation of the young Hebrew writers to a revolutionary movement in the 1880s among young German writers, known as the Naturalists, who launched vicious attacks on older writers and the German literary establishment.<sup>282</sup> He denounces Karl Bleibtreu’s *Revolution in Literature* (1886) as promoting a “realism” that “has no taste or beauty, or even a true impression of the life of the people, but only the animal filth.”<sup>283</sup> Bernfeld is equally negative toward other new movements in literature. He objects to Hebrew writers “scrambling the minds of readers” with “symbolism, occultism, and the like.”<sup>284</sup> He calls this literature “a kind of morphine,” especially dangerous to a people like the Jews, in a fragile state. He continues the intoxicant metaphor, “Our young writers want to give literary alcohol to our people...and we are obligated to warn the people to refrain from strong drugs like these.”<sup>285</sup>

---

<sup>281</sup> אין לנו כנופיא של סופרים הסוגרת השער לפני סופרים חדשים. אדרבה, ספרותנו היא כעיר פרוצה “ Ibid., 38.

<sup>282</sup> See “Naturalism” in Matthias Konzett, ed. *Encyclopedia of German Literature*. Routledge, 2015. 749-750.

<sup>283</sup> ספרות ריאליזם, כלומר ספרות שאין בה טעם ויופי, ואף לא טופס אמתי מחיי העם, אלא הזוהמא “ הבהמית בלבד *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 3, 36.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>285</sup> הצעירים אומרים להושיט אלכזהול ספרותי לעמנו...ומחובתינו להזהיר את העם להשמר מסמים “ חריפים כאלה Ibid., 35.

Bernfeld repeatedly uses the word “madness” (“שגעון”) to describe the literary forms favored by the young writers. “Symbolism is madness, not like *Hamlet*—madness according to a certain interpretation—just plain madness.”<sup>286</sup> The young German writers who moved from naturalism to symbolism, “have left the realm of literature and entered the realm of psychiatry.”<sup>287</sup> This line of criticism was a major provocation and gave rise to a strong response from Berdichevsky.

In the first of two letters to the editor, Berdichevsky responds to Bernfeld and objects to the uncivil tone Bernfeld employs in declaring “war” on the young writers.<sup>288</sup> Berdichevsky accuses Bernfeld of implying that they are insane, users of alcohol and drugs, and inauthentic as Jews. Berdichevsky takes issue with Ahad Ha’am for allowing these attacks to be published, since they are beneath the usual standards of *Ha-Shiloah*.

The young authors have been accused of venerating foreign authors. Berdichevsky defends himself by saying that they do not revere specific people, but only wish to uphold freedom of thought. Again, in response to the suggestion that the young writers seek humanistic subjects in foreign literatures, Berdichevsky responds, “We are afraid of this ‘other field,’ we are wary of the tear that develops from any limiting of our literature to Judaism alone.”<sup>289</sup> This returns us to the starting point of the discussion and Berdichevsky’s original objection to Ahad Ha’am. Bernfeld has a

---

<sup>286</sup> “הנה הסמבוליזמוס הוא שגעון, לא כזה של המלט: שגעון ע”פ שטה מסוימת – כי אם שגעון פשוט” Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> “יצאו מגדר הספרות ונכנסו בגדר הפסיכיאטריא” Ibid., 36.

<sup>288</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, Vol. 3, 183-186.

<sup>289</sup> “מפחדים אנו משדה אחר זה, יראים אנו את הקרע המסובב מכל התגבלות ספרותנו ביהדות בלבד” Ibid., 183.

positive evaluation of the current Hebrew literature; Berdichevsky strongly disagrees. He considers it stuck in place. He calls for it to reflect “voices, sorrows, hopes, and I’m not ashamed to say—dreams” of the youth.<sup>290</sup>

In his third section, Berdichevsky responds to criticism of the “new way” developing among the young writers of the West. He is not embarrassed to declare that due to their spiritual and social situation, the young writers should be at the head of the new literary movement. He claims no concern for the insults thrown at him by Bernfeld.

Berdichevsky turns to Ahad Ha’am and names him an influence on the young writers’ thinking about the relationship between life and literature. He quotes a passage from an earlier Ahad Ha’am essay that argues that the autonomy of the Jewish people has been unnaturally subordinated to the authority of religious texts.<sup>291</sup> Berdichevsky makes a dramatic call: “No more ‘look to the book to decide’! We will return God’s voice to man’s heart! We will return to our people freedom of thought, direct connection to nature, its essence.”<sup>292</sup>

In the last section, Berdichevsky points out that it is possible to value one type of literature without casting aspersions on another. He feels no connection to research into antiquities, but he does not object to it. In conclusion, he says that if the older generation does not value the literature of the young writers, that does not bother

---

<sup>290</sup> “קולנו, צערנו ותקותינו, איני מתבייש לומר גם – חלומותינו” Ibid., 184.

<sup>291</sup> The essay quoted is “Mikhtav sheini el ha-orech” (“A Second Letter to the Editor”), the lead essay in the second volume of *Pardes* (1894), later published as “Torah she-ba-lev” (“Torah of the Heart”).

<sup>292</sup> “לא ניתי ספר ונחזי! נשיב קול אלהים ללב האדם! נשיב לעמנו את חירות המחשבה, את היחס הישר” “...אל הטבע, את עצמותו” *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 3, 185.

them. The young authors are ready for war; Berdichevsky merely wished to clarify what they would be fighting for.

Following Berdichevsky's letter, Ahad Ha'am responds in an editor's note. He does not want to repeat his earlier arguments, which he accuses the young writers of not having read closely or understood. With regard to Bernfeld, Ahad Ha'am claims that he referred to the *doctrine* of the young authors as "madness," but was not calling them mad themselves. Ahad Ha'am refuses to exclude criticism that is merely unfair—he tolerates it even when he himself is unfairly criticized. In the final paragraph, he claims that Berdichevsky's "humanism" is bound up with the doctrines of Nietzsche and "secrets," and even the author himself can't make sense of his own stories. He finds the whole humanism of the young authors "obscure."

Ahad Ha'am's editor's note is the last straw for Berdichevsky, and he responds with a curt letter.<sup>293</sup> He is offended that Ahad Ha'am turned from criticism to an ad hominem attack, and as a result, Berdichevsky will no longer participate in the discussion. He defends his work and points out that readers, other editors, and even Ahad Ha'am himself have found it valuable. He asks only for freedom of thought, to pursue the path he thinks correct. With reference to the criticism of Nietzsche, Berdichevsky states, "It's actually not the 'superman' that we need in our literature, but any man at all."<sup>294</sup> Again, Berdichevsky upholds the value of the individual subjectivity. In parting, Berdichevsky laments that some value controversy

---

<sup>293</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 3, 287-288.

<sup>294</sup> "לא דוקא" אדם העליון" דרוש לנו בספרותנו, רק ה"בן-אדם" בכלל." Ibid., 287.

over ideas, but he is confident that his program for the course of Hebrew literature is the correct one.

Ultimately, a breach of norms brings the Ahad Ha'am-Berdichevsky controversy in *Ha-Shiloah* to an end. Berdichevsky's offense at Ahad Ha'am's failure to defend him from Bernfeld's abuse is obvious. Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky each feel that the other has crossed a line by resorting to personal attacks. This breakdown shows how central social and literary convention were to the entire controversy. Until the dispute over Bernfeld erupted, Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky collaborated in a literary exchange governed by norms of civility, argumentation, and shared cultural goals. These norms were attributable to Ahad Ha'am as the editor of *Ha-Shiloah*.

### **Conclusion**

From full consideration of *all* the major texts of this debate, it is apparent that the stereotype of a bitter and polarized conflict between Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky does not match the tone or content of their writings in their original context. In the pages of *Ha-Shiloah* itself we see that Ahad Ha'am values individual expression and aesthetic literature but is skeptical about the ability of the new Hebrew literature to meet those needs. Ahad Ha'am repeatedly expresses his willingness to welcome such literature, if it can be produced, and he demonstrates his openness in fact by publishing numerous pieces expressing the young writers' point of view. The young writers, for their part, plainly state their admiration for Ahad Ha'am and show how their interest in autonomy and self-expression flow from Ahad Ha'am's own views on cultural revival. And within both "camps" there are significant differences between the objectives and emphases among the different authors.

As the editor of *Ha-Shiloah*, Ahad Ha'am is, in a way, the author of this entire debate. In a letter to Ehrenpreis, he asks him to maintain a "positive" tone in "Le'an?" since the readers may be tiring of the discussion.<sup>295</sup> Upon receiving Berdichevsky's letter responding to Bernfeld, Ahad Ha'am wrote to him asking that the personal references to Ahad Ha'am be removed, to depersonalize the debate and avoid the necessity of responding with his editor's note.<sup>296</sup> Ahad Ha'am consciously crafted this controversy for the Hebrew literary public, with the young writers as willing collaborators. Ahad Ha'am shows openness to dialogue by publishing extensive criticism of his own positions. The selections build on each other, and the positions of the writers evolve in response to the dialogue. Ahad Ha'am demonstrates the flexibility of Hebrew, one of the very subjects under discussion, by presenting the debate across different types of writing: theory, history, political advocacy, and correspondence. He uses meta-commentary to indicate awareness of the audience and his own rhetorical situation. The periodical context allows Ahad Ha'am to orchestrate this exchange of views and the tone in which it was conducted. The controversy became a milestone in the development of Hebrew literature—not despite Ahad Ha'am's efforts, but because of them.

---

<sup>295</sup> Ahad Ha'am letter to M. Ehrenpreis, 18 Jan 1898. *Iggerot Ahad Ha'am*, vol. 1, 168.

<sup>296</sup> Ahad Ha'am letters to Berdichevsky, 6 Jan 1898 and 3 Feb 1898. *Ibid.*, 164, 178-181.

## Chapter 4 — Belletristic Literature in *Ha-Shiloah*

In February 1898, following the publication of his first “Letter to the Editor” and Ahad Ha’am’s sharp editor’s note, Berdichevsky wrote to Ahad Ha’am, “In your letter it indeed says that you consider B. [Berdichevsky] talented, but in your note you mention only the bad.”<sup>297</sup> Ahad Ha’am responds in a patronizing tone:

I see no benefit in continuing the argument, since you are not able to get out of your own subjectivity. If you were able to do that, you would understand on your own, that the announcement you made to the readers in your last letter, that I have sometimes said to you: “well done,” is meaningless. For is it not understood that all the articles I have published in *Ha-Shiloah* meet my approval? Since otherwise I would not have published them. Therefore there was no need for me to mention “also the good” in my note (as you complain against me), since this good stands out on its own in the very same issue, since I published your article in addition to the open letter.<sup>298</sup>

Every piece of literature published in the first ten volumes of *Ha-Shiloah* was selected and edited by Ahad Ha’am. He was responsible for bringing them before the reading public, and by publishing them in *Ha-Shiloah*, he lent his own prestige and that of the day’s premiere outlet for Hebrew literature to those authors and works.

---

<sup>297</sup> במכתבך אמנם נאמר שחושב אתה את ב. [ברדיצ'בסקי] לבעל כשרון, אבל בהערתך רק את הרע “הגדת.” Berdichevsky to Ahad Ha’am, 9 Feb. 1898. “Mikhtevei Micha Yosef Berdichevsky me-1886 ad 1902” [“Letters of Micha Yosef Berdichevsky, 1886-1902”], *Proyekt Ben Yehudah*, <https://benyehuda.org/read/18661>, accessed 1 Dec. 2020.

<sup>298</sup> איני רואה תועלת בהמשך הוכחה, אחר שאינך מוכשר לצאת מסובייקטיביות שלך. אלמלי היית “מוכשר לזה, היית מבין מדעתך, כי ההודעה שהודעת להקוראים במכתבך האחרון, שגם אני אמרתי לך לפעמים: “ישר כחך”, אין לה שחר. כי הלא ממילא מובן, שכל המאמרים שהדפסתי אותם ב“השלח” מצאו חן בעיני, ואלמלא כן לא הייתי מדפיסם. ומפני זה לא היה לי כל צורך להגיד בהערתי “גם את הטוב” (כמו שאתה מתאונן עלי) אחר כי הטוב הזה בולט מעצמו באותה חוברת עצמה, שנתתי מאמריך מלבד המכתב הגלוי.”

Ahad Ha’am to Berdichevsky, 22 Feb. 1898, *Iggerot Ahad Ha’am*, vol. 2, 41-43. In the same issue as Berdichevsky’s “Open Letter,” Ahad Ha’am published an article by Berdichevsky on the founding of a Galician colony in Palestine.

While previous chapters have shown Ahad Ha'am's openness to diverse voices and directions in Hebrew literature, there is another important source of evidence for Ahad Ha'am's influence as an editor: the stories and poems he published. Because Ahad Ha'am's essays are so clearly and powerfully stated, critics have looked there for the definitive account of Ahad Ha'am's literary sensibility. In particular, based on the program laid out in "Te'udat *Ha-Shiloah*" and the Ahad Ha'am-Berdichevsky controversy in general, critics have claimed that Ahad Ha'am had little regard for belletristic writing and imposed a narrow, restrictive definition of the proper subjects of Hebrew literature. He is accused of accepting only works with a didactic focus on some aspect of Judaism and especially Jewish cultural nationalism.

But the literature in *Ha-Shiloah* departs from what Ahad Ha'am calls for in his programmatic essays, and it certainly does not conform to the repressive, insular stereotype of what Ahad Ha'am deemed acceptable. Since every literary selection in *Ha-Shiloah* was chosen and edited by Ahad Ha'am personally, they must be accounted for in his literary legacy. To the extent that poems and stories explored themes outside of Ahad Ha'am's nationalist agenda—humanism and universalism, the romanticism of nature, the irrationalism of dreams, visions and madness—they all met with Ahad Ha'am's approval. The belletristic literature published in *Ha-Shiloah* reveals the importance and influence of Ahad Ha'am the periodical editor, alongside Ahad Ha'am the writer.

## From the Expected to the Unexpected

From the literary selections in *Ha-Shiloah*, it is easy to draw examples that conform to the narrow caricature of Ahad Ha'am's tastes. In the first volume alone, townspeople take turns debating the merits of emigrating to Palestine in a dialogue scene with basically no plot.<sup>299</sup> In a health spa in Western Europe, a Russian Jew laments his "rebellious" son, who instead of becoming a doctor or lawyer, earned a doctorate in Jewish studies and founded a school in Israel.<sup>300</sup> The Messiah sees the suffering of the People of Israel and asks God when he will be allowed to redeem them. God replies:

...Until a new generation rises  
A generation that will understand redemption  
A generation that will want to be redeemed  
And will understand its soul to be redeemed.<sup>301</sup>

Taking up a similar theme, Bialik's first poem in *Ha-Shiloah*, "Moshe meit vi-Yehoshua makhnis" ("Moses Dies and Joshua Leads In"), dramatizes the moment in the Torah narrative where the generation that had been slaves in Egypt gives way to a new generation that will take possession of the Promised Land—"We will build another home, we will raise another tent!"<sup>302</sup> In these selections and many others,

---

<sup>299</sup> M.D. Brandstadter, "Zalman goy" ("Zalman the Gentile"), *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 1. (1896): 48-54, 116-122.

<sup>300</sup> Reuven Brainin, "Ben sorer u-moreh" ("A Stubborn and Rebellious Son"), *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 1 (1896): 540-550.

<sup>301</sup> "עד יקום דר חדש, \ דר אשר יבין גאולה, \ דר אשר יחפץ להיות נגאל \ ואשר יבין נפשו להיות" ... "נגאל" David Frischmann, "Mashiach" ("Messiah"), *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 1 (1896): 263-267.

<sup>302</sup> "בית אחר תבנה, אהל אחר תקים!" H.N. Bialik, "Moshe meit vi-Yehoshua makhnis" ("Moses Dies and Joshua Leads In"), *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 1 (1896): 152-153.

ideology is in the foreground, and the subject is Jewish nationalism. These are not works of literary art for its own sake. They are concerned with the communal more than the personal. The dominant styles are social realism and allegory, and the nationalist message is clear.

Pieces like these constitute the majority of the literature published in *Ha-Shiloah* throughout Ahad Ha'am's tenure as editor. This only casts in sharper relief the selections that do not fit the mold. Ahad Ha'am's *Ha-Shiloah* includes a number of stories and poems that are universalist or humanist, that focus on subjective experience, or that reflect emerging modernist themes. These are not the literary developments that *Ha-Shiloah* is known for. But Ahad Ha'am curated the journal with extreme care and total discretion, so the inclusion of these pieces is significant. They show that Ahad Ha'am did not "lock the gates" of Hebrew literature completely, as he has been accused. These pieces that Ahad Ha'am found worthy and gave his imprimatur show that he fostered the very developments in modern Hebrew literature that are often understood as arising in opposition to him.

### **Universalism and Humanism**

One of the accusations made by the young writers is that Ahad Ha'am confines literature by requiring it to relate to particularistic Jewish concerns. In their view, this excludes universal and humanist themes from Hebrew literature. But while Ahad Ha'am did privilege literature that had specific relevance to the Jewish people, this did not actually exclude universal themes. This can be seen in two poems published in consecutive issues of *Ha-Shiloah* in 1897, Saul Tchernichovsky's "Ani

ma'amin" ("I Believe") and Bialik's "Anaḥah" ("Groan"). Both of these poems have a nationalist message, but their dominant themes are universal.

"Ani ma'amin" is notably the only work by Tchernichovsky published by Ahad Ha'am in *Ha-Shiloah*. Ahad Ha'am was generally disdainful of Tchernichovsky's "pagan" orientation, and opening up *Ha-Shiloah* to Tchernichovsky's poems is often cited as a signature change made by Ahad Ha'am's successor, Yosef Klausner. In this poem, the nationalist connection is explicit; the final three stanzas express faith in the Zionist project.<sup>303</sup> Tchernichovsky proclaims:

My people will then rise and flourish,  
And in the land a generation arise,  
Its iron chains removed,  
Seeing light in each other's eyes.<sup>304</sup>

In the following stanza, Tchernichovsky positions himself against Ahad Ha'am's cultural Zionism, in particular:

It will live, love, act, and work,  
A generation is indeed alive in the land,  
Not in the future, in the heavens –  
Of spiritual life it has no end.<sup>305</sup>

He recognizes current settlement activity as the beginning of the utopian Zionist vision, rejecting Ahad Ha'am's contention that development of "spiritual life" for the

---

<sup>303</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 2 (1897): 168. Set to music by Tuvia Shlonsky, this poem became extremely popular among Zionist settlers in Palestine. It serves as the official anthem of several Zionist youth movements, including *Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir*. It has been proposed by members of Knesset as an alternative national anthem for the State of Israel. In 2014, Israel issued a 50 NIS banknote with a portrait of Tchernichovsky and a line from this poem, "For I still believe in man / and in his spirit, a powerful spirit" ("כי עוד אאמין גם באדם / גם ברוחו רוח-עז").

<sup>304</sup> "ישוב יפרח אז גם עמי \ ובארץ יקום דור \ ברזל כבלו יוסר מנו \ עין בעין יראה אור."

<sup>305</sup> "יחי, יאהוב, יפעול, יעש, \ דור בארץ אמנם חי, \ לא בעתיד, בשמים — \ חיי רוח לו אין די."

Jewish people should be at the top of the nationalist agenda. The inclusion of this view is not unusual for Ahad Ha'am, who frequently published views contrary to his own.

What makes this poem notable is that the first five of its eight stanzas express a utopian vision beyond the confines of Jewish nationalism. In the first stanza, the speaker professes faith “in man” and in a female lover, to whom the poem is addressed. The speech is not only humanistic, but personal and embodied. In the stanzas that follow, he extends the “I Believe” to the “spirit” of man, to “friendship,” and to “the future.” This utopian vision is inflected by socialism (“a laborer will not die of hunger,” “לא ברעב ימות עובד”) and universalism (“...bringing peace / and blessing from nation to nation,” “אז וברכה לאום מלאום”). By using the title “I Believe,” Tchernichovsky specifically sets up these ideals as a replacement for the traditional beliefs of Judaism, summarized in Moses Maimonides’s “Thirteen Principles of Faith,” a twelfth-century creed popularly sung in the synagogue worship service, which begins each principle, “I believe...” Tchernichovsky’s fourth stanza proclaims:

I will also believe in the future,  
even if the day is distant,  
yet it will come! Bringing peace  
and blessing from nation to nation.<sup>306</sup>

This clearly invokes the language of Maimonides’s twelfth principle, “I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah. Even if he delays, nonetheless I will await

---

<sup>306</sup> “אאמינה גם בעתיד, / אף אם ירחק זה היום, / אך בא יבא! ישא שלום / אז וברכה לאום מלאום”

his coming each day.”<sup>307</sup> The secular vision of universal peace replaces the coming of the Messiah.

In “Ani ma’amin” Tchernichovsky puts his humanity first, his desire for deep personal relationships and his sense of connection to all people. This universalism sits alongside his expression of his particular Jewish vision. There is no “tear in the heart,” no conflict between the Jewish and European/universal spheres. Ahad Ha’am brings both parts into *Ha-Shiloah*.

The next poem that appeared in *Ha-Shiloah*, in the following issue, is Bialik’s “Anahah” (“Groan”)<sup>308</sup> The poem evokes the oppression and strife of the working class. The land itself, “the full and open land” (“ארץ המלאה הפתוחה”) is framed as the oppressor. It “enslaves us”:

Without leaving the soul  
a moment of joyful escape  
to relieve the heart of its weariness  
in the silence of a quiet corner.<sup>309</sup>

The lack of a “quiet corner” for autonomy and the renewal of heart and soul is a major subject of the poem. The poet laments the absence of a “reliable place” (“מקום נאמן”) where “we can plant a stake” (“נוכל לתקע בו יתד”) and say, “we’ve sought – and we’ve found rest” (“מצאנו מנוחה”). This admits of a Jewish nationalist reading, the first-person plural representing the collective subject of the Jewish people who are exploited and exhausted in a foreign land. The key need identified is a land

---

<sup>307</sup> אני מאמין באמונה שלמה בביאת המשיח. ואף על פי שיתמהמה עם כל זה אחכה לו בכל יום “שיבוא.”

<sup>308</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 2 (1897): 248. This title was added by Ahad Ha’am. In Bialik’s collections, the poem first appears untitled and later as “Mah rav, oy mah rav” (“How Great, O How Great”).

<sup>309</sup> “מבלי אשר-תותיר לנפש \ אף רגע של-תענוג לפליטה, \ לשביע הלב מיגיענו \ בדממה בפנה שקטה”

of their own, “to which we might bind our souls” (“שנקשר אליו את נפשנו”), which easily fits into a Zionist framework.

But non-particularist readings are equally strong. Avner Holtzmann suggests two options: 1) he reads the poem as “a socialist political protest against the cruel economic exploitation of people to the point they become soulless slaves;”<sup>310</sup> or 2) it could be a more general lament “on the societal alienation of the individual in the modern urban world.”<sup>311</sup> This is Bialik’s humanist, universalist impulse. His class consciousness is not limited to fellow Jews. And rather than ascribe this existential condition to a particular nation, he frames the poem in terms general enough that it can be a response to the alienation of modernity.

The Russian censor, at least, did not see this poem as limited to internal Jewish concerns. To Ahad Ha’am’s surprise, the entire poem was rejected, and the issue was printed with a black box covering the page. The poem only appears in a few dozen copies that were sent outside the Russian Empire.<sup>312</sup> It seems likely that neither poet nor editor was deeply upset by this omission. Bialik was unsure of the poem from the beginning and had asked Ahad Ha’am to publish it anonymously. (Ahad Ha’am ignored the request.)<sup>313</sup> Later Bialik was upset that the poem was printed without an update he had sent to Ahad Ha’am, which changed the ending.<sup>314</sup> Ahad

---

<sup>310</sup> “מבלי אשר-תותיר לנפש \ אף רגע של-תענוג לפליטה, \ לשביע הלב מיגיענו \ בדממה בפנה שקטה” Avner Holtzmann, *Hayyim Nahman Bialik: ha-shirim* [*Hayyim Nahman Bialik: The Poems*] (Dvir, 2008), 83.

<sup>311</sup> “על ניכורו החברתי של היחיד בעולם האורבני המודרני” Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Shulamit Laskov, *Hayyei Ahad Ha’am*, 104.

<sup>313</sup> Dan Miron, *Hayyim Nahman Bialik: shirim* [*Hayyim Nahman Bialik: Poems*] (Tel Aviv University, 2003), 23.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 310.

Ha'am, for his part, wrote to a friend in Odessa that the poem "wasn't the best, and the loss isn't very great."<sup>315</sup> This production history demonstrates that Ahad Ha'am's standards were not always exacting and rigid. While he frequently rejected submissions for a variety of reasons, he also published works that did not precisely match his taste in form or content, which was a source of diversity for the literature in *Ha-Shiloah*. Here, it leads him to include a poem of universal empathy and concern.

### **Encounters with Nature**

In "Te'udat *Ha-Shiloah*," Ahad Ha'am specifically mentions poetic meditations on nature as the kind of literature that will not find a place in his journal. Despite this announcement, a number of literary selections in *Ha-Shiloah* are based on romantic engagement with nature. Many of these reflect on the landscape of the Land of Israel. Shmuel Leib Gordon begins a poem called "Yafo" ("Jaffa"), "Now I see you, every heart's desire! Glorious sight! / Here is the coast and the beautiful landscape – O, is it true?"<sup>316</sup> The imagined view of Jaffa from above has a profound emotional effect on the speaker: "My spirit storms, my heart fears, expands uncontrollably / My knees shake, my eyes fill with tears of joy and pain."<sup>317</sup> These tears and tremors, the awe and fear in the face of the natural world, are far from the bloodless intellectual discourse associated with Ahad Ha'am.

---

<sup>315</sup> "לא היה טוב ביותר ואין ההפסד גדול כל כך." Ahad Ha'am to Yehoshua Michaelson, 29 Jul. 1897, *Iggerot Ahad Ha'am*, vol. 1, 247-248.

<sup>316</sup> "הנה אראך, משאת כל נפש! מראה-הוד! / הנה החף ויפה הנוף — הוי, האמנם?" *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 5 (1899): 158. "The beautiful landscape" ("יפה הנוף") plays on the name of a new neighborhood, "Yefe Nof" ("יפה נוף"), founded near Jaffa by Benei Moshe in 1898.

<sup>317</sup> "רוחי יסער, לבי יפחד, ירחב בלי-חך — / ברכי כורעות, עיני דמעות מגיל וכאב."

Leib Yaffe's "Ba-Merḥak" ("In The Distance") takes a similar aerial view, this time over the whole land of Israel, which appears to the speaker in a dream:

Blue skies, pure and bright,  
Skies endlessly deep,  
And beneath their canopy, in song  
Farmers gather the crops.<sup>318</sup>

The encounter with nature responds to the tumultuous state of the speaker's soul: "How my soul trembled, longing / for feeling, brightness, and warmth."<sup>319</sup> The direct connection of the longing of the soul to the experience of nature highlights that this fantasy is beyond the domain of reason. And it takes place in a dream, where the usual restrictions of logic and order are suspended.

Because the landscape in both poems is the Land of Israel, they are not meditations on nature for its own sake. Each of them has a Zionist agenda, to praise the Land of Israel and proclaim a connection between Jews in Diaspora and that specific landscape. But as in the Tchernichovsky and Bialik poems, the existence of a nationalist theme does not negate all other themes and poetic devices. Here, Ahad Ha'am has published romantic odes to nature, though he has claimed he will exclude them.

In at least one case, Ahad Ha'am saw fit to publish a poem that reflects on nature without any nationalist or didactic overlay. Bialik's "Mi-shirei ha-ḥoref" ("From the Winter Poems") relates not to the landscape of Israel, but to a cold winter day in the Russian forest.<sup>320</sup> In the first section, Bialik builds what Holtzmann calls a

---

<sup>318</sup> שמי תכלת טהורים ובהירים, \ ותחת שפירים בשירים \ מאספים אכרים היבול" *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 4 (1898), 65.

<sup>319</sup> "מה-נפשי רועדת, נכספת / לרגש, לזהר וחום."

<sup>320</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 8 (1901): 528-530.

“mythical tale,” a story of God taking up a hammer and anvil to pound vast and destructive energy into the world, which is barely contained.<sup>321</sup> Bialik evokes a landscape that is hard and full of incredible brightness: “The whiteness is endless and radiance limitless.”<sup>322</sup> Tuvia Rubner calls it, “pure description, dominated by ‘splendors’ everywhere.”<sup>323</sup> The images of light and restrained power multiply: “the world is bright and solid!” (“בהיר ומוצק העולם!”) and oak trees split in the forest from holding back the explosion of energy. The image is wild and unstable; the poet tells us that at any moment, the powers chained within the earth will burst forth and destroy the world. Romanticism is evident in the wildness and unpredictability of nature, the experience of nature as divine, and nature’s duality of vitality and destructive potential.

In the second section of the poem, Bialik analogizes the nature scene to the play of forces within an individual. His heart pounds, his fists clench. The winter day makes him want to lash out against the whole world. Ultimately, he gets on a cart to ride off into the ice and snow. Nature absorbs the pent-up energy and ends the crisis: “In an untouched land, wide and bright — / may the mighty power be scattered like dust!...”<sup>324</sup> Holtzmann calls this a repeated theme in Bialik, “nature as a dynamic mirror of the soul.”<sup>325</sup> The nature scene is not merely an allegory for the human

---

<sup>321</sup> Holtzmann, *Hayyim Nahman Bialik: ha-shirim*, 214.

<sup>322</sup> “ואין סוף ללבנונית ולזהר אין קץ”

<sup>323</sup> *The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself*, eds. Burnshaw et. al (Wayne State University Press, 2003), 22.

<sup>324</sup> “ובארץ לא עבד בה, רחבה ובהירה — / כאפר תפזר נא עצמה כבירה!”

<sup>325</sup> “הטבע כאספקלריה דינמית של הנפש” Holtzmann, *Hayyim Nahman Bialik: ha-shirim*, 214.

situation, but rather they relate to and interact with each other. The human reflecting on nature is not a passive observer, but a participant in a dramatic system.

### **Descents Into Madness**

Ahad Ha'am is associated with intellect, with clarity of thought and expression, so much so that the title of his essay "Shilton ha-sekhel" ("The Supremacy of Reason," 1904) became a mocking euphemism for Ahad Ha'am himself.<sup>326</sup> The stereotype, echoing the complaints of the "young writers," is that Ahad Ha'am's worldview is too orderly, abstract, and intellectual. But a number of the stories that Ahad Ha'am selected for *Ha-Shiloah* feature narrators and characters whose reason is obscure and disordered. At the extreme, they depict madness, the breakdown of Ahad Ha'am's vaunted reason.

In the short story "Ha-Geneivah" ("The Theft"), a bookkeeper becomes obsessed with the thought of stealing from his wealthy employer.<sup>327</sup> The impulse is intrusive; he describes it as "a thought that assaulted him" ("מחשבה אשר תקפתהו") and "a strange idea" ("רעיון מוזר"). He acts on the impulse and takes a handful of gold coins. Immediately, he hears a shout of "Thief!"; the shout is not directed at him, but he is increasingly overtaken by the fear of being caught. He imagines bringing the coins to a moneychanger and hearing the shout: "Thief!" His mental distress manifests in his body: "He jumped up to go, but he couldn't. It was as if his legs were

---

<sup>326</sup> Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet*, 253.

<sup>327</sup> Moshe Sablotsky, *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 2 (1897): 341-346. The story appeared in Issue 10 (July, 1897). In the following issue (August, 1897), a brief notice by Y.Ħ. Ravnitsky (using his pseudonym, "Bar Katzin") accuses Sablotsky of copying the story with minimal changes from an uncredited piece published in Jerusalem several years earlier. See *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 2, 476-477.

chained; his spirit was wrecked, and his body shook.”<sup>328</sup> He returns home to a scene of melodramatic destitution: a dirt floor, dying wife, and destitute children. As he goes to show his wife the coins, he is even more frenzied: “His eyes flashed in their sockets and the flush of fever came over his face...and he didn’t know himself: His heart pounded and his emotions raged.”<sup>329</sup> The fever and emotional upheaval externalize the bookkeeper’s intellectual deterioration. His wife says nothing, but the man hears “Thief!” The word haunts him: “That word rings in his ears nonstop. It’s heard again and again in fury and scorn.”<sup>330</sup> He is so tormented by guilt and paranoia that he returns to his employer’s house and confesses his crime.

The whole focus of this story is the mental state of the bookkeeper. There are only a few scattered references to indicate the man is Jewish. There is some social context—the man’s poverty, the hard-heartedness of his employer—but certainly not enough to make a substantive comment on Jewish life. The subject here is not collective, but individual. And if this individual is to be taken as a kind of collective subject, it is not the positivist, nationalist subject *Ahad Ha’am* is said to require, but rather much more like what the fragmented, experimental young writers claim is their experience of Jewish modernity.

Yitzhak Isaac Lubetzky’s “*Ta’anit ḥalom*” (“Fast for a Dream”), published in two parts in the summer of 1898, has elements of a standard didactic *Ha-Shiloah*

---

<sup>328</sup> “הוא יחפוץ ללכת, אך לא יוכל. רגליו כמו לנחושתיים הוגשו, רוחו חובלה וגוו רועד” *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 2, 342.

<sup>329</sup> “עיניו נוצצו בחוריהן ואודם-קדחת ישפך על פניו...והוא לא ידע את נפשו: לבו דופק בחזקה” Ibid., 343.

<sup>330</sup> “המלה הזאת מצלצלת באזניו בלי הרף. היא תשמע עוד הפעם ועוד הפעם בקצף ובבוז” 344.

story.<sup>331</sup> It is a coming-of-age story with an arc common in the literature of the time: through a series of experiences as a child and a young man, the protagonist describes his gradual alienation from traditional Jewish culture and education. It includes motifs shared by many such stories: a harsh and unforgiving father, a grotesque and abusive rabbi overseeing a *heder* (religious school for children), the extreme hardship the protagonist faces to survive after escaping to an indifferent modern city. As in many of these stories, the young man comes to a tragic end.

“Ta’anit ḥalom” also fits the template of *Ha-Shiloah* in that the plot of the story gives way frequently to long expository passages. Through the artist protagonist, David Parchi, Lubetzky proclaims a full aesthetic theory. Established artists, David’s foils, name him a “wild talent” (“כשרון פראי”),<sup>332</sup> and he repeatedly returns to this concept, which is essentially connected to both Jewishness and poverty. The artist of “wild talent” expresses the ineffable spirit of life, rather than just the exterior appearance. He rails against realism:

They shout incessantly: realism, realism...and with these sounds they fill the whole space of the world of painting. But this is just an empty phrase that doesn’t yield or add anything, and if we look at their activities or works, we can see how they have destroyed painting, lack of spirit and small-mindedness stand out from every line, artificial work that from the outset of its creation is made only for external splendor, to blind the viewers’ eyes.<sup>333</sup>

---

<sup>331</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 4 (1898): 47-57, 143-152. The title refers to ancient Jewish tradition that a person should fast in order to neutralize a disturbing dream. See Babylonian Talmud, Ta’anit 11a.

<sup>332</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 4, 48.

<sup>333</sup> "המה יצעקו בלי הרף: ריאליסמוס, ריאליסמוס...ובקולות האלו ימלאו את כל חללו של עולם הציור. אבל כל זה הוא אך פרזה ריקה אשר לא תתן ולא תוסיף לנו מאומה, ובמעשיהם ועבודתם אם נתבונן, אז נראה עד מה השחיתו את הציור, יבשות הרוח וקטנות המח בולטות מכל קו וקו, עבודה מלאכותית אשר מראשית יצירתה נבראה אך בגלל ההוד החצוני, למען עור את עיני הרואים." *Ibid.*, 49.

The realistic style conceals something essential about the world. He dismisses fashions and the search for “new ways” in art; an artist of talent, following the path of the “old masters” (“מורים עתיקים”) needs only a few colors and simple lines, “and they’ll show you life’s boiling.”<sup>334</sup> He rejects populism in art, mocking the artist who adapts his style to popular tastes and lamenting the recrimination of the artist who does not conform to public taste: “He will fall and nothing can help. His fall will not awaken a spark of compassion in the hearts of the viewing public. For he is mad, and he brought disaster upon himself.”<sup>335</sup> In David’s view, the “wild talent” of the Jewish artists makes this conflict with the public inevitable: “Hebrew talent, despite its genius, does not capture the hearts of the masses. It awakens them, boils their blood with its bitterness, but does not take their hearts, for it lacks the internal softness and external splendor.”<sup>336</sup>

In the story, David suffers just such a fate. In the climax of the story, the painting that is his last hope is rejected from an exhibition. An established artist acquaintance, whom David despises, explains that while the work shows great talent, it is not pleasing. He accuses David of only showing the bad in the world, and not giving his audience any relief.<sup>337</sup> This leads David to articulate his final, critical aesthetic principle. While the popular artist upholds beauty for its own sake, David argues that aesthetics must always be combined with, and even subordinated to,

---

<sup>334</sup> “והמה יראוך את רתיחת החיים.” Ibid., 53.

<sup>335</sup> הוא נפול ופול ומאום לא יועיל. ובנפלו לא יעורר אף זיק חמלה בלבבות הרואים, אחרי כי משוגע “ Ibid., 148.

<sup>336</sup> כשרון עברי, למרות גאונותו, לא יצוד את לבות ההמון. הוא יעוררם, ירגיז עליהם את דמם “ Ibid., 145.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 151

content. “Yes, not abstract beauty, but the idea and internal spirit must be primary. And as much as we subjugate beauty and external splendor to the idea, beauty benefits as well.”<sup>338</sup> The proper role of art throughout the ages has been to “proclaim the spirit of the age” (“מבשרת רוח הזמן”).<sup>339</sup>

Here the aesthetic theory of “Ta’anit ḥalom” coincides with the philosophy of Ahad Ha’am, who in “Te’udat *Ha-Shiloah*” values the content of art over aesthetic beauty for its own sake. Ahad Ha’am could be similarly dismissive of popular tastes and art with mass appeal. And the idea of a “talent” or artistic style that is inherently Jewish fits with Ahad Ha’am’s conception of the “spirit” of the Jewish people. One point of disagreement is Lubetzky’s critique of realism. Ahad Ha’am elevated realist art as providing insight into the actual conditions of the Jewish people, while Berdichevsky argued that realism stifled the creativity and emotion of Romanticism.<sup>340</sup>

Ahad Ha’am made a point to include views in *Ha-Shiloah* that contradicted his own. But apart from its explicit theorizing, the style of “Ta’anit ḥalom” pushes against Ahad Ha’am’s stated boundaries. The narrative is non-linear and disorienting. The “present” of the story takes place in the artist’s squalid apartment, and the opening line reports that he has not eaten in two days. The narrative goes back and forth between the present and flashbacks or hallucinations of David’s earlier life. These often have a dream-like quality: sitting before a page of Talmud, the letters

---

<sup>338</sup> כן, לא את היופי המפשט, כי אם את הרעיון והרוח הפנימי נחוץ לעשות לעיקר. וכל מה שנכניע את “ Ibid., 152.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> “Tzorekh ve-yekholet be-sifroteinu ha-yafah.” See above.

“dance” and rearrange themselves into elaborate pictures. A memory of his father beating him turns grotesque, “as if his long thin fingers jab beneath the skin and break the bones.”<sup>341</sup> As a young man, David describes his artistic awakening in romantic terms:

The pleasant solitude that reigned in that square, the glory of nature and the ruins of the fortress, these all captured his heart, they made him forget his current state and carried him to another world, a world that was all poetry, a world that he himself did not know or understand its value then, but as with a hidden power he felt, that his heart and soul belonged to that world.<sup>342</sup>

Musings on the beauty of nature and being carried off to “a world that is all poetry,” allegedly proscribed by Ahad Ha’am’s editorial policy, find a place here.

And once again, the primacy of reason is disrupted by the main character’s psychological deterioration. At the beginning of the story, David’s despair at his poverty and lack of artistic recognition is so great that he prepares to commit suicide; he is only stopped when he becomes fixated on a painting that sparks the visions of his youth. As he goes longer without food or sleep, his disorientation increases: “The noise in his mind deafens him, his racing pulse intensifies, and with it the tumult in his head. There is no order to his thoughts or account for his emotions, the past and future blend together with strange delusions.”<sup>343</sup> At the conclusion of the story, following the rejection of his final painting, David experiences a dramatic emotional

---

<sup>341</sup> “אצבעותיו הארוכות והרזות כמו יחדרו אל תחת העור וישברו את העצמות” *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 4, 51.

<sup>342</sup> “הבדידות הנעימה אשר שררה בכל הככר הזה, הדר הטבע וחרבות המבצר, כל אלו צדו את לבו, “ *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>343</sup> “אז את ערכו, אבל כמו בכח נסתר הרגיש, כי לבו ונפשו מסורים אל העולם הזה. השאון אשר במחזו יחריש את אזניו, מרוצת הדם התגברה, ועמה גם הערבוב בראשו. אין כל סדר” *Ibid.*, 146.

crisis and once again attempts suicide. He is only stopped by the sudden arrival of his landlady, and David is imprisoned as the “crazy” artist who disturbs the peace during the night.<sup>344</sup> As the narrator becomes increasingly erratic and fixated, the descent into madness complicates and undermines the theoretical content of the story. One would expect that the editor nicknamed “The Supremacy of Reason” would be opposed to this plot and the suggestion that such “wildness” is somehow inherent in the Jewish people. But Ahad Ha’am gave it a place in the pages of *Ha-Shiloah*.

Lubetzky’s “Ta’anit ḥalom” dramatizes madness undermining elite Jewish culture, an artist deeply engaged with aesthetic theory. By contrast, Eliyahu Meidanik’s “Ha-kabtzan ha-iveir” (“The Blind Beggar”), published in two parts in the summer of 1901, is a story of madness taking hold of a figure from a traditional Jewish village.<sup>345</sup> When Avraham’s home and small store burn down, he travels to the city to ask a wealthy relative for aid. The relative offers less than he needs, so he reluctantly seeks charity from the Jews of the city. When he returns home, his wife is horrified to learn what he has done, but with the large amount of money he has collected, they are able to set up an apartment and a small store. When it comes time for Avraham to resume his work as a *melamed*, he refuses to take on students. He disappears from his village and returns to seeking alms, traveling from city to city. When he returns home again, he is wearing rags, news of his behavior has spread, and his family is ashamed. He cannot adjust to family life, refusing to part with the large sum of money he has collected, until his wife demands it as a dowry for their

---

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>345</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 8 (1901): 41-48, 155-165.

daughter. Avraham returns to the life of a beggar, and his material situation deteriorates. He becomes blind, and even as he amasses a large fortune, he is obsessed with protecting his money and gathering more. As an old man, even the amount of his fortune loses meaning, and his existence narrows to the begging itself.

The first part of this story is darkly humorous, as Avraham insists on distinguishing himself as a “nisraf,” a victim of a fire, rather than an “ordinary” beggar. But the psychological perspective of Avraham becomes increasingly disordered. After he returns home, he is oblivious to the distress that his obsession causes his wife and children. His resentment grows, until in an unprompted violent outburst, he curses his family and threatens to kill himself, brandishing a knife. After leaving his family for good and becoming blind, Avraham becomes increasingly paranoid. He believes the boy who guides him knows about his wealth and plots to murder him and steal it. In his dreams he sees endless streams of gold coins. In a group with other beggars, he will not sleep for fear of being robbed. He becomes fixated on the idea that his gold Imperials have been replaced by less valuable half-rubles, since he can’t distinguish the coins by touch. “His mind withered from doubt and despair.”<sup>346</sup> When a boy taunts him, Avraham becomes enraged and tries to attack him. Avraham falls and is left on the ground, bruised and bleeding. He is described as almost inhuman: “Slowly his moaning became a strange and terrible cry.”<sup>347</sup> After that his mind is completely broken. He merely “collects and collects,

---

<sup>346</sup> “מוחו התכווץ מספק ומיאוש.” Ibid., 164.

<sup>347</sup> “מעט מעט היתה נהימתו לבכי משונה ונורא.” Ibid., 165.

adds and adds” and “sometimes scattered thoughts about his money pass through his mind.”<sup>348</sup>

“Ha-kabtzan ha-iveir” has some elements of social satire, on the poverty of the Jews, family relations, and the special status of beggars in Jewish communities. But the central theme is Avraham’s psychological portrait, from sympathetic eccentricity to temptation and addiction and ultimately to obsession and madness. These themes are individual, not national, and they are not specifically Jewish. That madness appears as such a regular theme in *Ha-Shiloah* reveals something of the personal struggles faced by many modern Hebrew writers—both Lubetzky and Meidanik suffered from mental illness and died by suicide<sup>349</sup>—but also an openness on the part of Ahad Ha’am to works centering emotional and psychological themes.

### **Berdichevsky’s Contributions**

Berdichevsky’s own contributions to *Ha-Shiloah* undermine his claims that Ahad Ha’am excluded the perspective of the young writers, claims that were accepted as fact by later critics. In addition to the essays in the controversy with Ahad Ha’am, Berdichevsky published several pieces in the early volumes of *Ha-Shiloah*, mostly brief critical notices on new Hebrew publications. He published two literary pieces: a set of three brief sketches published under the title “Shevarim” (“Shards”) in volume 3 (1898) and a longer story, “Mi-derekh el derekh” (“From Path to Path”) in volume 7

---

<sup>348</sup> “פעמים תועות במוחו איזה מחשבות מקוטעות על דבר כספו” and “קובץ וקובץ, מצרף ומצרף.”  
Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> On Meidanik, see Zalman Schneur, *H.N. Bialik u-vene'i doro* [*H.N. Bialik and His Generation*] (Devir 1958), 275-290. On Lubetzky, see Getzel Kressel, *Leksikon ha-sifrut ha-Ivrit be-dorot ha-ahronim* [*Lexicon of the Hebrew Literature in Recent Generations*] (Sifriyat Po'alim, 1967), 176-177.

(1901). Each of these has significant engagement with Jewish and nationalist themes, but they also develop Berdichevsky's individualistic literary subject.

“Shevarim” consists of three sketches, one-to-two page stories, not related to each other.<sup>350</sup> The second and third pieces are conventional in subject and style. In the second piece, “Be-Derekh reḥokah” (“On a Long Road”), a boy happens to buy a copy of the *Josippon*, a medieval work of Jewish history from Creation through the fall of Masada in the Judean war against Rome around 73 C.E., and he is absorbed by the stories of Jewish militarism and heroism. He is disturbed by a feeling of disconnection between this dramatic Jewish history and his own tradition and surroundings. The message is in keeping with Berdichevsky's desire to ground Jewish nationalism in eclectic sources and Jewish historical precedents outside the normative tradition. Even with this clear didactic purpose, Berdichevsky foregrounds the boy's subjectivity, describing his experience in emotional and spiritual terms: “my heart overflows its banks,” “I weep bitterly,” “it all passes before me, as in a vision.”<sup>351</sup>

The third sketch, “Be-Yom din” (“On Judgment Day”) Berdichevsky calls “a legend known to ‘Hasidim’” (“אגדה ידועה ל'חסידים”). Placing “Hasidim” in quotation marks indicates that this is not an authentic Hasidic folktale, but an original story told in that style.<sup>352</sup> The scene takes place before God's heavenly throne on Rosh Hashanah, the “Day of Judgment.” The old man being judged, Eliyahu, is a “completely righteous” man (“צדיק גמור”) who has devoted his whole life to Jewish

---

<sup>350</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 3 (1898): 155-159.

<sup>351</sup> “לבי מלא על כל גדותיו”, “הנני בוכה במר נפש”, “הכל עובר כמו בחזון לפני” Ibid., 157-158.

<sup>352</sup> Berdichevsky was engaged in a project collecting Jewish and especially Hasidic folklore; he published a collection of these tales, *Sefer Hasidim*, in 1900.

text study. The only accusation that the prosecuting angels can bring against him is his opposition to Hasidism. Berdichevsky uses the scene to praise Hasidism, “It came to open the hearts of the Children of Israel and draw them near to their Father in heaven,”<sup>353</sup> and to satirize Eliyahu, who continues to mumble Mishnah while standing before the Divine Presence and is completely blind to the wonders of the Garden of Eden and the Baal Shem Tov, whose teaching he is sentenced to attend each Shabbat. Berdichevsky’s embrace of Hasidism came in part from family connections: his father served as the town rabbi of Medzhybizh in Ukraine, where the Baal Shem Tov spent his last years. But he also believed that Hasidism represented a vital force in Judaism, a rejection of legalism and an embrace of emotion and nature. A recent study calls Berdichevsky’s Hasidism “a neo-romantic construct, a projection onto Hasidism of everything he wished to see in it.” Berdichevsky calls Hasidism a “revival” (“תחייה”) and casts the Baal Shem Tov as a Nietzschean *Übermensch*, forging his own philosophy.<sup>354</sup> This light polemical fable on intra-Jewish religious politics is thus also an assertion of Berdichevsky’s romantic, antinomian Jewish subjectivity.

The first sketch of “Shevarim,” called “Goyim ve-elohav” (“The Nations and Their Gods”)<sup>355</sup> follows the most familiar plot: a young man in the *beit midrash* begins to read *haskalah* literature and is drawn to modern ideas, creating an internal conflict. In Berdichevsky’s romantic telling, it is not merely the “outside books” (“ספרים חצונים”) that lead the narrator away from the strictures of tradition, but a

---

<sup>353</sup> “באה לפתוח לבם של בני ישראל ולקרבם לאביהם שבשמים,” *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>354</sup> David Biale, et. al, *Hasidism: A New History* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 560-561.

<sup>355</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 3, 155-156. The title phrase is quoted from II Samuel 7:23.

revelatory encounter with nature. Walking home from the study house under a clear night sky, “the spirit comes upon me, and I feel the whole world beyond the narrow ‘four *amot*,’ and the world is larger and higher and wider than ‘as it is written.’”<sup>356</sup> The narrator learns of a book that is said to be able to reconcile traditional Jewish teaching with his new learning. Acquiring this secret and dangerous knowledge is a transformative experience: “I am like a man awakened from sleep, brought back to life.”<sup>357</sup> The actual synthesis the book provides is to equate the “gods” (“אלהים”) of various nations referenced in the Bible and the “protecting angels” (“שרים”) ascribed to each nation in Rabbinic literature with the modern concept of each nation’s particular “spirit” (“רוח”). This divinity or spirit “unites and binds [the nation] internally in place and time from generation to generation.”<sup>358</sup> This could be a concise description of *Ahad Ha’am*’s cultural nationalism, which also relies on the concept of a particularistic unifying spirit. But for Berdichevsky’s narrator, this is not an intellectual discovery, but a mystical experience. He is overwhelmed by emotion: “My heart rages, darkening and brightening and it’s as if my soul melts.”<sup>359</sup> He is transformed, “Now I feel, that much has changed in me in that moment,” and literally escapes to embrace nature—“My spirit carries me farther and farther, and I hurry to

---

<sup>356</sup> אז יתעורר בי הרוח, ואני מרגיש מלוא העולם אשר מעבר ל’ארבע אמות’ הצרות, והעולם הוא “גדול ורחב מ’ כמו שכתוב *amot*” Ibid., 155. “Four *amot*” is a measure of personal space in Jewish law, representing here the boundaries of traditional Jewish life. “As it is written” is a common phrase in Jewish legal texts to derive authority from the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>357</sup> “הנני כאיש נעור משנתו, כמקיץ לתחיה.” Ibid., 156.

<sup>358</sup> “מיהד ומקשר אותה בפנימותה גם במקום גם בזמן מדור לדור.” Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> “לבי סוער, מחשיך ומאיר ונפשי כמתמוגגת.” Ibid.

go.”<sup>360</sup> The transformation is ecstatic and spiritual, not intellectual. It is not Ahad Ha’am’s mode of engagement, but rather the one associated with the young writers.

The longest Berdichevsky story that Ahad Ha’am published in *Ha-Shiloah*, “Mi-derekh el derekh”<sup>361</sup> is similar to Meidanik’s “Ha-kabtzan ha-iveir,” a story of irrationality and madness. It takes place against the background of Jewish society, but the main subject is the psychological deterioration of the main subject. Shlomo Natan Zarḥi is the third son of a wealthy family. While the family has departed from piety to immerse itself in business, Shlomo Natan takes piety to extremes. He mortifies his body, fasting and immersing in a cold mikvah. He becomes obsessed with the idea of fulfilling the commandment of tzedakah, giving charity to the poor. He collects tzedakah from everyone he meets; he gives away whatever wealth he has at hand. He steals from his own home and others to give to the poor. His self-abnegation becomes more and more extreme. He elevates the poor above all things and aspires to make himself and his children poor as well. He rejects any pleasure, desire, or personal will. He becomes a vagabond, alienated from all human connection. He goes blind and dies in a foreign city.

At first, Shlomo Natan’s attempts to fulfill the mitzvah of tzedakah appear to follow rationally from the premise of the ultimate significance of a single mitzvah. But his actions perform a *reductio ad absurdum* argument, and rather than disproving the premise, they show Shlomo Natan’s reason to be defective. His convictions begin plausibly—“The rich were only created for the sake of the poor”<sup>362</sup>—and become

---

<sup>360</sup> “הלאה הלאה רוחי ישאני, ואני ממהר לצאת” / “הנני מרגיש, שהרבה נשתנה בי ברגע הזה” Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 7 (1901): 517-521.

<sup>362</sup> “העשירים לא נבראו אלא בשביל העניים” Ibid., 519.

increasingly extreme and destructive—“The poor man comes before everything. He comes before you, your wife, your children, and everything that is yours.”<sup>363</sup> He embraces total discontinuity with the present order: “Everything that is furthest from you must be closest to you,”<sup>364</sup> or “Rejoicing in life is the curse of life.”<sup>365</sup> These lead to the ultimate rejection of self: “Break yourself for the sake of others.”<sup>366</sup> In the final section of the story, Shlomo Natan is indeed broken. He has forgotten all of his Jewish learning, and sometimes he forgets everything and sits exposed to the elements. Here Shlomo Natan appears to be on the path to madness and death, but Berdichevsky has something else in mind. “His heart had already begun to be destroyed,”<sup>367</sup> which Shlomo Natan takes as a positive step towards humbling himself in God’s service. He has a dream vision in which he sees not only his beloved hungry people, but also God’s throne and the Divine realm. When he becomes blind at the end of the story, it is not a sign of degradation, but the achievement of the status he had strived for: the broken poor who are most beloved by God. Having achieved this purification, “There everything may begin anew.”<sup>368</sup> When Shlomo Natan dies anonymously at the end of the story, it is not a breakdown, but an apotheosis. The narrator says of his death, “no one knows where he is buried,” Shlomo Natan has become like Moses, the greatest of prophets who saw God face to face.<sup>369</sup>

---

<sup>363</sup> “העני קודם לכל דבר. הוא קודם לך, לאשתך, לבניך, לכל אשר לך” Ibid., 520.

<sup>364</sup> “כל הרחוק ממך ביותר צריך להיות קרוב לך ביותר” Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> “שמחת החיים היא קללת החיים” Ibid., 521.

<sup>366</sup> “שבר את עצמך בשביל אחרים” Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> “לבבו כבר החל להחרב” Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> “שם יתחיל הכל מחדש” Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> “ואיש לא ידע את קבורתו” Ibid. Compare Deuteronomy 34:6.

The end of the story raises the question: was Shlomo Natan acting reasonably all along? He was not; instead, Berdichevsky romanticizes irrationality, suffering, and madness. Through this intensely subjective, disturbed psychological portrait, Berdichevsky rejects rationalism and promotes fanaticism and mysticism. This is far from Ahad Ha'am's conception of literature as a source for understanding the real conditions of the Jewish nation. But as Ahad Ha'am himself wrote to Berdichevsky, publication in *Ha-Shiloah* is a sure indication not only of Ahad Ha'am's acceptance, but of his positive regard for a work of literature. While Berdichevsky and his circle accused Ahad Ha'am of closing the doors of Hebrew literature to them and their concerns, the publication of Berdichevsky in *Ha-Shiloah*, in Ahad Ha'am's own prestigious platform, tells a different story about Ahad Ha'am's relationship to European style, universalism, and emerging modernist trends in Hebrew literature.

### **Conclusion**

In the first volume of *Ha-Shiloah* that he did not edit, Ahad Ha'am writes his own "Letter to the Editor," responding to a prospectus circulated by his successor, Yosef Klausner.<sup>370</sup> As he reflects on the founding of the journal and his tenure as editor, the controversy with Berdichevsky and the "young writers" stands out as a major event. Ahad Ha'am recalls how "the wrath of the 'youth' pounced on me, since they could not stand... 'the waters that go slowly' and raised a great outcry around me."<sup>371</sup> Ahad Ha'am claims that he was open to the young writers: "I listened — and

---

<sup>370</sup> "Michtav el HaOreich," *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 11 (1903): 11-15.

<sup>371</sup> "קפץ עלי רוגזם של 'הצעירים', שלא יכלו לסבול... את 'המים ההולכים לאט', והרימו קול שאון" "מסביב לי Ibid., 11.

I did not understand. But I did not raise myself up to rebuke the outcry and I did not ‘dismiss’ them pridefully from my ‘high throne.’”<sup>372</sup> He claims to have published every contemporary Hebrew writer of talent in *Ha-Shiloah*, with very few exceptions, specifically including those who criticized his editorial approach. He frames the literary development of *Ha-Shiloah* not as a pitched battle, but as a collaborative effort.

In his prospectus, the major changes Klausner announces are that he will remove the restriction on articles that are not of particular Jewish concern, and he will devote more space to literature.<sup>373</sup> In response to the first, Ahad Ha’am writes: “You ‘will not distinguish subjects related to Judaism alone and general human subjects’—whereas I distinguished. Certainly, I did not distinguish as much as you make it seem, but rather—between subjects relating to Judaism also and subjects that are solely general.”<sup>374</sup> Ahad Ha’am was correct in saying that he did not enforce as sharp a divide between Jewish and general literature as Klausner implies, and as the critics of Ahad Ha’am suggest up to the present. On belles lettres he addresses Klausner, “you ‘will pay more attention to the area of fine literature’—whereas I did not pay attention. Actually, I certainly did pay attention to this area, but my attention was directed to the quality and not to the quantity.”<sup>375</sup> Ahad Ha’am refutes the accusation

---

<sup>372</sup> ואני שמעתי — ולא הבינותי. אבל לא נערתני בנזיפה בבעלי השאון וגם לא ‘בטלתי’ אותם בגאווה “ Ibid., 11.

<sup>373</sup> “Megamateinu” (“Our Direction”), *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 11 (1903): 1-10.

<sup>374</sup> אתה ‘לא תבדיל בין ענינים נוגעים ביהדות בלבד ובין ענינים אנושיים כלליים’--ואני הבדלתי. “ אמנם, לא כך הבדלתי כמו שיוצא מתוך דבריך, כי אם — בין ענינים נוגעים גם ביהדות ובין ענינים כלליים בלבד. “Michtav,” 12.

<sup>375</sup> אתה ‘תשים לב יותר אל חלק הספרות היפה...’ — ואני לא שמתי לב. כלומר, גם אני אמנם שמתתי “ Ibid. לב אל החלק הזה, אבל שימת-לבי היתה מכוונת אך אל האיכות ולא אל הכמות

that he takes no interest in literature. While these responses are beautifully and clearly phrased, they are defensive; Ahad Ha'am is aware that a critical narrative has begun to solidify around his literary taste and activity as an editor. Ultimately, his attempts to combat that narrative were not successful. But considering the full text of Ahad Ha'am's volumes of *Ha-Shiloah* gives a clearer picture of his great and complex contribution to the development of modern Hebrew literature.

## Conclusion

In December 1902, in one of the final issues of *Ha-Shiloah* he edited, Ahad Ha'am published a sharply critical review of Theodor Herzl's utopian novel *Altneuland*. The review rails against what Ahad Ha'am perceived as Herzl's lack of attention to Hebrew language and Jewish character generally in his imagined Jewish state. He accuses Herzl of merely wishing to imitate a European society in the Middle East.<sup>376</sup> The review was also published in Russian and in the German-Jewish monthly *Ost und West*, which provided an advance copy to Herzl for a response. Herzl gave the task to Max Nordau, the respected co-founder of the World Zionist Congress, and arranged for Nordau's rebuttal to appear in Zionist publications in Russia, as well as Western Europe.<sup>377</sup>

Nordau's response to Ahad Ha'am was vicious and personal. He called Ahad Ha'am a "driveling fool," who had "led a neglected existence amidst the slums of obscure letters."<sup>378</sup> Ahad Ha'am's parochialism was disgustingly intolerant, Nordau said, due to the writer himself being "a crippled, hunchbacked victim of intolerance."<sup>379</sup> Ahad Ha'am's supporters responded with vehemence; Mordecai Ehrenpreis, Ahad Ha'am's opponent in the Berdichevsky controversy, wrote in *Ha-Shiloah* that Nordau's insults and provocations assumed "a kind of Zionist

---

<sup>376</sup> "Yalkut katan 42," *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 10 (1902): 566-578.

<sup>377</sup> On the Ahad Ha'am-Nordau affair, see Jacques Kornberg, "Ahad Ha'am and Herzl," in *At the Crossroads*; Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet*, 194-199; and especially Shulamit Laskov, "Ha-Riv al odot *Altneuland*" ["The Controversy over *Altneuland*"], *HaTziyonut*, vol. 15 (1990): 35-53.

<sup>378</sup> Quoted in Kornberg, "Ahad Ha'am and Herzl," 12.

<sup>379</sup> Quoted in Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet*, 197.

papacy, whose qualities we are not permitted to question.”<sup>380</sup> Even for many Russian Zionists working within Herzl’s camp, Nordau’s attacks crossed a line. Chaim Weitzmann, Martin Buber, and other prominent cultural figures published a letter defending Ahad Ha’am, “this genuine and perfect Jew...against the defamations and degradations contained in Nordau’s article.”<sup>381</sup> The controversy raged in the Jewish periodicals of the East and West, occupied more with the vindication of Ahad Ha’am or Nordau than the substantive merit of *Altneuland*.

Ahad Ha’am’s own response to Nordau observes the policy he had maintained as editor of *Ha-Shiloah*. He refutes Nordau’s arguments, but he does not engage in personal attacks and even graciously suggests that Nordau’s wild accusations do not detract from his status as a great writer and interpreter.<sup>382</sup> Despite Ahad Ha’am’s measured response, this controversy differed dramatically in tone from his dispute with the “young writers” less than ten years earlier. That was “a colorful and responsible exchange,” in which Berdichevsky and the others remained “respectful colleagues of Ahad Ha’am to the end.”<sup>383</sup> Here, Nordau denies that Ahad Ha’am is even a Zionist and attempts to eject him from the discourse entirely. This is a polemic without the stabilizing focus of Ahad Ha’am as editor. The wildness, ugliness, and ultimate destructiveness of the *Altneuland* affair highlights by contrast how Ahad

---

<sup>380</sup> “מין אפיפיוריות ציונית שאין אנו רשאים להרהר אחר מדותיה.” *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 11, 295-297.

<sup>381</sup> Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet*, 198.

<sup>382</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 11, 393-402.

<sup>383</sup> Stanley Nash, “Ahad Ha-Am and ‘Ahad Ha-Amism’: The Onset of Crisis,” *At the Crossroads*, 73-82.

Ha'am's editorial control allowed opposing voices to be heard in a constructive dialogue.

The attacks on Ahad Ha'am by Herzl and Nordau's defenders helped to cement the stereotype of Ahad Ha'am as hidebound, arrogant, and ineffectual. They combined with a number of factors that reduced the influence of Ahad Ha'am and Hebrew cultural nationalism in the first decade of the twentieth century. The socialist Bund party and Simon Dubnow's non-Zionist theory of Jewish autonomism, both of which emphasized Yiddish as the authentic language of Jewish culture, were increasingly popular. Orthodox Zionists continued to oppose the educational reform central to Ahad Ha'am's cultural platform. There was a generational decline in the number of Hebrew readers, with fewer young men coming to Hebrew culture through the familiar path of disaffection with a traditional text-based Jewish education. Hebrew revival was overshadowed by world events, especially the Kishinev pogroms beginning in 1903 and the Russian Revolution of 1905.<sup>384</sup>

Ahad Ha'am's decline in influence also stemmed from factors in his personal life. Beginning in 1899, he suffered from a nervous disorder which drastically limited his ability to work. This diagnosis came only a month after the death of his father and a few years after his once-wealthy family's financial collapse. Due to his dire financial situation, after leaving *Ha-Shiloah*, Ahad Ha'am took a position as an agent for the Wissotzky tea company, work that left him little time to engage in cultural

---

<sup>384</sup> These factors are described in Nash, "Ahad Ha-Am and 'Ahad Ha-Amism'," 74-75. For the generational decline in Hebrew readers, see Dan Miron, "Ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit be-reishit ha-me'ah ha-esrim" ["Hebrew Literature at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century"], in *Sefer ha-yovel le-Shimon Halkin [Jubilee Volume for Simon Halkin]*, eds. Boaz Shachevitz and Menachem Peri, eds. (R. Mas, 1975): 419-487.

affairs.<sup>385</sup> In 1908, he moved to London, where he was isolated from his circle of friends and supporters and unable to find a place among the British Jews, “with whom he had no serious interest in common.”<sup>386</sup>

At the end of the decade, a new controversy cast Ahad Ha’am once again as the avatar of stifling Jewish insularity. This time the opponent was Yosef Brenner, a young leader of the Hebrew writers and labor movement in Palestine. In 1910, Ahad Ha’am’s essay “Al Shte HaSe-ipim” (published in English as “Judaism and the Gospels”) sought to establish a firm distinction between the spirit of Judaism and Christianity.<sup>387</sup> It was a response to Claude G. Montefiore, the respected figurehead of Liberal Judaism in England, whose recent commentary on the Synoptic Gospels argued for a Jewish appreciation of the teachings of Jesus. Criticizing “Judaism and the Gospels,” Shai Ish Hurwitz, a Hebrew publicist and critic working closely with Berdichevsky in Berlin, revived attacks from the early days of *Ha-Shiloah*, portraying Ahad Ha’am, in Stanley Nash’s phrase, as “the arch stifler of Jewish literary aesthetic growth.”<sup>388</sup> But in *Ha-Po’el ha-Tza’ir* (*The Young Worker*), a labor party journal in Palestine, Brenner opens a new line of attack on Ahad Ha’am, mocking his preoccupation with the “threat” of assimilation. The relative merits of different faiths are irrelevant, he claims, since the Jewish youth have despaired of religion entirely. In the most direct threat to Ahad Ha’am’s vision of Jewish culture, Brenner writes:

---

<sup>385</sup> *Elusive Prophet*, 162-169. Goldstein, *Ahad Ha’am: biografyah*, 260-281. Leon Simon, *Ahad Ha’am, Asher Ginzburg: A Biography* (Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960), 195-198, 208-209.

<sup>386</sup> Simon, *Ahad Ha’am*, 217.

<sup>387</sup> *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 23 (1910), 97-111.

<sup>388</sup> “Ahad Ha-Am and ‘Ahad Ha-Amism,’” 77.

They ask me: but the Christian legend of the Son of God, who was sent to humanity and atoned for its eternal sins with his blood—the legend that pervades all the culture and literature of Christian Europe—how do you relate to it? And to that I respond: However I like... According to my mood... A man in Israel can be a good Jew, committed to his nation heart and soul, without fearing this legend like some kind of *treifah* (forbidden food).<sup>389</sup>

Ahad Ha'am denounced Brenner for apostasy and for insulting the sanctity of the Jewish religion. But his response was not just literary; he also pressured the leadership of Hovevei Zion into revoking its funding of the journal, *Ha-Po'el ha-Tza'ir*. This censorship sparked another round of polemics, in which Ahad Ha'am was justifiably portrayed as an enemy of free speech.<sup>390</sup>

I note the tumultuous events of the first decade of the twentieth century because *these* cemented the now-familiar caricature of Ahad Ha'am: arrogant, antiquated, closed-minded. But in the controversies with Nordau and Brenner, Ahad Ha'am does not function as he did in his “golden age” of periodical editorship in the 1890s. The politics of the Zionist Movement, the material conditions of the Jews in Europe and Palestine, and Ahad Ha'am's own circumstances had changed dramatically. And while his writing in this period was forceful, it was tinged with bitterness and futility. His ideological opponents were not his collaborators in forging a larger Hebrew discourse. He was no longer an editor.

---

<sup>389</sup> ובאים ואומרים לי: אבל הלגנדה הנוצרית על בן-האלוהים, שנשלח לבני האדם ובדמו כיפר את עוון... “הדורות – ללגנדה זו המחלחלת בכל הקולטורה והספרויות האירופיות הנוצריות – היאך אתה מתייחס?” “הדורות – ללגנדה אף על זה אענה ואומר: כחפצי... לפי מצב-רוחי... ובכל אופן, אין שום סכנה לאומית, איך שיתייחסו לזה... יכול אדם מישראל להיות יהודי טוב, מסור ללאומו בכל לבבו ונפשו, ולבלי לפחד מפני הלגנדה.” “הזאת כמו מפני איזו 'טריפה'.” “Ba-Itonut u-va-sifrut” [“In Journalism and Literature”], *Ha-Po'el ha-Tza'ir*, 24 Nov. 1910, 6-8.

<sup>390</sup> The most complete account of the Brenner Affair is found in Nurit Govrin, *Me'ora Brenner: ha-ma'avak al hofesh ha-bitu'i (5671-5673)* [*The Brenner Affair: The Fight for Free Speech (1910-1913)*] (Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi, 1985).

This dissertation shows that in the period of his greatest influence, Ahad Ha'am's importance as a periodical editor went beyond imposing norms of style and content on a generation of Hebrew writers. From the beginning as the editor of the single-volume *Kaveret*, Ahad Ha'am brought together writers of divergent and even opposing views in the discourse of cultural nationalism. In a time of profound change, he placed the laments of Orthodox traditionalists side by side with calls to action of secularists and reformers. Ahad Ha'am did not define the "ruah," the essential spirit of the Jewish people; he used his power as an editor to create an impression of it through the dialogue of overlapping voices.

As an editor, Ahad Ha'am crafted the Odessa nusach—not just a distinctive Hebrew style and syntax, but a literary Jewish world. Ahad Ha'am's nusach was not limited to a particular subject position in that world. Hasidic "rebbe" and university professors, yeshivah students and anarchist revolutionaries—the whole social scene of the European Jewish world facing the crisis of modernity is the substance of the nusach. Ahad Ha'am's nusach had limitations: it barely touched on the perspective of women, for one.<sup>391</sup> But Ahad Ha'am's editing powerfully evoked the turmoil and aspirations of the age.

Not all Hebrew periodical editors were able to achieve this balance. In *Pardes* Yehoshua Hana Ravnitsky allows a much narrower range of views. Extreme positions go unbalanced. Writing in *Pardes*, Ahad Ha'am brings a characteristic measure of moderation. But it is not only that he takes less extreme positions on the questions of

---

<sup>391</sup> See Sheila Jelen, *Intimations of Difference: Dvora Baron in the Modern Hebrew Renaissance* (Syracuse University Press, 2007), xxvii-xxxii.

haskalah and religious reform. He offers respect and legitimacy to the advocates of those movements, rhetorically including them in the discourse of Hebrew letters, even when he is not in the position to include them as editor.

With *Ha-Shiloah*, Ahad Ha'am wields that power and makes his definitive statement as a periodical editor. From the very beginning of his tenure and "Te'udat *Ha-Shiloah*," he is remembered as placing aesthetic literature and European humanism outside the proper bounds of Hebrew literature. But the analysis here has shown that this is far from the case. Ahad Ha'am also felt the "tear in the heart," the tension between Jewish identity and universal values. He did value fiction and poetry, and he always saw a place for them in Hebrew culture. His hesitations around belles lettres were more practical than ideological, and he was a gradualist, preferring to let the culture develop slowly than address itself to all potential avenues immediately.

The dispute with Berdichevsky and the young writers was itself a literary creation. Ahad Ha'am invited the controversy and shaped it through editing and communications "behind the scenes." It was a tour de force demonstration of intense engagement with the course of Hebrew culture. Ahad Ha'am ensured that it was a "proper" debate, in which ideological positions and turns of phrase were subject to minute scrutiny, but the integrity of the participants was not questioned. While Ahad Ha'am's editorial method has been described as dictatorial, his editorial power was actually collaborative. It was Ahad Ha'am's editing more than his writing that made the controversy with Berdichevsky a touchstone in Hebrew literary history.

Finally, Ahad Ha'am's editing of *Ha-Shiloah* offers a corrective to the view that he valued only didactic literature. The literary selections in *Ha-Shiloah* range

across subjects and styles. There are Romantic revelations of nature and flights of emotion. Fragmentation of Hebrew style and the breakdown of the individual subject, in dreams or madness, show the seeds of modernism. Some of these stories and poems include nationalist themes as well, but these do not negate the other literary and human concerns on display. Ahad Ha'am chose to include all of these elements in *Ha-Shiloah*, lending them exposure, prestige, and the imprimatur of his approval. These editorial choices must be included in evaluating Ahad Ha'am's role in the development of Hebrew literature.

In future studies, a focus on Ahad Ha'am's relationships with individual authors and the technical specifics of his language editing can extend and deepen the understanding of his literary influence. Such studies will address the large body of extant documentary material—correspondence, drafts, and ephemera—to give a comprehensive account of Ahad Ha'am's literary activity. Ahad Ha'am's political activity has received this treatment in the biographies of Zipperstein and Goldstein, but a definitive literary analysis, uncolored by the biases of Zionist history, has not yet appeared. The periodicals discussed here will be a crucial part of such an analysis.

The potential avenues for future periodical studies in Hebrew literature are numerous. *Ha-Dor (The Generation)*, a weekly magazine edited by David Frishman, was published by Ahiasaf as an alternative to *Ha-Shiloah* in 1901. *Ha-Dor*'s focus was explicitly more aesthetic and European, though Frishman drew on many of the same writers as *Ha-Shiloah*.<sup>392</sup> An analysis of *Ha-Dor* would illuminate what Ahad

---

<sup>392</sup> Menucha Gilboa, *Bein re'alism le-romantika: al darko shel David Frishman ba-vikoret [Between Realism and Romanticism: On David Frishman's Critical Method]* (Tel Aviv University, 1975).

Ha'am refused to publish and the true "ability" of Hebrew literature in the 1890s. Beyond Ahad Ha'am, a clear subject for periodical study is Yosef Brenner, who edited several significant journals and newspapers. Brenner founded *Ha-Me'orer* (*The Awakener*) in London in 1906-1907, an outlet for his own original criticism, essays and literature by young writers, and translations of European literature into Hebrew. He edited *Revivim* (*Rain Showers*) anthologies of new Hebrew literature in L'viv (1908) and after settling in Palestine. In Palestine he was involved in editing labor party publications *Ha-Po'el ha-Tza'ir* and *Ha-Ah'dut* (*Unity*), and after World War I, he founded *Ha-Adamah* (*The Land*), the leading Hebrew literary outlet of its day.<sup>393</sup> Further studies of these periodicals in their full context would be valuable to the understanding of Brenner's own development and how his work as an editor shaped the landscape of Hebrew literature for a generation.

Concluding "Te'udat *Ha-Shiloah*," Ahad Ha'am turns to the role of the editor, who must "bestow upon the organ he edits one general spirit, with regard to its form and content, so that it becomes truly a kind of 'organic' creation."<sup>394</sup> This holistic view, so central to Ahad Ha'am's concern, is lost when a periodical is reduced to excerpts and quotations and can be recovered when the periodical as a whole is taken as the object of study. Penetrating the biases of Ahad Ha'am's ideological opponents, which have colored generations of criticism on his literary role, we find that Ahad

---

<sup>393</sup> For the evolution of Brenner's editorial and philosophical stance from the metaphysical nationalism of *Ha-Me'orer* to the land-based constructivism of *Ha-Adamah*, see Eric Zakim, *To Build and Be Built: Landscape, Literature, and the Construction of Zionist Identity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 78-79.

<sup>394</sup> "לשפוך על האורגן הנערך על ידו רוח כללית אחת, בנוגע לצורתו ותכונת עניונו, באופן שיהיה "באמת מעין בריה 'אורגנית' *Ha-Shiloah*, vol. 1, 6.

Ha'am's periodicals are not only elegant literary creations. They are mechanisms by which Ahad Ha'am advanced the development of Hebrew language and literature at the outset of modern Hebrew culture.

## Bibliography

### Periodicals

*Kaveret* [*Beehive*]. 1 vol. Odessa, 1890.

*Pardes* [*Orchard*]. Y.H. Ravnitsky, ed. 3 vols. Odessa, 1892-1896.

*Ha-Shiloah* [*The Shiloah*] Asher Ginsberg (Ahad Ha'am), ed. Vols. 1-10. Berlin, 1896-1903.

### Other Works Cited

Ahad Ha'am. *Iggerot Ahad Ha'am* [*Letters of Ahad Ha'am*]. Arie Simon, ed. 6 vols. Moriah, 1923-1925.

---. "Li-She'elat ha-lashon" ["On the Language Question"]. *Luah Aḥiasaf* (1894): 17-30.

---. "Pirkei zikhronot" ["Remembrances"]. In *Kol kitvei Ahad Ha'am* [*The Complete Works of Ahad Ha'am*]. Dvir, 1947.

Alter, Robert. "Inventing Hebrew Prose." In *Hebrew and Modernity*. 1-22. Indiana University Press, 1994.

---. *The Invention of Hebrew Prose: Modern Fiction and the Language of Realism*. University of Washington Press, 1988.

Attia, Ali Mohamed Abd El-Rahman. "Ahad Ha'am, Editor of Ha-Shilo'ah," In *At the Crossroads: Essays on Ahad Ha'am*. 28-35. State University of New York Press, 1983.

- . *The Hebrew Periodical Ha-Shiloah from 1896 to 1919 and Its Role in the Development of Modern Hebrew Literature*. PhD diss. University of London, 1979.
- Barzilai (Fulman), Yehoshu'a. *Ha-Shiloah, 1896–1927: Bibliografiyah [Ha-Shiloah, 1896-1927: Bibliography]*. Tel Aviv, 1964.
- Berdichevsky, Micha Yosef. "Mikhtevei Micha Yosef Berdichevsky me-1886 ad 1902" ["Letters of Micha Yosef Berdichevsky, 1886-1902"]. *Proyekt Ben Yehudah*, <https://benyehuda.org/read/18661>. Accessed 1 Dec. 2020.
- Bernfeld, Shimon. "Ha-Shiloah." *Ha-Tzefirah* 251, 27 Nov. 1896, 1223-1224.
- Biale, David et al. *Hasidism: A New History*. Princeton University Press, 2017.
- Bialik, Hayyim Nahman. "Ahad Ha'am." *Moznayim* no. 42 (31 Jan 1930): 1-2.
- . "Yotzer ha-nusah." *Proyekt Ben Yehudah*, <https://benyehuda.org/read/6964>. Accessed 1 Dec. 2020.
- "Books and Bookmen." *Jewish Chronicle* [London], 20 Nov. 1896, 17.
- Brenner, Yosef. "Ba-Itonut u-va-sifrut" ["In Journalism and Literature"]. *Ha-Po'el ha-Tza'ir*, 24 Nov. 1910, 6-8.
- Burnshaw, Stanley et al., eds. *The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself*. Wayne State University Press, 2003.
- Cohen, Israel. "Al kitvei eit ve-al ketav eit merkazi" ["On Periodicals and On a Central Periodical"]. *Aspaklariyot [Mirrors]*. Massada, 1968.
- Collier, Patrick. "What Is Modern Periodical Studies?" *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 6, no. 2 (2015): 92-111.

- Finkin, Jordan. *A Rhetorical Conversation: Jewish Discourse in Modern Yiddish Literature*. Penn State University Press, 2010.
- Gilboa, Menucha. *Bein re'alism le-romantika: al darko shel David Frishman ba-vikoret* [*Between Realism and Romanticism: On David Frishman's Critical Method*]. Tel Aviv University, 1975.
- Glickson, Moshe. *Ahad Ha'am: hayyav u-fo'olo* [*Ahad Ha'am: His Life and His Work*]. Haaretz, 1927.
- Gluzman, Michael. *The Politics of Canonicity: Lines of Resistance in Modernist Hebrew Poetry*. Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Goldstein, Yosef. *Ahad Ha'am: biografyah* [*Ahad Ha'am: A Biography*]. Keter, 1992.
- . "Ahad Ha'am – Lilienblum: pulmus ide'ologi o ma'avak ishi u-foliti?" ["Ahad Ha'am and Lilienblum: Ideological Conflict or Political and Personal Confrontation?"]. *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Div. B, vol. 1 (1989): 244-250.
- . "Benei Moshe: sippuro shel misdar hash'a'i" ["Benei Moshe: The Story of a Secret Society"]. *Tsiyon* 57 (1992): 175-206.
- . "The Ideological Test of Ahad Ha'am: The Struggle over the Character of *Bnei Moshe*." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 67, no. 2 (2016): 392-407.
- Govrin, Nurit. *Me'ora Brenner: ha-ma'avak al hofesh ha-bitu'i (5671-5673)* [*The Brenner Affair: The Fight for Free Speech (1910-1913)*]. Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi, 1985.

- Halkin, Simon. *Modern Hebrew Literature: Trends and Values*. Schocken Books, 1950.
- Henig, Roni. *Life of the Non-Living: Nationalization, Language and the Narrative of “Revival” in Modern Hebrew Literary Discourse*. PhD diss. Columbia University, 2018.
- Hever, Hannan. *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon: Nation Building and Minority Discourse*. New York University Press, 2002.
- Holtzmann, Avner. *Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik: ha-shirim [Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik: The Poems]*. Dvir, 2008.
- Jelen, Sheila. *Intimations of Difference: Dvora Baron in the Modern Hebrew Renaissance*. Syracuse University Press, 2007.
- Karo, Baruch. “Yovelo shel ‘Ha-Shiloah’” (“Jubilee of ‘Ha-Shiloah’”). *Maariv*, 14 Sep. 1966, 34.
- Karp, Abraham J. *Jewish Perceptions of America: From Melting Pot to Mosaic*. Syracuse University Press, 1976.
- Klausner, Yosef. *Ha-Zeramim ha-ḥadashim shel ha-sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-Tze’irah [The New Trends in the Young Hebrew Literature]*. Ivriyah, 1907.
- . *A History of Modern Hebrew Literature (1785-1930)*. Herbert Danby, trans. London: M. L. Cailingold, 1932.
- . *Ruḥot menashvot: bikoret meforetet al shenei sifrei ha-Pardes [Winds Blowing: A Detailed Critique of the Two Volumes of Pardes]*. Warsaw, 1896.
- Kornberg, Jacques. “Ahad Ha’am and Herzl.” In *At the Crossroads: Essays on Ahad Ha’am*. 106-129. State University of New York Press, 1983.

- Kressel, Getzel. *Leksikon ha-sifrut ha-Ivrit be-dorot ha-aḥronim* [*Lexicon of the Hebrew Literature in Recent Generations*]. Sifriyat Po'alim, 1967.
- Kronfeld, Chana. *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics*. University of California Press, 1996.
- Lachower, Fishel. *Ahad Ha'am*. Warsaw, 1910.
- . "Micha Yosef Berdichevsky." *Netivot: bimah ḥofshit le-inyanei ha-ḥayyim ve-ha-sifrut* [*Pathways: An Open Stage for Topics in Life and Literature*] vol. 1 (1913): 138.
- Laskov, Shulamit. *Ḥayyei Ahad Ha'am: pesifas mitokh ketavav u-khetavim aḥerim* [*The Life of Ahad Ha'am: A Mosaic from His Writings and Other Writings*]. University of Tel Aviv, 2006.
- . "Ha-Riv al odot *Altneuland*" ["The Controversy over *Altneuland*"]. *Ha-Tziyonut* [*Zionism*] 15 (1990): 35-53.
- Latham, Sean and Robert Scholes. "The Changing Profession: The Rise of Periodical Studies," *PMLA* 121, no. 2 (2006): 517-531.
- Levenson, Alan T. *The Making of the Modern Jewish Bible: How Scholars in Germany, Israel, and America Transformed an Ancient Text*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011.
- Lilienblum, Moshe Leib. *Ketavim otobiyografiyim* [*Autobiographical Writings*]. Mossad Bialik, 1970.
- Mintz, Alan. "The Many Rather Than the One: On the Critical Study of Jewish Periodicals." *Prooftexts* 15, no. 1 (1995): 1-4.

- Miron, Dan. "Al 'Hakhmei Odessa'" ["On the 'Sages of Odessa'"]. In *Zeman Yehudi hadash: tarbut Yehudit be-eidan hiloni* [*New Jewish Time: Jewish Culture in a Secular Age*]. Yirmiyahu Yovel, David Shacham, et. al., eds. Keter, 2007.
- . *Bodedim be-mo'adam: li-diyokanah shel ha-republikah ha-sifrutit ha-Ivrit bi-tehilat ha-me'ah ha-esrim* [*When Loners Come Together: A Portrait of Hebrew Literature at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*]. Am Oved, 1987.
- , ed. *Hayyim Nahman Bialik: Shirim* [*Hayyim Nahman Bialik: Poems*]. Tel Aviv University, 2003.
- . *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking*. Stanford University Press, 2010.
- . "Ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit be-reishit ha-me'ah ha-esrim" ["Hebrew Literature at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century"]. In *Sefer ha-yovel le-Shimon Halkin* [*Jubilee Volume for Simon Halkin*]. Boaz Shachevitz and Menachem Peri, eds. 419-487. R. Mas, 1975.
- Nash, Stanley. "Ahad Ha-Am and 'Ahad Ha-Amism': The Onset of Crisis." In *At the Crossroads: Essays on Ahad Ha'am*. 73-83. State University of New York Press, 1983.
- "Naturalism." *Encyclopedia of German Literature*. Matthias Konzett, ed. 749-750. Routledge, 2015.
- Parush, Iris. *Kanon sifrutit ve-idiyologiyah le-umit: bikoret ha-sifrut shel Frishman be-hashva'ah le-vikoret ha-sifrut shel Klausner u-Vrenner* [*Literary Canon and National Ideology: Frishman's Literary Criticism Compared to the Literary Criticism of Klausner and Brenner*]. Mossad Bialik, 1992.

- Pinsker, Shachar. "The Challenges of Writing a Literary History of Early Modernist Hebrew Fiction: Gershon Shaked and Beyond." *Hebrew Studies* 49 (2008), 291-298.
- . *Literary Passports: The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe*. Stanford University Press, 2011.
- Pooch, Melanie U. "Cultural Diversity in a Globalizing Age." In *DiverCity – Global Cities as a Literary Phenomenon: Toronto, New York, and Los Angeles in a Globalizing Age*. 37-56. Transcript, 2016.
- Sadan, Dov. *Avnei bedek: al sifroteinu, mosadah va-agafeha* [*Scrutiny Stones: On Our Literature, Its Founding and Its Branches*]. HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1962.
- Salmon, Joseph. "Ahad Ha'am and Benei Moshe: an 'Unsuccessful Experiment?'" In *At the Crossroads: Essays on Ahad Ha'am*. 98-105. State University of New York Press, 1983.
- Schachter, Allison. *Diasporic Modernisms: Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Schneur, Zalman. *H.N. Bialik u-vene'i doro* [*H.N. Bialik and His Generation*]. Dvir, 1958.
- Scholes, Robert and Clifford Wulfman. *Modernism in the Magazines: An Introduction*. Yale University Press, 2010.
- Shaked, Gershon. *Ha-Sipporet ha-Ivrit, 1880-1980* [*Hebrew Fiction, 1880-1980*], Vol. 1. HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1977.

- Simon, Leon. *Ahad Ha-Am, Asher Ginzberg: A Biography*. Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960.
- Spicehandler, Ezra. "Odessa as a Literary Center." In *The Great Transition: The Recovery of the Lost Centers of Modern Hebrew Literature*. Glenda Abramson and Tudor Parfitt, eds. Rowman and Allenhend, 1985.
- Spiegel, Shalom. *Hebrew Reborn*. Macmillan Company, 1930.
- Stein-Ashkenazi, Esther. "Agudat Benei Moshe: merkezhah be-Varsha ve-zikatah li-tenu'at Hibbat Tziyon" ["The Organization Benei Moshe: Its Center in Warsaw and Its Connection to the Hibbat Zion Movement"]. *Ha-Tziyonut* 11 (1986): 29-64
- Tchernowitz, Shmuel. *Benei Moshe u-tekufato* [Benei Moshe and Its Era]. Ha-Tzefirah, 1914.
- Zakim, Eric. *To Build and Be Built: Landscape, Literature, and the Construction of Zionist Identity*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.
- Zipperstein, Steven J. *Elusive Prophet: Ahad Ha'am and the Origins of Zionism*. University of California Press, 1993.
- . *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881*. Stanford University Press, 1985.