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**YOSEF HAYYIM BRENNER**  
**A Comparative Look at His Fiction and Non-Fiction Writing of the**  
**Second *Aliyah* Period**

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination.

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Referee, Professor Ezra Spicehandler

## DIGEST

Yosef Hayyim Brenner (1881-1921) was one of the early Hebrew writers who wrote both fiction and non-fiction in Palestine. Born in the Ukraine, he received a traditional education and upbringing. At an early age, Brenner began to rebel as he actively sought to broaden his secular education. He escaped from the Russian army in 1903, went to London where he lived until 1908 when he moved to Lvov. In 1909, he emigrated to Palestine. He remained there until his untimely death in 1921 when he was murdered by Arabs in the May Day disturbances.

Brenner's writings reflect his ongoing internal struggle with himself, the Jewish world at large and the hardships of living in the *yishuv*. His fiction is autobiographical by his own admission. He lived a tormented and painful existence. He believed in the Zionist cause and fought for it, although he was already disillusioned with it prior to his arrival in Palestine. Life in the *yishuv* only confirmed his apprehensions regarding the possibility of fulfilling the Zionist dream and the resolution of the "Jewish problem."

Brenner's non-fiction writing reveals a caustic, bitter though insightful critic. His articles can be better understood, knowing that within six months of his settling in Palestine, he was so unhappy that he wished to leave. Yet the very man who actively sought to leave, bitterly castigated diaspora Jewry for their lack of interest in settling in the land of Israel. His work is riddled with contradictions. He did not encourage his personal friends to come to Palestine because life was so difficult, yet this was not his public stance.

His fictional portrayal of the *yishuv* depicts its problems more accurately and in greater detail than his non-fiction writing. In his fiction, he was able to fully develop many issues and present different perspectives through his various characters. He offers no solutions to the problems, perhaps because he realized that he had none. His own ambivalence and struggle are expressed in the three novels examined in this thesis.

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my Grandmother, Goldie F. Saslaw  
(1907-1987) זכרונה לברכה who will always be a very special part of me.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
INTRODUCTION.....	iv
Chapter	
I. BRENNER'S LIFE.....	1
II. THE <i>YISHUV</i> DURING THE SECOND <i>ALIYAH</i> .....	35
III. BRENNER'S NON-FICTION WORKS.....	41
IV. A CLOSE LOOK AT TWO SHORT NOVELS.....	62
V. AN ANALYSIS OF <i>BREAKDOWN AND BEREAVEMENT</i> ....	85
VI. CONCLUSION.....	104
VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	108

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## INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I will examine the life of Yosef Hayyim Brenner and his fiction and non-fiction writings of the Second *Aliyah* period (1909-1914). The purpose of this work is to explore the relationship between the themes of the two genres of literature and see if any overlap exists.

The first chapter is a biography of his life. While most of the earlier material is taken from Yitzhak Bacon's work on Brenner, the latter part of the chapter is based on his correspondence during that period. No detailed biography of Brenner exists in English. His correspondence provides the reader with a detailed portrayal of his life and experiences in Palestine. It also reflects his personal neurosis and obsession with illness as well as an accurate account of his concerns. For these reasons, I have presented in detail the general contents of these letters. Though it may seem that the selection of topics is random and disjointed, I believe that they present us with a deeper understanding of Brenner, which is why they are included in this chapter.

In order to understand the background against which Brenner wrote, the second chapter contains a brief overview of the *yishuv* and its dominant social problems during the Second *Aliyah* period.

The third chapter contains a presentation of his non-fiction writings which appeared primarily in הפועל הצעיר. These articles were often commentary on events happening in the world which affected Jewish survival, life in the *yishuv*, dealt with the paucity of Hebrew literature, the plight of the worker and with the problems of both immigration and emigration. I did not discuss articles that solely had as their subject literary analysis.

Chapter four deals with his novels, *מכאן לכאן* and *בין מים למים*, neither of which have been translated into English. In Chapter five I discuss *שכול וכשלון*. In these two chapters my main purpose is to analyze those themes which are discussed in his non-fictional works. I found that given the range available for plot development, he was able in many cases to make more astute observations about society in a less caustic fashion through his various fictional characters. The venom and passion that was expressed in his criticism is toned down in his fiction.

All of the quotations appearing in chapters three and four and in his correspondence in chapter one are my own translations. I used Hillel Halkin's translation of *Breakdown and Bereavement* when discussing this novel. Halkin's translation for stylistic purposes often deviates from the text.

## CHAPTER 1- BRENNER'S LIFE

**For the fate of his people and the fate of all of humankind, he never had one day of rest; all of his life he lived for others and worked for others; he carried the troubles of millions of people in his heart; he always sought after the truth.**

**Hillel Zeitlin -Essay on Brenner published after Brenner's death.<sup>1</sup>**

Yoseph Hayyim Brenner was born in 1881 in Novi Mliny in the Ukraine. He received a traditional education and upbringing. Brenner left home for the first time when he was ten years old to study in a *yeshiva* in Homel where he stayed for a year and a half.<sup>2</sup> He wrote a *Purim Spiel* for the *yeshiva*, his first known literary attempt. When he left Homel, Brenner moved to Hlusk which made an important impact on his life. Here he was exposed to secular Hebrew literature. He read *ציון אהבת* by Avraham Mapu and *קבורת חמור* by Peretz Smolenskin. Already at this young age, Brenner began to question his traditional beliefs and became known as a rebel. His father, a religious man, took him out of this *yeshiva* and sent him to the Konof of *Yeshiva* to study with the Chasidim. Brenner's father did not want to lose his son through secular reading and therefore chose to put him in a stricter religious environment.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See Hillel Zeitlin, (ערכים וזכרונות), ת. ברנר, "התקופה" י. ת. ברנר, vol.15-16, 1922, p. 619.

<sup>2</sup>See Yitzhak Bacon, (Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1975), p.10. Throughout Bacon's work, he has attempted to correct the erroneous information published about Brenner's life in other sources. His method of documentation was based primarily on Brenner's letters and seemingly parallel events in Brenner's life which he incorporated into his fiction. Bacon's work covers Brenner's life through the time that he was still typesetting for "המעורר" in London.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid*, p. 15.

Brenner did not remain at the Konotof *Yeshiva* very long. He left and went to the Pochep *Yeshiva* following an incident where he was found with some of his own controversial writing, the content of which is not entirely clear. It was thought to have contained either a critical look at the Chasidim or literary criticism on secular Hebrew literature. This was the first of three times when Brenner lost all of his writings. In this case, they suddenly disappeared overnight from amongst his belongings.<sup>4</sup>

Brenner entered the *yeshiva* at Pochep just prior to becoming Bar Mitzvah and was one of the youngest students there. Despite the open atmosphere at Pochep, he continued to wrestle with his desire to emancipate himself from traditional religious life. Because of his love for his father, he threw himself into his studies. He had a reputation for being shy and modest, but was known for his good memory and for being a sharp quick learner. While in Pochep, he was further exposed to Hebrew literature and to the Russian language. Along with A.N. Gnessin, Brenner served as co-editor and writer of the newspapers "הפרח" and "הקורן." Both Brenner and Gnessin were known as *epikorsim* at Pochep.<sup>5</sup>

Brenner left Pochep and went to Bialystock. It is not known exactly why he left the Pochep *yeshiva* given its tolerant atmosphere. It may be that the *yeshiva* did not promote the in depth learning or exploration that Brenner desired. Once again it was reported that he was caught with some personal secular writings which created tension between him and the *Rav* of the *yeshiva*. Given the pattern of Brenner's movement, it would follow

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<sup>4</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 15-17.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 20-26.

that he probably left after having made another public expression of his unresolved conflict between secular and religious life.<sup>6</sup>

Brenner went to Bialystock at age fifteen to broaden his education. Being a large city, it afforded him both privacy and anonymity. He was free to study and did not have to worry about being watched by anyone, though he did have an uncle who lived there. In order to support himself, he taught Bible and Hebrew to private students. He read 2 hours of Russian daily, took classes in Russian and Bible, and was constantly writing. He came into contact with people who had a variety of backgrounds. This gave him a broader prospective on life. His friends are said to have thought that he was crazy because he was writing all the time.<sup>7</sup>

He had a very difficult time adjusting to secular life. After living in Bialystock for about eight months, he became very ill and subsequently very depressed. Due to his illness, he lost his private students and had to move because he could not afford his room. Around the same time, his uncle sent a letter to his father explaining to him that Brenner was no longer "learning," a term associated with traditional Jewish study.<sup>8</sup>

As the result of these problems, Brenner temporarily became a בעל תשובה and started studying Talmud regularly. He felt that his quest for enlightenment and the desire to broaden his knowledge had caused him great pain and resulted in his dismissal from the *Yeshiva*. He consciously tried to forget his conflicting thoughts. In order to please his uncle and his father, he went to work as a סופר סת"ם; a scribe.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid, pp. 26-28.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, pp. 29-30.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, p. 33.

Brenner became a student at a small *yeshiva* in Bialystock. While there, he started to question his earlier feelings of doubt. He continued to exchange letters with his father. His father's letters were filled with love for him. Brenner's father also had great expectations for his son within a traditional context. This had to be an additional source of conflict for the adolescent. His father encouraged him to write a letter of apology to the *Rav* at Pochev so that he would be invited back to study there.<sup>10</sup>

At age sixteen and a half, Brenner returned to Pochev as an enlightened nationalist. He stayed there this time for a year as his literary side began to emerge. He worked as a tutor and studied German, Russian, mathematics, geography and history. His conflict did not disappear. In order to forget his problems, he absorbed himself in reading.<sup>11</sup>

At the end of 1898, he left Pochev and went to Homel where he remained until 1900. He worked in a Zionist library and also taught Hebrew. He enrolled in a gymnasium and studied Latin, geography, history and physics. He was exposed to the great masters of Russian Literature: Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Turgenev. He knew that he wanted to be a writer and that it was imperative for him to broaden his general education and while he continued reading Hebrew Literature, he also resumed his study of German.<sup>12</sup>

While in Homel, Brenner joined the Bund.<sup>13</sup> It is not certain what his involvement with the Bund was since he never mentioned his affiliation

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<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.* p. 34.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 50-55.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 65-66.

<sup>13</sup>The Bund was one of the first Jewish Socialist mass organizations. It was founded in 1897 at a secret conference in Vilna. Its platform was anti-Zionist and it promoted Yiddish as the national language of the Jewish people.

with it in his writings. It is thought that his teacher, Sander Baum influenced him toward socialism. Brenner sought solutions to the world's problems that reflected humanistic values, and questioned Zionism's claims.<sup>14</sup>

Sander Baum also introduced him to realist positivist criticism. He taught Brenner to examine every book to see how it applied to man's life in general, and to Jewish life specifically.<sup>15</sup>

By the end of 1899 Brenner left the Bund. Even though by then he had become an advocate of Aḥad Ha'am, his decision to disaffiliate was not because of a conflict between Zionism and socialism. Aḥad Ha'am (1856-1927) was one of the first major thinkers who understood that Jews needed an alternative to the ideology of the *Haskalah*. Thus, he began to develop and promote his philosophy of Zionism. He understood that a crisis was taking place within Judaism. A rapid and radical breakdown in the traditional modes of Jewish faith was occurring. Judaism as the revealed religion was no longer the force that held Jews together. New structures had to be devised in order to thwart the disruptive forces of individualism and secularism amongst Jews.

He realized that it was imperative to Jewish survival to break with the ideologies of the past. Knowing that it was unrealistic to believe that the future of Jewish civilization could be found in Europe, he directed his thoughts to a Jewish homeland in the land of Israel. A new emphasis needed to be placed on finding solutions for Jewish life, and more importantly, a long range solution.<sup>16</sup> Aḥad Ha'am advocated establishing a spiritual center

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<sup>14</sup>*ibid*, p. 66.

<sup>15</sup>*ibid*, p. 71

<sup>16</sup>See *Selected Essays of Aḥad Ha'am*, trans. Leon Simon (New York: Atheneum, 1970), Introduction pp. 11-40.

in the Land of Israel which would provide inspiration and guidance for those Jews who remained in the Diaspora. Israel would be the permanent center for Jewish culture.

Zionism offered a new hope to persecuted Jews who were looking for redemption from degradation and humiliation.<sup>17</sup> Brenner felt that the Jewish nation was sick and was going to die out unless an immediate healing solution was found to normalize its life. He no longer felt that socialism was the answer. Coincidentally, he received a rejection notice from Ahad Ha'am for a story that he had submitted for publication.<sup>18</sup>

From Homel, Brenner moved back to Bialystock with interim stops in Pochep and Warsaw. He visited people in the Jewish literary circle in Warsaw and is reported to have made a bad impression on Peretz and others possibly due to his immaturity. He met with Avraham Reisen, the Yiddish poet, and translated some of his writings to Hebrew.<sup>19</sup>

In the fall of 1900 Brenner's first novel, *בחורף* was published. Its publication brought notoriety to him and was a major breakthrough in his literary career. He became known as a Hebrew writer. At the same time, he worked as an editor for the Bundist newspaper "*דער קאמף*" for 9 months. Brenner still had some contact with the Bund and continued editing and translating for them during this period.<sup>20</sup> By then, he was well acquainted with the young Hebrew and Yiddish authors of the period.

In 1901 Brenner was inducted into the Russian army. During his first 4 months of basic training, he was cut off from the rest of the world. He

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<sup>17</sup>See *The Jews in Russia*, Louis Greenberg (New York:Schocken Books,1976), p.174.

<sup>18</sup>*ibid.* p. 76.

<sup>19</sup>*ibid.* p. 80.

<sup>20</sup>*ibid.* pp. 89-90.

was not allowed to read or write anything or have visitors. Following basic training, he was allowed to write again. Though he was also able to read a lot of Russian literature and became proficient in spoken Russian, Brenner suffered greatly. In a letter to Gnessin, he described his daily routine. He complained that he rose every morning at 5:00 a.m. and that the army was not a place for a serious, sensitive person like himself. He was very unhappy and his outlook toward man and society changed. He began to see the importance of the plight of individual man rather than the plight of mankind.

Despite his overwhelming unhappiness, he was just as prolific in the army as he had been in his civilian life. All of his letters were filled with pessimism. He constantly came in contact with situations that he had never faced before in his life. He saw no way to improve his situation in the army.<sup>21</sup>

The last year in the army was more tolerable for him. He was allowed visitors and was able to leave the base as well. In exchange for writing letters for soldiers, he received favors. This gave him more time to read and write. As he began to read psychology books, his love and energy for life returned. Considering his predisposition to depression, it was surprising that he suddenly had such a positive attitude toward life. Two events should have affected him negatively at this time: he learned about the suicide of his beloved teacher, Sander Baum, and also, for the second time, he lost his writings. He had given his writings to someone in Bialystock to hold for him while he was in the army.<sup>22</sup> That person burned

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<sup>21</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>22</sup>See ברנר י. ת. כל כתבי י. ת. (Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1967), pp. 346-347.

them when he learned that the police were planning to raid his house.

Baum's death provided him with the impetus to start writing

מסביב לנקודה.<sup>23</sup>

Brenner grew up in a tumultuous climate for Jewish intellectuals in Russia. Following the pogroms in Kishinev in 1903, he realized that Jews would not be accepted by the dominant cultures in which they lived. Jews would never be treated as equals and enjoy full citizenship rights in their motherlands. Brenner was one of many caught in the throes of this struggle. He travelled in many circles, some of them were of a revolutionary nature. These groups of people were intellectuals, Jewish and non-Jewish. He became active in the Russian Social Revolutionary Party and according to Hillel Zeitlin, a close friend, this marked his final break with the Bund.<sup>24</sup>

Brenner felt that the Bundist revolution was too dogmatic and that their fight was dated. The Social Revolutionists, on the other hand was a Russian party in which Russians, secular Jews and Zionists were active. They confronted the problem of nationalism and the Yiddish /Hebrew conflict. They opted to support Hebrew as the national language in an attempt to return to Semitic roots, while retaining Yiddish for cultural purposes. The Bund claimed that Jews were Russians of Jewish descent and that they should assimilate. The Social Revolutionists came out against the pogroms, antisemitism and the elements who partook in the pogroms. Even when Brenner was in London, he maintained his connection with this party.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>ibid. pp. 99-102.

<sup>24</sup>ibid. p. 103.

<sup>25</sup>ibid. pp.104-108.

Though he was supposed to be in the army for four years, he found it to be insufferable and escaped after serving two and a half years.<sup>26</sup> The details of the escape are not entirely clear. Haya Wolfson, a social revolutionist friend of Brenner's was instrumental in helping Brenner escape. According to Hillel Zeitlin, she was the only romantic involvement that Brenner had until he went to Palestine. True to Brenner's character, this romance was filled with doubt and agony. The character Hava Bloomin in *מסביב לנקודה* was based on Wolfson.<sup>27</sup>

There are several contradictory accounts of his escape. We know from a letter written to Bialik that Brenner planned to escape. Brenner's unit was scheduled to move eastward with the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war. He escaped from a train station in Brinsk as his unit was supposed to head east. He was then picked up by the military police, but with the help of his friends, either from the Social Revolutionists or from the Bund, he was freed again. Wolfson was the contact person for everyone involved. He remained hidden underground for over a month in Sitrodow, as he waited for papers that would enable him to cross the border into Prussia. He left Russia on March 14, 1904.<sup>28</sup>

Prior to leaving Russia, Brenner spent about a month working in Warsaw as a member of the editorial staff for "*השלוח*." He tried to arrange work as an editor in advance of his departure for London. Brenner decided at this point that he wanted to focus on being a literary critic and not solely a writer of fiction.<sup>29</sup> Prior to his departure to London, he was living under an assumed name. Before he left Russia for the third and final time in his life,

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<sup>26</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>27</sup>*ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>28</sup>*ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>29</sup>*ibid.*, p. 123.

Brenner lost his writings. Because he was living under an assumed identity, he was unable to do anything about his lost work.<sup>30</sup>

Brenner arrived in London in April, empty handed, not knowing a soul, but soon found work in a Russian library. In the meantime he wrote to Bialik in Warsaw and through him attempted to make an arrangement with "השלוות" whereby they would send him 20 rubles a month in exchange either for what they owed him for works already published or for what he would write in the future. Since Bialik was not in Warsaw when this letter arrived, it was well over a month before he finally received a negative reply.<sup>31</sup>

The Russian library attracted many tired and hungry people. Everyday at 4:00 P.M. as was the English custom, two men would come into the library carrying tea, bread and herring. Brenner, like many others, knew at least where one meal a day would be coming from. Most of the time he did not have enough money to eat.<sup>32</sup>

Brenner's stay in London marks the darkest period in his life. When he was in Russia he felt lonely and cut off, but at least he was at home and surrounded by loyal friends and family. Even while he was in the army his friends visited him with regularity.<sup>33</sup>

In London, he had no friends. He consciously chose to remain anonymous. According to his close friend, Asher Beilen, months went by before he revealed his identity to anyone.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Brenner, v. III, pp. 346-347.

<sup>31</sup>ibid. pp. 123-125.

<sup>32</sup>ibid. p. 125.

<sup>33</sup>ibid. p. 122.

<sup>34</sup>ibid. p. 128.

Some time after his arrival in London, he became interested in the *ציון פֿועלי* movement.<sup>35</sup> He also wrote and published articles on Hebrew literature in "The Jewish Chronicle." Occasionally Brenner gave lectures on literary topics to Hebrew teachers and workers. Since Brenner did not earn much money working in the library, he was always looking for additional part-time work. These extra jobs were of a literary nature which he did in his spare time at home. He worked long hard hours in the library which he viewed as a temporary post.<sup>36</sup>

Brenner's life turned around in November of 1904 when he moved in with Kalman Mermer and began working for the Yiddish Social-Democratic paper: "די נייע צייט".<sup>37</sup> He wrote news, translated and also did some editing. He wrote under the following pseudonyms or initials which were directly related to the main characters in his novel *בחורף* : *ח.פ.* or *ח.פ.ו*. Those initials stood for *פֿייערמאן* who was the father of the protagonist *ירמיה פֿייערמאן* in the novel. *חיים* is Brenner's middle name. *פֿייערמאן* is also related in meaning to Brenner.<sup>38</sup>

Brenner wrote Bialik prior to taking this job and explained to him that he was nauseated by the thought of working for a Yiddish paper. Bialik had suggested that Brenner seek work with one as a means of support. Brenner claimed that he had no desire to come into contact with "טומאה" referring to Yiddish journalism. He claimed that the quality of the writing was "literary garbage." He was against what the Jewish Social Democrats stood

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<sup>35</sup>This was an international movement that sought to combine political Zionism with socialism.

<sup>36</sup>*ibid.* p. 129.

<sup>37</sup>*ibid.* p. 130.

<sup>38</sup>*ibid.* p. 130.

for, their Marxist dogmatism, their approach to the "Jewish Problem," and their attitude toward the Hebrew Language. The only reason that he condescended to work for the paper was in order not to starve to death while waiting to hear from Bialik.<sup>39</sup> He also wrote to "אחיאסף" and offered to sell them the literary rights to all of his works. They never responded to him.<sup>40</sup>

The conflict between Brenner and the Ideology of the Social Democrats finally became too much for him. He was writing material with which he did not agree. He felt guilty and wanted to be able to continue to work on his novel מסביב לנקודה. Fortunately for him, he received a letter from Bialik stating that they would pay him the 20 rubles a month. Brenner quit his job and spent the next month in his room writing. By August 1st, he finished the novel that he originally started in the army. When he began writing the second time, he claimed that he was consumed by a burning fire that enabled him to work non-stop.<sup>41</sup>

When Brenner's novel was published in 1904 in "השלוח" his personal situation changed drastically. The publication seemed to have been the catalyst that he needed to bring him out of his shell. Brenner no longer hid his identity and reestablished his ties with the local Jewish community which he had severed during his secluded period of writing.<sup>42</sup>

He strengthened his commitment with the ציון פועלי movement in London. He served as secretary and became one of the most active members of the organization. The London group was comprised of a broad range of people spanning the spectrum from modern Orthodox Jews to young

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid. pp. 130-131.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid. p. 131.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid. p. 142.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid. p. 147.

democratic Zionists.<sup>43</sup> He gave a talk on Mendele which evidently was so impressive that Bialik and Klausner<sup>44</sup> heard about it in Warsaw and requested that he send them a copy of the talk for publication in "השלוח".<sup>45</sup>

In November of 1904, because of his financial situation, Brenner worked again for the "ד'י נייט צייט". It is curious to note that the London Jewish community never connected him directly with this paper. This was partially due to the fact that he still had not signed his real name to any of his publications in London.<sup>46</sup>

He also worked as a part time editor for the Hebrew publication "היהודי". He mainly published translations though occasionally he wrote literary articles. Brenner translated under the signature of ב. פ. ז. His tie with this publication is important for two reasons: first of all, it connected him with the Hebrew circle in London, and secondly, he used his real name for the first time in London in one of his articles.<sup>47</sup>

In August of 1905, he went to work to learn how to be a typesetter. Concerned with the state of the proletariat, he decided that he too actually wanted to work with his hands. While working as a typesetter, he unsuccessfully tried to launch several literary projects. The first periodical was entitled "האבוקה". He wrote a literary prospectus in which he explained its purpose asserting that the large number of Zionist Jews

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<sup>43</sup>ibid. p. 174.

<sup>44</sup>Joseph Klausner (1874-1958) was a historian, literary critic, editor and publicist. From his youth he was active in promoting the revival of the Hebrew language. When Brenner wrote to Bialik, Klausner was the literary criticism editor for "השלוח". He wrote numerous works and served as Professor of Hebrew Literature and Second Temple History at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

<sup>45</sup>ibid. pp. 147-148.

<sup>46</sup>ibid. p. 148.

<sup>47</sup>ibid. pp. 169-172.

living in Russia, Poland, and in the ghettos of London and New York needed a Hebrew paper to be their collective voice. The periodical would print the truth and would not only deal with issues local to London, it would have articles on Hebrew literature, the cultural life of the Jews in London, and literary material for the soul. It would also include translations of European literature which would broaden its readers horizons on intellectual and economic matters. He failed to get financial backing for its publication.<sup>48</sup>

He then began work on a prospective literary collection entitled "רגש ורצון." For some unknown reason, he stopped writing the prospectus for this work in mid-sentence. In it, he explained that as long as Jews continued to live in the diaspora without the Land of Israel, their lives would be incomplete. He then wrote, "we see the pogroms, we see..." and never ended the sentence.<sup>49</sup>

Knowing this background is pertinent to understanding his involvement with the literary organization "Masada," originally a group for Hebrew speakers. Its offshoot was the Hebrew periodical "המעורר" published by Brenner from 1906-1907. This as already noted was not his first attempt to issue a literary journal. His previous failures probably led to the success of this journal.<sup>50</sup>

The pogroms in Russia in 1905 had a profound affect on Brenner. He became angry and depressed. His pessimistic outlook affected his daily life. A close relative of his was killed in the pogroms and it took him a long time to overcome his sorrow and pain.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>ibid. p. 203.

<sup>49</sup>ibid. p. 204.

<sup>50</sup>ibid. pp. 210-202.

<sup>51</sup>ibid. p. 215.

"המעורר" came out following the pogroms when other major Hebrew publications had temporarily stopped being issued. Its stated purpose was to clarify the reality of Jews living everywhere. The objective was to gather information about the fate of Jews and present it in a manner that would lead to rational analysis. Not surprising, it was also meant to help elevate the mind by means of the literature presented in the national language, Hebrew.<sup>52</sup>

Brenner was very dedicated to this publication. He wrote under various pseudonyms for it, typeset it, and personally mailed it to its subscribers. He even used his own salary to help offset its running deficit. In 1908 due to financial difficulties, he was forced to let the publication lapse.<sup>53</sup>

In 1908 he moved from London to Lvov. He found work in a publishing house for a Hebrew newspaper to support himself. Between 1908-1909, he published two editions of the Hebrew periodical "רביבים." In 1909 after much contemplation, he emigrated to Palestine.<sup>54</sup>

Since the focus of this thesis is on Brenner's works written during the Second *Aliyah*, the rest of this chapter will contain an in depth look at the author based on his personal correspondence dated from March 10, 1909 through August 1, 1914, providing the reader with a more accurate and thorough understanding of the person inside of the "author." His letters reveal a different side of him that is not seen in his non-fiction writings. They give the reader insight into how Brenner was really feeling, thinking,

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<sup>52</sup>*Ibid*, p. 215.

<sup>53</sup>See *Breakdown and Bereavement, A Novel by Yosef Haim Brenner*, trans. Hillel Halkin ( Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971), Introduction pp. 8-9.

<sup>54</sup>See מלון הספרות החדשה העברית והכללית, ed. Avraham Shaanan (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1966), p. 156.

and reacting to his own daily life in Palestine. He personalized his causes in his correspondence. He also took a different stand for himself and his friends vis-a-vis their actual stake in the fulfillment of the Zionist dream. By viewing all of his work together, rather than independent of each other, a more real person emerges.<sup>55</sup>

Brenner arrived in Haifa between February 10th and 12th in 1909.<sup>56</sup> His first letter was written from Jerusalem which indicates that he had settled there soon after his arrival.<sup>57</sup> Within six weeks his impressions of the country indicate that he felt that it was very hard to live in Palestine, everything was expensive and making a living was difficult.<sup>58</sup> He commented on the general disorganization in the country substantiated by the fact that he had been waiting over ten days for his trunk to arrive in Jerusalem.<sup>59</sup>

On April 7th, he wrote a letter to Esther Lempert, a friend from Lvov, apparently in response to a letter from her. She evidently asked him how he felt about himself. He replied that it was hard enough to verbalize an answer, let alone write about those feelings. Furthermore, writing in Yiddish made it all the more impossible for him to express himself. Brenner managed to skirt her question altogether. Despite his impassioned nature,

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<sup>55</sup>It is important to note that the information that follows on Brenner's life is taken from primary sources from this point onward. No one has written as detailed a work since Bacon's on the rest of his life. While most of the information we have now is documented through Brenner's own writings, the precision and accuracy of this material is not as clear as the earlier material whose dates were checked against other sources by Bacon.

<sup>56</sup>כל כתבי ברנר, \* 430, p. 342.

<sup>57</sup>*ibid.*, \* 429, p. 342.

<sup>58</sup>*ibid.*, \* 431, p. 342.

<sup>59</sup>*ibid.*, \* 432, p. 342.

he was unable to share that part of himself on an interpersonal level with a woman. He closed his letter asking her to send him a picture of herself.<sup>60</sup>

On May 1st, he wrote the first of many letters to his friend Asher Beilen. In it he complained about the difficulty of making a living, the high cost of everything especially food, and the prevalence of sickness and malaria.<sup>61</sup> He predicted that Beilen would probably not last in the *yishuv* for a month! He also indicated that he saw no prospects for marriage. He revealed that he and others were already disillusioned and had little hope that the Zionist ideals will ever be realized. He complained that he had no literary material at hand and encouraged him to send him anything that he had written. Brenner was worried that due to the paucity of literature being written in Palestine, he would not have a job with "הפועה"צ"<sup>62</sup> after the summer.<sup>63</sup>

Brenner wrote to the Hebrew critic F. Lachower on May 9th. This began a series of letters dealing with various literary matters. Lachower asked Brenner to send him some autobiographical data for an article. Brenner suggested that he should reread his short stories because they contained the information which Lachower sought, evidence that he did not deny his use of autobiographical material in his fiction.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>ibid., \* 433, p. 343.

<sup>61</sup>ibid., \* 435, p. 343. Brenner constantly referred to the general prevalence of illness in Palestine and to his own in particular. For further references to his health see letters: 443, 475, 478, 485, 487, 488, 489, 509, 510, 512, 522, 523, 530, 590, 593, 594, 605, 612.

<sup>62</sup>"הפועה"צ" is the abbreviation for הפועל הצעיר. From this point on I will use this abbreviation when I am referring to either the organization or its publication.

<sup>63</sup>ibid., \* 435, p. 343.

<sup>64</sup>ibid., \* 437, p. 344.

In May and June Brenner had a marked shift in his attitude.<sup>65</sup> He wrote to Dora Avramovskiah, a friend from Lvov, in the beginning of July and told her that in general his life was not so bad.<sup>66</sup> Curiously, only a week later on July 7th he wrote to Beilen again, in a more pessimistic vein. He complained that the climate was awful. Since it was his first summer in the Middle East, it is hardly surprising that he found it difficult to bear the weather. For the first time, he addressed the issue of the number of people who were leaving the country. He rhetorically asked, "why would anyone leave, if it wasn't so awful?"<sup>67</sup> He was beginning to show signs of his own personal despair when he admitted to Beilen that had he a place to go, he too would have departed that very day.<sup>68</sup>

In a letter to Lachower written in the beginning of August, he was more forthcoming with information about himself. He clarified his birthdate for Lachower. When discussing a picture that was going to appear of him, Brenner displayed a very modest reaction, bordering on embarrassment. He stated that the picture was four years old and not very good. While acknowledging that his face was more relaxed now, he claimed that he looked much more tired than he did when the picture was taken.<sup>69</sup>

Brenner explained to Lachower that the timing was not right to issue a new literary publication in the land of Israel. He agreed with him that there was a need for one, but he felt that it should be published in a cultural center. He stated that Israel was not a cultural center and that, in essence it would be a waste to publish something worthwhile there because it would

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<sup>65</sup>ibid. # 439, p. 344.

<sup>66</sup>ibid. # 441, p. 345.

<sup>67</sup>ibid. # 443, p. 346.

<sup>68</sup>ibid.

<sup>69</sup>ibid. # 447, pp. 347-348.

not be appreciated. He claimed that even a journal like "הפורה" צ" had no influence on either the *yishuv* or diaspora Jewry.<sup>70</sup>

In a letter to Beilen written on August 18th, Brenner wrote that despite his not wanting to return to Galicia, he did write a letter to Dr. D. S. Yochelman in Kiev looking for work. Dr. Yochelman worked with Jewish emigration and Brenner sought his help. Brenner, who publicly chastised European Jewry for not making *aliyah*, privately admitted that he wanted to leave Palestine within six months of his arrival.<sup>71</sup>

Several weeks later, Brenner wrote a letter to the editorial board of "הפורה" צ" and gave them notice. He informed them that as of the beginning of 1910 he would no longer participate on their staff as a full time employee though he still anticipated writing for them.<sup>72</sup>

By early September, Brenner moved from Jerusalem to a small *moshavah* near Jaffa. This was the first time that Brenner wrote about being ill.<sup>73</sup> In a letter of November 22nd, he specifically mentioned that he was living in Ein Ganim, where both the housing and food were purportedly cheap.<sup>74</sup>

From a letter to Daniel Persky written on October 15th, we learn that Brenner's works were being translated into other languages. He told Persky that what he had seen of the Yiddish translation of his novel *לנקודה* was of pretty poor quality although it was not as bad as the Russian translation.<sup>75</sup> In a letter written to Persky (July 17th) almost a

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<sup>70</sup>ibid.

<sup>71</sup>ibid., # 446, p. 348.

<sup>72</sup>ibid., # 448, p. 348.

<sup>73</sup>ibid., # 450, p. 349.

<sup>74</sup>ibid., # 454, p. 350.

<sup>75</sup>ibid., # 452, pp. 349-350.

year later, he praised the idea of translating works into Hebrew asserting that Hebrew literature on its own was not rich enough. As a side note, he mentioned A.D. Gordon and referred to him as "an old worker."<sup>76</sup> He must have assumed that Persky had not yet heard of Gordon.

Contrary to his letter of resignation, it appears that on January 31, 1910, Brenner was still working for "הפוע"ץ. Brenner wrote a letter to an "unknown author," S. B. Maksimovsky<sup>77</sup> whom he felt had talent, requesting that he send him anything that he had written. He asked that he try to submit something that he felt personally involved with, because he felt Maksimovsky's views were important to convey to his readership. Maximon must have been a friend of Brenner's because he closed with a personal inquiry about this author's brother and sister's welfare.<sup>78</sup>

At the end of March he wrote to S. Ben-Avram, an author who was going to emigrate from Russia to Palestine. He told him that he would need 20 rubles for the trip from Odessa to Palestine and at least 3 times that amount to obtain exit papers and for bribes. He suggested coming in the winter.<sup>79</sup>

Brenner responded to an accusation made by Jacob Rabinovitch in a letter written in May to the editor of "המבשר." Rabinovitch accused Brenner of writing that "Bialik was worthless."<sup>80</sup> Brenner asked him to please point out the source to which he referred. Somewhat out of character, he

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., # 467, pp. 354-355.

<sup>77</sup>At that time, Maksimovsky lived in London and served as a part time "literary secretary" for Aḥad Ha'am. He later changed his name to Shalom Maximon, settled in the United States and in the early nineteen thirties he was the registrar for Hebrew Union College.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., # 456, p. 351.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., # 458, p. 351.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., # 463, p. 352.

rather politely suggested that this accusation was no matter to be taken lightly.<sup>81</sup> Given his fiery nature, one would have expected Brenner to lambast Rabinovitch and charge him publicly with slander. He finally turned to the editor of "הפורה" in the beginning of June about this matter since his letter to the editor of "המבשר" had not been printed. He felt a responsibility to Bialik and wanted to clear himself of this slanderous charge. He asked "הפורה" to print his letter.

A different side of Brenner is exposed through several letters written on behalf of a talented 20 year-old actress whom he wished to help find work in the Yiddish theatre. He wrote to Abe Goldberg in New York and to Asher Beilen.<sup>82</sup> He explained that she was a Sefardi who knew Yiddish and did not know Hebrew although he heard her speak an impeccable memorized Hebrew on stage and was very impressed with her acting ability.<sup>83</sup>

The caring, sensitive side of Brenner was revealed once again in a letter written to Josef Klausner on June 16th. A friend of his, the poet David Shimonovitz, was on his way to Israel and he had not heard from him in 7 weeks. Shimonovitz's parents wrote to Brenner asking him if he knew anything about their son's whereabouts. He only knew that he was supposed to have stopped off in Odessa on the way to Israel and asked Klausner whether he had heard from him.<sup>84</sup> Brenner did locate him as he wrote to him in August of that year regarding a literary matter.<sup>85</sup>

In response to questions asked of him by Tzvi Weinberg, a teacher who was considering moving to Israel, Brenner wrote on August 24th that he

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., # 471, p. 355.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., # 466, p. 353.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., # 468, pp. 353-354.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., # 475, p. 356.

would have to take a test given by the teachers' union to be eligible to teach. He told him that finding work in that field was done on an individual basis. He implied that a person with talent could find work but told him that it was hard to settle in Palestine and a great deal of illness was rampant. The cost of living was high but a teacher's salary was respectable. He found it difficult to answer the rest of Weinberg's questions, and did not do so.<sup>86</sup> Again we have an example of Brenner not really encouraging *aliyah*.

On December 1st, he announced in a letter to B. Y. Glinik that his sister and brother were emigrating to Palestine from Russia. They were going to live with Brenner in Jaffa. He then added that it should not be assumed from their coming that he had become rich.<sup>87</sup>

Writing to Beilen on December 9th he refers to an article that Maksimovsky published which was critical of Brenner's works. He asked Beilen if he had read the article. Brenner's pride was wounded. That he reacted very personally is evidenced by the questions which he asked Beilen: "What did he want me to learn from it? Should I swallow my pride and not write? Should I not demand spiritual pay for my literary work?" He added in Russian that it was a foolish article. On a more personal note, reiterating familiar themes, Brenner told Beilen that his life was not bad, he had no enmity against anyone, but it was impossible to make a living.<sup>88</sup>

Brenner wrote to Persky on December 30th asking him if he could get him a \$50 loan and promised to pay him back or whoever loaned him the money with the publication of his book. His only condition was that this

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., # 473, p. 355.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., # 482, p. 359.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., # 484, p. 360.

request not be publicized in the press and he asked for an immediate response.<sup>89</sup>

On the 10th of January, he wrote to Glink from his sickbed informing him of his going to Tiberias to convalesce. He relates that he was unable to walk and added that he hoped that he would arrive safely in Tiberias. In a postscript, he explained that he had been unable to read a particular work because he had been bedridden for a month.<sup>90</sup>

Before going to Tiberias, he wrote Beilen a letter in Yiddish in which he again discussed Beilen's desire to make *aliyah*. He tried to discourage him in several letters explaining that if he were to come with 1000 francs in hand, that sum would last him 6 months, enough time to enable him to find work. He told Beilen that Rav Binyamin, a mutual friend, agreed with his assessment.<sup>91</sup>

On February 2nd he wrote a response from Tiberias to M. Ben-Eliezer.<sup>92</sup> He told him that "single life" in the land of Israel was not great and that it was no different than being single anywhere else. He felt that the illusion about the land of Israel needed to be completely dispelled. Commenting about a certain woman whom he had seen recently, he told Ben-Eliezer his impressions of her claiming that she was bright, lacked real intimacy, and other than that, was just as unhappy as everyone else.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>ibid., # 485, p. 360.

<sup>90</sup>ibid., # 487, p. 361.

<sup>91</sup>ibid., # 488, p. 361.

<sup>92</sup>Moshe Ben-Eliezer (1882-1944) was a Hebrew writer and critic. He served as editor for "השחר" in Warsaw and then for "שתילים" in Moscow. He lived in Germany, France and the United States. In 1925 he moved to Palestine.

<sup>93</sup>ibid., # 489, p. 361.

Brenner was back in Jaffa by March 3rd.<sup>94</sup> In a letter to Gershon Shofman on March 7th, he inquired as to why Shofman had been so surprised to learn of his illness. Echoing *Kohelet*, he stated that a man has to get sick, and afterwards, has to die. From the letter, we infer that Shofman had just become engaged. Brenner teased him about his engagement and asked him to send him a picture of his fiancée so that he could also love her. In this letter, we learn that Brenner finished his work "מכאן ומכאן" which he said was twice as long as "בין מים למים." He wrote that it contained some new material as well as some old material and that he wanted to see it published. He ended the letter stating that his material situation was worse in Palestine than it had been in Galicia.<sup>95</sup>

The Apostasy Controversy first entered Brenner's personal correspondence on March 3rd when he wrote a letter to the editor of "הד הזמור" complaining about the Odessa Committee's withdrawing their monetary support from "הפרוה"צ". The tone of this letter indicated that Brenner was quite upset. He stated that while he wrote for the publication from time to time, that he was in fact no longer part of their editorial staff. His basic premise was that it was unfair of the Committee to withdraw their support especially if they based their decision on his tangential affiliation with the paper.<sup>96</sup>

On July 6th Brenner wrote to the editor of "הפרוה"צ" criticizing the poor quality of the press in Palestine (with the exception of course of "הפרוה"צ"). He discussed both the lack of important issues and the atmosphere of schnorrers, as affecting the quality of the press. He

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<sup>94</sup>ibid., # 491, p. 362.

<sup>95</sup>ibid., # 492, p. 362.

<sup>96</sup>ibid., # 494, pp. 362-363.

complained about the narrow range of influence that the press had in Palestine.<sup>97</sup>

On September 3rd Brenner informed Lachower that he had finished his translation of Crime and Punishment into Hebrew.<sup>98</sup> In another letter written that month, while discussing a new literary journal that was soon to be published, Brenner expressed his view that life was not worthwhile for Jews if they had no national identity. That identity, according to him, at least, provided them with the reason for their suffering.<sup>99</sup>

By 1911, Brenner had reached his breaking point insofar as his commitment to live in Palestine. He wrote a very significant letter to Abraham Reisen in New York on September 8th. Brenner told him that he wanted to leave Palestine. He did not refer to the land of Israel, but rather to Palestine. He began by explaining that he was sick of being there and that even if he decided to stay it would be impossible for him to earn a living, particularly because now he also had to support both his brother and sister. He felt that with all of his literary skills he would surely be able to earn enough in America.

Brenner concluded that he had no choice but to leave. He asked Reisen for money to pay for the journey for his entire family, a sum that would be impossible for him to amass. He expressed a preference to depart before winter. He stressed that he was turning only to him as a confidant, despite his having many friends in New York. These he wished to avoid. He did not want to depend on them once he arrived.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., # 505, pp. 367-368.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., # 506, p. 368.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., # 507, p. 368.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., # 508, p. 369.

By the beginning of October, Brenner moved back to Jerusalem where he began to work for "האחדות".<sup>101</sup> Brenner gave a lecture on Chernichovsky in which he used material that had appeared in an article which Klausner published in "השילוח" without mentioning the source. After the lecture was published in "האחדות," Brenner wrote a letter in December in which he apologized to Klausner for not crediting him properly. He wanted Klausner to understand that he did not know that the lecture was going to be published.<sup>102</sup>

On March 20th he wrote to Beilen and informed him that "הפרוה"צ" would be going into publication on a bi-weekly basis. He told him that he discussed the possibility of offering him work with the editors of the journal. He asked Beilen whether he was interested in a position with "הפרוה"צ".<sup>103</sup>

In June, he wrote to Yoseph Aharonovitz and complained that "האחדות" was keeping him so busy that he did not have time to write. He postponed a project with him until the beginning of the next year.<sup>104</sup> There is no indication by June that he ever received a response from Reisen. Brenner probably assumed that he would still be in Palestine in the coming year.

On September 9th Brenner informed Berditchevski that he gave a lecture on his works to a group of teachers. He stated that he was paid 10 francs for the lecture which he confessed was not very deep though interesting.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>101</sup>ibid. \* 509, p. 370.

<sup>102</sup>ibid. \* 513, pp. 370-371.

<sup>103</sup>ibid. \* 522, p. 373.

<sup>104</sup>ibid. \* 524, p. 373.

<sup>105</sup>ibid. \* 530, p. 375.

Lachower was expecting some material from Brenner but on October 5th he wrote that he did not foresee writing anything in the near future. He told Lachower that he would soon be seeing S. Y. Agnon, and that perhaps, Agnon would have something for him.<sup>106</sup> He also wrote a letter of apology to the editor of "הזמן" in October for not fulfilling obligations due to illness.<sup>107</sup>

In October, Brenner actually sent a love letter to Hasia F--D (sic). He began by telling her that he was writing because he did not anticipate being able to see her that week. For some reason, he also felt that he would be prevented from seeing her often at her home. He promised that he would be faithful to her and said that he was not embarrassed to write and tell her that he loved her with all of his soul. He closed hoping that she would have similar feelings for him as she thought of him.<sup>108</sup> This was the first letter in which Brenner expressed his love for a woman.

Brenner sent Hasia another letter from Jaffa in November. It was much shorter and not as romantic as the first. He inquired as to how she was doing and said that life was going well for him. He told her that he would not move from Jerusalem, for fear that he would miss Jerusalem greatly.<sup>109</sup> This was his last letter to her.

On January 3, 1913, Brenner thanked Rav Binyamin for his help in trying to secure a loan for him. He informed Rav Binyamin that he no longer needed the money and then politely added that when he does, he will borrow

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<sup>106</sup>ibid. # 532, p. 375.

<sup>107</sup>ibid. # 533, p. 375.

<sup>108</sup>ibid. # 534, p. 376.

<sup>109</sup>ibid. # 537, p. 376.

it from a bank. Later on in the letter, he admitted that he needed to target his writings for a more popular audience.<sup>110</sup>

Brenner first spoke of going to America over a year and a half earlier. Again on January 6th, he indicated that he still desired to leave but he changed his mind about the terms. He suggested to Ephraim Lisitzky<sup>111</sup> in New York that he would like to go there for a year or two to work on a joint project and then, after its completion, return to Palestine.<sup>112</sup>

In April of 1913, we learn from a letter to Berditchevski that Brenner has the opportunity to publish another issue of "רביבים." He was depressed and confided that his life was good sometimes and that there were even moments of light, though generally the darkness was greater than the light. There had been no external changes in his life at that time. He spoke of his parents who were old and sick, living in Russia. He complained of having no luck with writing a new story. He was experiencing a classic case of writer's block.<sup>113</sup>

In April, he wrote to Judith Adler in Yiddish. Judith and he were acquaintances and had seen each other at a lecture recently in Jerusalem. Brenner apologized to her for not talking with her more when he last saw her in Jerusalem. He asked her some personal questions and told her that she was welcome to visit him if she should happen to be in Jerusalem again.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid., # 540, p. 377.

<sup>111</sup>Ephraim Lisitzky was a Hebrew poet born in Minsk who moved to the United States in his youth.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., # 541, pp. 377-378.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., # 545, p. 379.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., # 548, pp. 379-380.

By June 20th Brenner indicated that he was finally well again after spending many weeks being ill. He was going back to work.<sup>115</sup> In July he moved into a different apartment next door to Eliezer Ben Yehuda.<sup>116</sup>

Even as late as 1913, Brenner still did not try to "sell" settlement in the land of Israel to his close friends. On July 11th Brenner wrote Lachower and he tried to discourage him from moving to Israel. He pointed out that it would be very difficult for him to settle there, because he was married. He claimed that the "land consumed its settlers."<sup>117</sup>

Brenner reacted to an article which Shlomo Zemach<sup>118</sup> wrote about him in "השילוח" in a letter to Klausner of July 20th. He was hurt by the article and responded defensively. While acknowledging that it contained some particularly astute observations, he claimed that Zemach was very distant from him and unfamiliar with his essence. In view of the fact that Brenner made a living as a literary critic, I found the following self disclosure a bit naive, and sarcastic. He wrote:

I write as I can. That my talent is not great-I sense every moment. How limited is my strength, I know better than others. Because I surely know what I wish to say and what I do say. But the sentences and the aspects of my writings for which the critics scorn me are in my eyes, at times, the very best.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>115</sup>ibid., # 550-551, p. 383.

<sup>116</sup>ibid., # 573, p. 387.

<sup>117</sup>ibid., # 571, p. 386.

<sup>118</sup>Shlomo Zemach was a Hebrew writer and critic. He was born in Poland in 1886 and moved to Palestine in 1904. He was one of the founders of "הפוע"ץ. In 1909 he moved to France where he taught philosophy and literature at the University of Paris. He was living abroad when he wrote the article on Brenner.

<sup>119</sup>ibid., # 576, p. 388.

I sensed here that Brenner was being more patronizing to his critics than honest with himself. Brenner like others, had an easier time criticizing the works of others than accepting criticism of his own.

Brenner did enjoy male companionship which is evidenced in his letters to his male friends. He wrote to Shimonovitch in July and told him that he really wished that they were together so that they could go over a manuscript together. He also asked him not to delay in responding to his letter as he was anxious to hear from him.<sup>120</sup> A letter to another close friend, Gershon Shofman written in August shows the depth of feelings Brenner had for him. "Shofman, if you are unable to travel to America and you cannot remain in Vienna, do not return to Lvov, come here."<sup>121</sup>

Whenever Brenner wrote to anyone on behalf of any publication that he represented, asking for material for publication, he was careful to spell out in detail what the financial remuneration would be. He, on the other hand, was always waiting to be paid for work which he had submitted and constantly was complaining to someone of this problem. One example of this was found in a letter of August 3rd to Rav Binyamin in which he asked him to look into a commitment made to him by someone in Kiev. Brenner did not receive the 100 rubles owed him in exchange for 200 pages of his work.<sup>122</sup>

By August his newest edition of "דב"רי"ם" had appeared and Brenner promised to send a copy to Beilen. He closed a letter with a revealing statement about his state of mind: "I have no peace and that is enough for him who understands."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup>Ibid. \* 577, p. 388.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid. \* 583, p. 390.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid. \* 581, p. 389.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid. \* 585, p. 390.

Writing to Lachower at the end of August, Brenner responded to criticism of some of his novels. He vented his resentment at hearing directly from people what they felt about his works. He preferred using pseudonyms so he could refer his "critics" to the concealed author who would then answer them. He obviously had great difficulty accepting negative responses to his work. At times, he claimed that just hearing his name cited bothered him.<sup>124</sup>

In a letter to Berditchevski, written nine days after he supposedly contracted malaria,<sup>125</sup> he announced that he had gotten married. He stated that he had not been in Jerusalem for weeks and had not had a chance to answer his mail. He did not mention anything else about his newly acquired bride.<sup>126</sup>

Given his mindset and constant pressing need for money, it is no wonder that once again he discouraged Menahem Poznanski from urging a friend of his to settle in Palestine. He told him that the situation had worsened, and that it was very depressing to be there. He did say that if the person was coming to be a laborer work was available if he had strong hands. Brenner, living then in Jerusalem stated that he personally was not living near the workers. He told Poznanski that if his friend came to Jerusalem, that he was willing to meet him.<sup>127</sup>

In December, he was traveling around the country giving lectures on Hebrew literature to groups of workers and teachers.<sup>128</sup> While on this tour,

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<sup>124</sup>ibid. \* 590, p. 392.

<sup>125</sup>ibid. \* 593, p. 393.

<sup>126</sup>ibid. \* 593, p. 393.

<sup>127</sup>ibid. \* 603, p. 395. This letter was written on November 1st.

<sup>128</sup>ibid. \* 612, p. 397.

writing from Rishon L'Zion, he commented that the situation of the workers was depressing, the food was horrible and there was no shelter.<sup>129</sup>

In February of 1914, he wrote that he was unable to find good quality paper on which to print "רביבים".<sup>130</sup> In an elated response to Lachower in March, he explained that he received 113 rubles which were owed to him and the money saved him for months.<sup>131</sup> Later that month he wrote Jacob Fichman and asked him if he could send him some books which he was unable to locate in Palestine.<sup>132</sup>

In May Brenner's mother died. He was very upset to learn of her death; it had been so long since he had seen her.<sup>133</sup> In the same letter, he stated that in the coming year he would no longer be working for "האחדות" and he was looking to find work either as a teacher or a clerk. If he was unable to do so, he wrote that he may leave Palestine and look for work abroad.<sup>134</sup>

On July 20th, Brenner wrote to Berditchevski announcing the birth of his son.<sup>135</sup> In another letter written the same day, his wife's name, Haya, appears for the first time. This letter announced the *Brit Milah*. He added, may it be God's will that this child arrive at the *chuppah* and not do any worse than his parents did.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>ibid. # 613, p. 397.

<sup>130</sup>ibid. # 630, p. 401.

<sup>131</sup>ibid. # 635, p. 402.

<sup>132</sup>ibid. # 637, p. 403.

<sup>133</sup>ibid. # 644, p. 404.

<sup>134</sup>ibid. p. 405.

<sup>135</sup>ibid. # 653 p. 406.

<sup>136</sup>ibid. # 654 p. 407.

On August 1st he informs Y. Yaari-Poleskin that he wanted to leave Jerusalem and move to Rishon L'Zion. He asked him to try and find him a place to live that had 3 rooms and a kitchen.<sup>137</sup>

Until Brenner's death, he was one of the most prominent authors who worked for and was published in the various workers' publications in Palestine. He also translated popular scientific articles for "השרון" and world literature for "יפת".<sup>138</sup> Brenner wrote his most famous novel, שכול וכשלון by 1914 though for unknown reasons, he held off its publication until 1920. He also wrote many short stories and literary articles in Palestine. He was known to have spoken out and written about every major event that occurred during his lifetime.

At the beginning of World War I, Brenner moved back to Jaffa and taught Hebrew literature in the Herzilia High School in Tel Aviv. He was expelled along with others from Jaffa by the Turks and moved to Hadera. Brenner was convinced that the only way that a Jewish state would come about was through Jews working together to build self supporting settlements. Brenner spent the rest of his life dedicated to promoting these ideals.

He returned to Jaffa when the British Army entered Palestine.<sup>139</sup> From 1919 through the time of his death he worked for "האדמה"<sup>140</sup> which was the journal of the political party אחדות-העבודה.<sup>141</sup> In 1920, Brenner

<sup>137</sup>ibid., \* 656 p. 407.

<sup>138</sup>ibid., p. 156.

<sup>139</sup>ibid., p. 156.

<sup>140</sup>See 1880-1970 העברית השרון, Gershon Shaked (Israel:Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Keter, 1977), p. 366.

<sup>141</sup>See ילקוט לבית-הספר, Yoseph Hayyim Brenner (Israel:Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1977), p. 10.

participated in the organization of הסתדרות העובדים, <sup>142</sup> which was to become Israel's powerful trade union. <sup>143</sup>

Brenner was killed by Arab rioters during the May Day disturbances of 1921, not far from Tel Aviv. He had been urged by his friends to move to Tel Aviv several days before because of the impending trouble, but refused to leave the family of workers with whom he had been staying. All of the bodies were found together on May 2, 1921. Apparently they had defended themselves against their attackers until their ammunition ran out.

Ironically, Brenner had published an emotional appeal for Jewish -Arab understanding in the Hebrew press several weeks prior to his death entitled "We Are All Brothers." <sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup>Shaanan, p.156.

<sup>143</sup>Brenner, p. 11.

<sup>144</sup>Halkin, p. 11.

## CHAPTER 2- THE *YISHUV* DURING THE SECOND *ALIYAH*

Not we. We do not ask for the land of Israel to dominate its Arabs and we don't seek a market for Jewish goods from the diaspora (גולה). We are seeking a homeland in the land of Israel- we want to shed the bitterness of exile...A homeland is not given or received as if it were a gift; it is not acquired by privileges or political contacts, and it is not purchased with gold or conquered by force; rather it is built by the sweat of the brow. A homeland is the historical creation and the collective enterprise of a nation (עם), the fruit of its physical, spiritual and moral labour over generations...The source of true rights to a land- like everything else- is not in political or legal authority, but in the rights of labour. The true actual owners of the land are its workers.

David Ben Gurion- 1915- A lecture to an American audience<sup>1</sup>

In order to appreciate Brenner's nonending *angst* with life in Palestine, it is necessary to investigate the condition and the problems of the *yishuv* during the period of the second *Aliyah* (1904-1914). Brenner, like many idealists living in Palestine at that time, was searching for answers to vital questions regarding the problems with which they were confronted daily.

Close to 40,000 people emigrated to Palestine during this period. One third of these people were young. According to statistics, between 70 and 90% of the new immigrants did not remain in the country. Those who stayed were affected by the upheaval and the pogroms of 1903-1905 in Russia. Most of the immigrants were either religious non-Zionist Jews who settled in the few established cities or colonies of the country or were Zionists who sought a new Jewish life style. The immigrants were divided between those who came for ideological reasons, and those who came out of despair. Some of the younger people who came over from cities in Russia and Poland were unhappy with their lives in the diaspora. They left their native countries in pursuit of a better life where they could have control of their

<sup>1</sup>See למעמד, David Ben Gurion (Tel Aviv: Am Oved and Karen ha-Negev, 1974), pp. 13-14. The occasion was a lecture to the Poale Zion conference in Cleveland, Ohio, November 1915.

own destinies. They came with enthusiasm to Palestine to work to build a homeland. The eruption of political creativity in Palestine was directly correlated with the disruption of Jewish life in Russia.<sup>2</sup>

The country was much more desolate than many anticipated. The economic situation was poor and the cultural level as a whole was low. For many, the hardships in Palestine were more difficult to endure than the problems that they left behind. Many of these people when confronted with hunger, disease, and lack of work, returned to their homes or emigrated to either Western Europe or the United States.

One of the major problems was the issue of Jewish labor. Many people realized that in order to succeed in Palestine a Jewish working class had to be created. This was based on the view that Jews in general were unproductive and not rooted in the soil. Without reordering the Jewish class structure, the settlers could not attain their own Jewish homeland. In view of this perceived reality, the two Jewish labor groups, הפועל הצעיר and פועלי ציון considered it their task to create a Jewish working class that could also cultivate the land. Their primary immediate task was to help the Jewish immigrants find work to sustain themselves.

The first Palestinian branch of פועלי ציון was established in November, 1905 in Jaffa. Many of its members had been involved with self defense movements in Eastern Europe. The party's goal was to create a Jewish state based on socialist foundations by means of a class struggle. It was Marxist in character and saw itself as the Zionist wing of the world revolutionary struggle. It sought the class entrenchment of the Jewish proletariat in Palestine and also prepared for class war. It urged for the

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<sup>2</sup>See *Zion and State*, Mitchell Cohen (New York: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1987), p. 93.

democratization of Jewish communal institutions, the formation of unions and political autonomy for the Jewish nation. This group helped create the first socialist commune in Palestine and was instrumental in the formation of the **השומר** defense organization.<sup>3</sup>

Several weeks earlier **הפועל הצעיר** was founded in Petah Tikvah. Unlike **פועלי ציון**, this party was non-Marxist, shunned socialism and it was opposed to a class war. It espoused the philosophy of A.D. Gordon as the key to developing a Jewish state. Through physical labor and returning to the soil, their lives would be healed. The dignity of labor or the religion of labor would give meaning to the lives of the pioneers. It foresaw the capitalist development as the normal course for Palestine. **הפועל הצעיר** also sought the democratization of Jewish institutions and rights for women and Jewish workers.<sup>4</sup>

The realities that the pioneers faced resulted in the formation of a new Jewish ideology that often conflicted with the ideologies of Jews living in the diaspora. The ethos of the Second *Aliyah* was self sacrificing pioneering. Judaism's religious myth was replaced with a secularized struggle for redemption. The pioneer became the new image of the Jew, standing with a plough in one hand and a rifle in the other. The conflict arose between this group of determined Jews who were building a new national future in the land of Israel and their diaspora counterpart who prayed instead for a return to Zion.<sup>5</sup>

The goal of the two parties was to find work for the young immigrant workers. Most of them were single and under the age of 25. A bitter

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 96-97.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

struggle ensued between the new immigrants and the veterans of the First *Aliyah* who owned their own farms. The veterans were not interested in the problem of Jewish labor, but rather, in making a profit. Arab labor was much cheaper and more productive. Jewish employers preferred Arabs because they made fewer demands on them than the Jewish workers who were not accustomed to physical labor. Arabs knew how to farm and were better workers. Their Jewish counterparts on the other hand, were not. In addition, the Jewish workers had difficulty adjusting to the climate and the food. All of these factors contributed to the reluctance of the members of *חובבי ציון* to even hire Jews.<sup>6</sup> This clash in attitudes set back the workers' attempt to actualize Zionism.

Several years after the formation of these parties, their original ideologies changed. Some Jews tried to hire themselves out for lower wages than the Arabs were earning. They soon discovered that they could not survive on such meager wages. By 1910 both parties despaired that Eastern European Jews would never become Palestinian farm workers. Instead of trying to create a wage-earning agricultural proletariat, a new model emerged; the Kibbutz.<sup>7</sup> Auxiliary Jewish farms and small villages outside the larger cities were formed to help serve the Jewish workers. These collective settlements served a twofold function: their communal lifestyle provided an atmosphere which combated the feelings of loneliness and isolation experienced in the new environment and they collectivized the

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<sup>6</sup>This movement was founded in 1882 as a result of the pogroms of 1881 in Russia. Its purpose was to encourage Jewish settlement in Palestine and promote Jewish national revival. By the second *Aliyah* its members in Palestine were part of the establishment. Those who remained were financially solvent and had lost their original pioneering spirit.

<sup>7</sup>*ibid.* p. 101.

Jewish laborers who were unable to compete with Arab laborers individually.<sup>8</sup>

The "conquest of labor" also embraced the Jewish right to self defense. It was untenable to continue to hire Arabs as guards for the Jewish agricultural workers. In 1909 a small group of Russian Jews formed the *השומר* society. This group was comprised of people who originally had been involved with the self-defense groups during the Russian pogroms. The new Jewish guards knew Arabic, were excellent marksmen and horsemen. They practiced night maneuvers, scouting and direction finding. The trained men even evoked the respect of the Arabs. *השומר* took over the defense of the villages in the Galilee and Judea.<sup>9</sup>

Concomitant with this rise in Jewish-Palestinian nationalism, there was a major awakening of Arab nationalism in Palestine. This phenomenon posed a serious physical threat to the lives of the Jewish settlers in Palestine. Turkey denounced the Zionist movement in 1908 as undermining the Ottoman Empire in Palestine.<sup>10</sup> The Turks began publishing anti-Zionist articles in their newspapers.

This was also a period for crucial cultural developments. Hebrew was slowly emerging as the language of the new Jewish community. It was being revived as the language of education and as a spoken language. Hebrew periodicals and newspapers were being published and Hebrew was the language of instruction in some of the newly established schools.

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<sup>8</sup>Patai, II, p.1014.

<sup>9</sup>See *A History of Israel From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time*, Howard M. Sachar (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), pp. 80-81.

<sup>10</sup>Patai, I, p. 593.

The period of the second *Aliyah* was difficult for many reasons. Aside from vital issues such as security and poverty, the Jewish settlers were in an awkward political situation. They had no legal national rights. They were idealists at heart seeking a new Jewish identity through national self-determination. Though they fought together for survival, they lacked unity in their struggle for the realization of the Zionist cause.

Brenner came to Palestine with a pessimistic outlook on life. When confronted with the realities of life there, his general despair for the human condition and disillusionment with life was further compounded. Like many others, he had difficulty adjusting to the daily hardships in Palestine. The *yishuv* was undeveloped. Jews had to band together in order to build the country. Brenner's outlook on life did not make his acclimation to the unfamiliar conditions any easier.

### CHAPTER 3 – BRENNER'S NON-FICTION WORKS

From an ideological viewpoint, Brenner fought against the Jewish past. He was not ready to attribute any importance to it. Yehezkiel Kaufman rightfully said that Brenner fostered Jewish Antisemitism because he claimed that the Jewish existence in the diaspora was a parasitic existence. The historical existence was only a source of suffering. Only through labor would the face of this society change.<sup>1</sup>

Being a harsh social critic, Brenner frequently reacted to what he saw happening around him, and what he read in the Jewish press. Brenner, a staunch idealist, criticized anyone whose views were contrary to his own. By examining his non-fiction writings which were published after his arrival in Palestine through 1914, (with the exception of those which were solely literary in nature), it is my intention to establish what issues were of primary interest and concern for Brenner. By culling his writings, I propose to recreate an image of the *yishuv* as presented through the eyes of an impassioned yet disillusioned writer. Many of the articles were published over a period of time in serial form. They appeared in "הפועל הצעיר," "הזמור," "האחדות," and "רשפים" under various pseudonyms, initials, and sometimes, under his actual signature.

Brenner took on the entire Jewish literary world of the diaspora through his non-fiction writings. He was a sharp, relentless and unforgiving critic of life both in the diaspora and for very different reasons, in the *yishuv*. Brenner was particularly incensed when anyone abroad tried to suggest solutions to the problems of the *yishuv*. He clearly indicated through his writings, that no one abroad had the right to speak out against anything that was happening in the *yishuv*. Like many Israelis today, he

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<sup>1</sup>Shaked, p. 367.

only valued or considered criticism when it was made by someone who lived in Palestine. Even then, unless the person shared his political or philosophical views, Brenner often challenged his views.

His articles rarely focused on a single issue, but rather contained many different topics. The general subject matter can be separated into 3 broad categories relating to: life in Palestine, diaspora Jewry, and commentary on the literary world.

He saw himself playing an active role in the formation of the Zionist ideal: building a Jewish homeland in Israel. Aware of the difficulties confronting the pioneers, he recognized the need to reshape the image of the Jew.<sup>2</sup> His contemporaries wanted to transform the ghettoized mold of the diaspora Jew into a strong, upright figure in Israel who was at home with physical labor and could acclimatize himself to the unfamiliar conditions of the Middle East. For Brenner, this new Jew would only come about through a total revolution which would bring about changes in the lifestyles of the pioneers, as well as in their thinking. The changes would promote a respected life of honor.<sup>3</sup>

Brenner urged the Jews of Palestine to examine other nations and learn about their cultures. This would enable them to cull the best from every country and create an even better culture for themselves.<sup>4</sup> Over a period of time, a Hebrew culture would develop. He called for the formation of interest groups to help develop the Hebrew language, literature and

<sup>2</sup>The article "מִן הַמְּשׁוּעַל" (From the Narrow Path) originally appeared in "הַפּוֹעַל הַצֵּעִיר" in 1910-1911. See כל כתבי ברנר, II, pp. 79-81.

<sup>3</sup>The article "בַּפֶּעַם הַמֵּאָה" (For the Hundreth Time) originally appeared in "רִשְׁפִּים" in 1909. See כל כתבי ברנר, II, pp. 30-34.

<sup>4</sup>ibid. p. 80.

Hebrew education.<sup>5</sup> A new education based on the utilization of Hebrew as a spoken language, and on A.D. Gordon's philosophy of returning to the land was the key, according to Brenner, for building a healthy society.<sup>6</sup> He maintained that the power to change and strengthen their lives was in their hands. Buying and working the land was the means by which they would gain respect throughout the world.<sup>7</sup> They did not want to be dependent on the Bible and did not want to be viewed as the *Shechina's* orphans.<sup>8</sup> Without a country, he realized that the Jewish people had nothing. He targeted his thoughts to his readership and mainly published his articles in workers' newspapers.

It is interesting to note that Brenner even attacked Gordon at one point for making unrealistic demands upon the workers. Gordon had criticized those people who had come over, settled, invested and eventually hired "others" to work for them. He found fault with Gordon because he contended that in reality, there were not enough Jewish workers in Palestine, and therefore, people were forced to hire Arab laborers as well.<sup>9</sup>

He was well aware of the hardships that confronted everyone living in Palestine. He often wrote with despair about how slow the whole process of change was. He was impatient with old ways that represented the past and retarded progress. Because of the conditions in Palestine, it was hard to attract new immigrants and keep them there. He feared that the limited opportunities would force settlers to retain their ghettoized image forever.

<sup>5</sup>The article "לברר העניין" (To Check the Matter) was originally published in 1911-1912 in "הפועל הצעיר." See כתבי ברנר, II, pp. 60-95.

<sup>6</sup>The article "האלה" (To the Tent) did not have the original place of publication cited. See כתבי ברנר, II, pp. 47-49.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.* p. 81.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.* p. 61.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.* p. 46.

He did not want to see the *yishuv* dependent on miracles in order to survive. He was genuinely concerned about the direction in which affairs were headed.<sup>10</sup>

Brenner stated that it was hard to write about life in Israel despite the proliferation of articles on the subject. He was not always sure what tone to use. He felt too burdened by the emphasis placed upon the future. Unlike the diaspora, he pointed out that, in spite of the hardships, there were positive things to be said about the *yishuv*. There were no pogroms in Israel, no one was starving and Jewish schools were open. In contrast with the diaspora, in Israel, people were proud of being Jewish and speaking Hebrew.<sup>11</sup>

Brenner was very critical of Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup> He viewed its inhabitants as being lazy and weak ghetto types. While he admitted that there were not many of them, he also pointed out the sad fact that there were even fewer farmers or workers in all of Palestine.<sup>13</sup> He felt that these people made a mockery out of Jerusalem, the Holy City which he depicted as a dead city.<sup>14</sup> He was outraged at the annual lottery system for housing, an ugly reality whose by-product were homeless Jews.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid. p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> The article "גם אלה אנחות" (These are also Sighs) was originally published in 1912 in "הפועל הצעיר." See כל כתבי ברנר, II, pp. 96-97.

<sup>12</sup> The article "מהספרות והעתונות שבארץ" (From the Literature and Newspapers in Israel) was originally published in 1909 in "הפועל הצעיר." See כל כתבי ברנר, II, pp. 254-264.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid. p. 258.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. p. 30.

<sup>15</sup> The article "בחינו ובעתונותנו" (In Our Lives and Our Newspapers) was originally published in 1912 in "האחדות." See כל כתבי ברנר, II, pp. 82-87.

Brenner recognized the need to organize self defense units.<sup>16</sup> In one argument where he put forth this idea, he spoke about the fact that even though Jews served in the Russian army, they were still surrounded by hatred. He shifted his discussion and focused on the Arab's hatred for Jews. At that time, there were many antisemitic articles being published in the French press. While he claimed that the Arabs could not read these papers, their antisemitic message was filtering down to them. He explained that the same hatred that Jews experienced everywhere they lived, was also present in Palestine. For that reason alone, it was imperative that Jews organize themselves so that they would be able to protect each other. Unfortunately, given Brenner's brutal death, no one was aware of how prophetic his words were.<sup>17</sup>

The lack of immigration was a terrible problem for the pioneers. Coupled with this were the staggering numbers of those who were leaving the country daily, with literally thousands opting to leave. This reality depleted the pool from which they drew to build a working class. As early as 1909 Brenner was already losing hope that this problem could be surmounted.<sup>18</sup> Brenner felt that Israel had the potential to be the answer to the Jewish problem abroad. By living in Israel, Jews could gain new respectable identities. He wanted to see new possibilities created that would attract new immigrants rather than deter them from coming.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>ibid. p. 258.

<sup>17</sup> The article "האֵלֶה" (To the Tent) did not have the original place of publication listed. See כּל כּתבֵי ברנר II, pp. 47-49.

<sup>18</sup>ibid. p. 259.

<sup>19</sup>The article "על העקר שאֵיננו" (For the Principle That Does Not Exist) was originally published in 1912 in "הזמון." See כּל כּתבֵי ברנר II, pp. 42-46.

In a report of the Zionist Congress meeting of 1912, the whole issue of immigration was discussed. The concept of the "wandering Jew" was raised. It was suggested that through the Congress, all of the wandering Jews should be encouraged "to wander" to Israel. Ber Borochov proposed that while the Zionist movement lacked the funds to finance so vast a project, it should focus on encouraging settlement in one particular place. The Congress agreed that both the emigration and immigration laws of all countries should be studied, so that this information could be available to Jews in transit. Jews should be helped both financially and with finding jobs. Brenner, while concurring in theory that the suggestions were wonderful, cynically questioned who was going to do this work, how was this program going to be launched into operation, and when was it going to start? He left his readers feeling that no concrete action was going to take place.<sup>20</sup>

Brenner, an outspoken literary voice, was not always well received. It is ironic that the majority of today's Israelis share many of his ideological views which seemed radical 70 years ago. He envisioned Israel as the center of the national Zionist movement.<sup>21</sup> He saw traditional Judaism as the main stumbling block that would prevent Israel from ever becoming the fulfillment of the Zionist dream.

Brenner had little if any respect for traditional Judaism at that point in his life. Belittling the Orthodox stance on Messianism, he appropriated messianic imagery with a slight twist. Instead of dreaming that the lamb lie peacefully with the wolf, he stated "that the lamb needed to draw upon its great past for strength, to grasp forcefully onto nationalism, in order

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid. pp. 73-75.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. p. 254.

that it may exist amongst the wolves."<sup>22</sup> Brenner wrote that something new had to be added to Judaism in order to make it more viable in the land of Israel. Only then could it help give meaning to Jewish lives. He felt that Judaism was dying. He called for a new Jew with a broader world view. People living outside of the Land wanted to see a return to faith and religion. Brenner claimed that these people were romanticising the past. A return to traditional, unchanged Judaism was a step backwards and not a move toward progress.<sup>23</sup>

In 1911, a trend of returning to God and religion infused European literature. Brenner did not want Israel to be part of this movement. He claimed that the "free Hebrew" unencumbered by Judaism was the healthy one. Brenner looked to Zionism for the infusion of content into their lives. Faith, according to him, would play no major role in their future or direction. *Mitzvot* and religion were not the answers for him, rather, labor was.<sup>24</sup>

The atmosphere abroad and at home led Brenner into the famous "פולמוס השמך", the Apostasy Controversy in which Christianity was a central issue. Almost all of the recurrent themes in his work are also worked into these articles as well. In "בעתונות ובספרות" (In the Press and Literature) which was published in הפועל הצעיר on November 10, 1910, Brenner called for the separation of nationalism and Judaism. He questioned the relevance of historical Judaism within the context of a nationalistically oriented *yishuv*. True to his ideals, he wanted to see the formation of a

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<sup>22</sup>ibid. p. 79.

<sup>23</sup>The article "בתיים ובספרות" (In Life and Literature) originally appeared in "רשפים" in 1910. See כל כתבי ברנר, II, pp. 52-60.

<sup>24</sup>ibid. pp. 54-55.

secular Jewish homeland, based on productive labor, and not a society steeped in religious Judaism. His radical views as evidenced through this controversy led to much upheaval in the *yishuv* and abroad.<sup>25</sup>

In his article, Brenner stated that the most important emphasis in life should be on מעשה, action. He interpreted Judaism as a religion based on stringent laws that did not enable people to respond or act naturally out of need or desire. Everything had to be in accordance with Jewish law. If traditional Jews had a problem, they referred back to religious sources in order to find solutions. Brenner could no longer accept this approach to life.<sup>26</sup>

Brenner then focused on his view of classical texts declaring his closer affinity with the Apocrypha than the Bible. He considered the Bible a remnant of the past, being the embodiment of the Jewish spirit. Since the New Testament was a byproduct of the Old Testament, he felt that it had the same importance as the latter and should therefore, be approached with as equal amount of respect. He foresaw no real spiritual revolution in Judaism. If Jews would recognize the New Testament as their spiritual inheritance. Furthermore, since Jesus and the prophets came from the same source he saw no real difference in their outlook.<sup>27</sup>

As for Jews relating to the Christian belief about Jesus coming to redeem Jewish sins, he saw no reason why this should alarm anyone. He

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<sup>25</sup>See *The Polemic Between Yoseph Hayim Brenner and Ahad Ha'am: 1910-1911*, Janet B. Liss, Unpublished Masters Thesis, Columbia University, 1980, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup>Brenner, p. 57.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid*, p. 58.

suggested that Jews should relate to this legend with the same religious tremor in their souls as they would when seeing a Da Vinci painting.<sup>28</sup>

He discussed the mystical elements of the legend by questioning who Jesus really was. He then asked if Jews really knew who Buddah, Moses or Isaiah were. Based on the limited knowledge about the prophets that the Jews had, he challenged whether or not they should judge Jesus any differently. He acknowledged that there was no reason to expound upon the few "facts" that are known about Jesus's life and felt that Judaism should not restrain Jews from thinking about these issues.<sup>29</sup>

With regard to conversion and assimilation, he claimed that he was not asking Jews to assimilate into the Christian world, although he did not see the loss of Reform German converts as any grave consequences to the Jewish nation. He couched the solution to the European Jewish problem in terms of emigration and living in a secular Jewish society in Palestine.<sup>30</sup> Brenner viewed conversion in pragmatic and not theological terms. When he suggested conversion for Jews in the diaspora, it was not because he viewed Christianity as being the truer or better religion, but because it was an entrance ticket into gentile society and its wealth of opportunities. He was not searching for spirituality, but rather for a way to escape the Jewish ghetto.<sup>31</sup>

Brenner's article became the major source of conflict amongst Jewish authors and intellectuals in Russia and Palestine. One of the primary

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>31</sup>See *The Traditional Jewish World in the Writings of Joseph Hayim Brenner*, Samuel Schneider (New York: Yeshiva University Dissertation, 1979), p. 4.

objections to it raised over and over again, was the condescending tone in which he chose to express himself. He repeatedly abased Orthodox Judaism and spoke with great disdain about Jewish history. This aggrieved many people and turned away many potential followers. The repercussions of this polemic were felt throughout the following year.<sup>32</sup>

Brenner claimed that no one was willing to confront the fact that religion was the root of the problem between Jews and non-Jews. He felt that Judaism had created barriers between Jews and gentiles, and therefore, he attempted to build a case for a secular Jewish nationalism in Palestine.<sup>33</sup> As an avowed atheist, he found no connection between nationalism and religion. He called on diaspora Jewry to be strong and not to rely on a messiah. He suggested that by eating *treif*, rejecting Jewish law, and inculcating the ethics of the New Testament, Jews would not be any less Jewish. He stated that his followers were nourished by Jewish literature, toiled for a free national culture, defended Jewish honor, and openly fought Jewish wars for the right to exist.<sup>34</sup>

Brenner stressed that his idea of nationalism did not require its followers to be of any specific leaning. To be a nationalist one simply had to live and play an active role in the Jewish community, and speak the nation's language, Hebrew.<sup>35</sup>

As would be expected, these thoughts were not well received by mainstream Jews. Ahad Ha'am openly fought Brenner in the Jewish press. He published several articles repudiating Brenner's position, including:

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 12-13.

"Torah From Zion" and "Religion and Nationalism." The Odessa Committee temporarily withdrew its financial support from הפועל הצעיר. Many other individuals and groups became involved in different phases of the polemic. A group of writers in Palestine met and published a collective statement in response to Brenner. After its publication, several of the people who signed it disavowed any connection with it.<sup>36</sup>

No aspect of Brenner's attitude or article escaped criticism. The only point that was continuously made in his favor, was his right to freedom of the press. This controversy did raise many important questions vis-a-vis the relationship between Jews living in the diaspora and those living in Palestine. The problems and tension created by the very nature of the dependency relationship of each group on the other, was frequently addressed and challenged by Brenner.

He wanted others to understand that the center of the Jewish world should be the land of Israel and not the diaspora. He claimed that people living in the diaspora did not share the same values as those living in Palestine. To some extent this criticism was valid, for had they shared the same values, more of them would have emigrated to Palestine.<sup>37</sup> Brenner faulted those Jews living abroad for not incorporating into their mentality that Israel was the country to which they should move. In one case a Bundist author, Abraham Coralnik, living abroad, suggested that perhaps Zionism was just a theory that in reality did not work. He wanted to poll the people and see if they still adhered to Zionist ideology. If the results showed that they were not in accord with this philosophy, he suggested that

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<sup>36</sup> ibid. p. 30.

<sup>37</sup> The article "הרהורי הקורא" (The Thoughts of the Reader) was originally published in 1910 in "הפועל הצעיר." See כחבי ברנר, II, pp. 247-250.

they should completely stop what they were presently doing. Brenner in utter dismay, questioned how those who chose to live in Palestine were supposed to go about quitting.<sup>38</sup>

Brenner had great difficulty relating seriously to groups such as the World Zionist Congress or anyone who supposedly spoke for Palestine. He could not fathom how people could meet abroad to discuss the future of Jewish Palestine. He felt that the discussions were a waste of time and purely academic, having no grounding in reality. Nothing was accomplished other than arranging large gatherings of people. In one article written in 1909, he sarcastically questioned what new approach the "Zionists" would be taking that year.<sup>39</sup> For him, the only way to solve the problems in Palestine was by living there and confronting the realities of everyday life on a daily basis. He was also concerned that these people really did not care about the plight of the actual worker. Meeting annually abroad would do nothing to expedite a solution to the varied difficulties of daily living.<sup>40</sup> At one point he suggested that it might be of some benefit if the Congress were to actually meet in Palestine. By doing so, they would have the opportunity to become familiar with what they were spending their time talking about.<sup>41</sup>

Brenner, like many others, was unhappy with the Turkish rule in Palestine and felt that the Jews needed their own self autonomy in order to obtain their desired goal, a Jewish homeland. He faulted those living in the diaspora who were shortsighted enough to actually be happy with Turkish rule. In particular he reacted to M. Dizengoff's claim that "there is no doubt

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid. p. 52.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid. p. 40.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid. p. 261.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid. p. 70.

that the land of Turkey can be a good and direct way for us, for the land of Israel." Dizengoff went on to say that he felt that Turkey could be trusted. Brenner took issue with every point that Dizengoff made.<sup>42</sup>

Another source of ongoing conflict with diaspora Jewry was caused by the whole issue of תלוקה and receiving charity from abroad. Brenner did not like the idea of being dependent on foreign sources, albeit Jewish, for monetary support. He felt that the system of distribution of the funds was unjust. He did not like the situation in which the community at large was under the potential threat of having funds withheld because donors may not agree with a particular course of action taken by it.<sup>43</sup> This issue really came to a head in the Apostasy Controversy. Brenner felt that it was an injustice for the Odessa Committee to cut off the funds to הפועל הצעיר just because they did not like what he had written. Once again his reaction was based on his feeling that people should come to Palestine, and then try to make changes from within the country. He was uncomfortable with the blatant power struggle created by the very existence of the diaspora support.

In one situation in 1910 there was an incident where Jews abroad were trying to raise money to donate to the Herzl forest in Palestine. Brenner could not believe how the pettiness of this project was arousing so much interest, concern and debate. It seemed that there was a conflict over whether these Zionists from Russia, Poland and America would want these same donations to be used for a Hebrew University and a daily newspaper. Brenner openly attacked those "Zionists" who chose not to immigrate. He questioned what it meant to be a Zionist and choose to remain in the

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid. p. 261.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid. p. 31.

diaspora. He angrily challenged them to come to Israel. Qualifying his position, he added that after 2000 years of living in the diaspora, it was not enough to stay there and just collect money to send to Israel.<sup>44</sup> Brenner constantly wrote about the yawning gap between those living in Israel and those who remained outside of her borders.<sup>45</sup>

He was not blind to reality. He realized that Jews have a collective memory and that the pogroms of Russia occurred in the not so distant past. Recognizing that although it was not easy to shed the past, he also was not ready to accept passively what was happening to the Jew in the world at large.<sup>46</sup> Many of his articles are filled with reports of antisemitism abroad. He constantly addressed the problems in Russia, England, Poland, France, and throughout Europe.<sup>47</sup>

Brenner was diametrically opposed to having any religious influence thrust upon the *yishuv*. He had absolutely no tolerance for Orthodox Jewry and had no qualms about expressing his negative feelings toward them repeatedly. In one of his first articles written in Palestine, he challenged the editor of the Orthodox journal "חבצלת" who also wished to see a higher level of literature published. He accused this editor of essentially being shallow, as he searched for simple solutions and skirted long range problems. The editor called on the people to rise above materialism. He promoted the need for more *Yeshivot*, synagogues and the publication of more religious literature. He also called on everyone to fulfill their obligation of obliterating the terrible sin that was being committed in Jaffa, referring to a Jewish owned cafe that was open for business on

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<sup>44</sup>*ibid.* p. 41.

<sup>45</sup>*ibid.* pp. 96-97.

<sup>46</sup>*ibid.* p. 35.

<sup>47</sup>*ibid.* pp. 60-95.

Shabbat. Brenner was outraged with the presumption inherent in this article that the religious element of the community had a right to interfere or imply that Jews were less holy because they choose to ignore the injunction against working on Shabbat.<sup>48</sup> He wanted the people to accept the responsibility of building and determining their own future. He was not willing to sit around and wait for the Messiah to put them on the right course of action. He also discussed a book published by A.Z. Rabinowitz in which he stated that Jews suffer because God wanted them to suffer. Brenner challenged the basic premise of this work.<sup>49</sup>

He felt that Judaism and Orthodox Jewry in particular were the stumbling blocks to progress. He viewed the religious type as the ghettoized image of the Jew who would keep them from being free and successful.<sup>50</sup> The rabbis naturally wanted everyone to be religious.<sup>51</sup> The conflict between secularism and religion was just as prevalent in Palestine as it was in Eastern Europe.

One means by which Brenner sought to improve the lot of the Jew was by producing more Hebrew literature. The literature would serve many purposes. It would spiritually elevate its readers, it would educate them, and it would broaden their perspective of the world. Brenner advocated translating the great classics of the world into Hebrew, as well as scientific literature that was needed for the industrial world.

From the very beginning of his new life in Palestine he personally fought the war for the proliferation of Hebrew Literature. Given that he

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<sup>48</sup>*ibid.* p. 256.

<sup>49</sup>*ibid.* pp. 257-258.

<sup>50</sup>*ibid.* pp. 30-31.

<sup>51</sup>The article "מפנקס קטן" (From a Small Accountbook) was originally published in 1912 in "הזמן." See כחבי ברנר, II, pp. 50-51.

was a professional in the field, he was also the harshest critic where literary matters were concerned. He wanted to see honest and realistic literature written. Unlike some, Brenner was not interested in the technical aspects of the Hebrew language, as for example, where the correct place to put a comma was, but rather, in promoting its usage. His concerns were on a different level. He wanted to see, for example, the development of teenage literature. He was concerned about how to address that group and how to write for them.<sup>52</sup>

He acknowledged that many Hebrew literary journals were being published, but that none with quality existed. The first Hebrew journal published quarterly in Palestine was "העומר." Brenner in his emphatic way, questioned who gave the editors the authority to decide what direction to take with the journal. He accused the publication of being too sympathetic to all sides.<sup>53</sup> Brenner of course never felt the need to explain his motivations for writing or justify his position. After praising some newly published works which came out in 1909, he addressed the newspapers in Palestine. Using a sarcastic approach typical of him, he inferred that the only reason there were two different papers there was because the publishers do not have enough work to do. His point was that there was no need for two separate newspapers in such a small place.<sup>54</sup>

He often introduced new Hebrew writers by way of criticism to his readership. He also reviewed anything written in Hebrew and occasionally reviewed Yiddish works. In one article, he spoke of two new poets whose work made a definitive break with the past. He commented that their styles

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<sup>52</sup>ibid, p. 255.

<sup>53</sup>ibid, p. 259.

<sup>54</sup>ibid, p. 263.

were unknown to Hebrew Literature. These new poets were Hayyim Nachman Bialik and Saul Chernechovsky.<sup>55</sup>

In another article Brenner implied that a new generation would arise which would produce a new literature of its own. He criticized a "*paytan*," Yaakov Steinberg who wrote *piyutim* and poetry employing imagery of the land of Israel which was unauthentic. He claimed that Steinberg had no world view, no eternal values or strong feelings.<sup>56</sup> In the same article Brenner praised the talented writer Hirsh David Nomberg. This writer focused on all the subjects which bothered Brenner and therefore, was credited by him as having guts and spirit.<sup>57</sup>

In 1911 Eliezer Ben Yehuda celebrated his 50th birthday and was honored in the Hebrew Press. In one of the articles, Ben Yehuda was criticized because he did not attend a synagogue. This infuriated Brenner. He in turn, lambasted the paper for its blatant arrogance and spoke very highly of Ben Yehuda. He complimented him for being the first to speak Hebrew at home, for his dictionary project, and for the fact that he chose to settle in Palestine. He credited him with infusing a new vital spirit into Jerusalem. But at the same time, Brenner was also true to himself. Despite the praise and respect he felt for Ben Yehuda, he did criticize him for publishing what people wanted to read in Europe, as opposed to the truth. Even Brenner felt that this alone should not preclude the readers from celebrating Ben Yehuda's 50th birthday with pride.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>ibid. pp. 79-81.

<sup>56</sup>ibid. p. 248.

<sup>57</sup>ibid. p. 249.

<sup>58</sup>ibid. pp. 55-56.

Brenner disagreed in one article with the claim that Jews are both rich monetarily and in spirit. According to him, Jews only claim to be rich in spirit. He complained that this richness in spirit is not reflected in either their language or their literature. Someone came to him and asked him for a Hebrew reading list and Brenner was at a loss as to what to recommend to him. He continued to discuss the paucity of Hebrew literature. He stated that while Jews know a lot of languages, they do not own one national language.<sup>59</sup>

The question of whether Yiddish or Hebrew should be the language of the Jewish people was also discussed by Brenner. His perspective was somewhat antithetical to what one would expect his position to be. He felt that Yiddish should remain the main language of diaspora Jewry but not of Jews living in the land of Israel. It was natural and not artificial to speak Hebrew in Israel because there people understood and used the language.<sup>60</sup> He advocated everyone speaking Yiddish in the diaspora because he thought that it gave meaning and honor to Jewish life. Yiddish was an acknowledged part of the culture abroad. At the same time, he encouraged those parents to teach their children Hebrew and provide them a good Jewish education.<sup>61</sup>

Brenner often implied that he felt that the Jewish press was not being honest with its reporting. He accused the press of down-playing incidents of antisemitism. His message to both the readership and the press at large was to be careful.<sup>62</sup> Jews were also accused of controlling the press. He questioned the logic of this accusation. If this were in fact true,

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid. p. 75.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid. p. 254.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid. p. 75.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid. p. 80.

why would Jews need their own newspapers published in their own languages?<sup>63</sup>

Brenner wrote about a journal entitled:

"אורגן המוקדש לעניני האמיגראציה והקולוניאציה היהודית" (The Organ Dedicated to Matters of Jewish Emigration and Colonization) a monthly published in Kiev.<sup>64</sup> The editor was Dr. D. Yochelman. The first issue came out in 1911 in Kiev. The irony which Brenner pointed out was that in the three issues which had come out through 1912, the land of Israel and Palestine were never mentioned in it. This journal with its focus on the Jewish nation and its future, never once suggested the Middle East as a possible solution.<sup>65</sup>

Brenner wrote about a new Hebrew publication, "הדרור" that came out in America. He criticized the need for such a paper. He questioned why Jews living in America wanted to read a Hebrew journal and predicted that such a venture would not survive. He claimed that if its sole purpose was to promote the use of the Hebrew language, then its publication was unwarranted. He did not think that the topics in it were of any legitimate concern to anyone. This is not surprising because it contained articles on Rabbis, hopeful dreams, *mitzvot* and assimilation. He was not fond of the editor, Reuben Brainin because he thought that he was self-serving. This fact alone probably prompted the tone of this article. It is not surprising that he reacted so negatively to this publication. He pointed out that this work contained no articles that discussed the content of American Jewish life. He found fault with a paper that purposely was written in easy

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<sup>63</sup>ibid. p. 89.

<sup>64</sup>I was unable to locate any other reference to this publication or to its editor.

<sup>65</sup>ibid. p. 93.

Hebrew in order to attract a larger readership. He claimed that the contents of the paper and not the Hebrew level was what attracted its following. He insisted that it needed a new angle if it were to survive.<sup>66</sup>

In another article it was suggested that one way to reach the Arabs living in Palestine would be by creating a Jewish controlled Arabic newspaper. The article stressed the role of the press in influencing people. Brenner questioned why Jews should give the Arabs a paper that they themselves feel no need for in the first place. He claimed that this project was both a waste of time and energy and that it was doomed to failure. He questioned who exactly was supposed to write for this paper. He wisely suggested that these same writers could accomplish the same goal by writing for existing Arabic newspapers. He aptly pointed out that Jews did not even bother to publish an Arabic newspaper for the *Sefardim* living in Palestine whose native tongue was also Arabic. He suggested that Jewish energy should be channeled into more productive ventures.<sup>67</sup>

In conclusion, Brenner was an active participant in society. He felt a responsibility to write and to react in print to what was going on around him in Palestine, and in the Jewish world at large. He was a man with impassioned convictions. While I have only highlighted the issues that he covered, it is important to note that many of his themes appeared over and over again, throughout much of his writings. His relentless criticism did not lessen during this 6 year time period. The overall impression derived from these works is that Brenner was an angry, unhappy, depressed individual, with an extremely important cause, which he constantly urged upon his readers. He believed in Zionism and in building the land of Israel as

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<sup>66</sup>ibid. pp. 80-81.

<sup>67</sup>ibid. pp. 48-49.

the Jewish homeland. He was physically there to be a part of this historical process. He felt that all Jews who chose to leave Europe should have emigrated to Palestine, to help bring about the fulfillment of this age old dream. He was pained by the reality that he was forced to confront every day. This reality was what he repeatedly reacted to in his non-fiction articles.

## CHAPTER 4 – A CLOSE LOOK AT TWO SHORT NOVELS

If one can say that they really have a future- I do not know. It is possible that they themselves do not realize how far they are going with their thoughts, if they knew, they would be shocked. Anyway, things like this should be completely clear- they should hear themselves and know their leaders.

Ahad Ha-am 1

The focus of this chapter will be on *בין מים למים*, *Between Water and Water* and *מכאן ומכאן* *From Here and From There*, the first two novels that Brenner wrote in Palestine. My goal is to highlight the various themes brought out in each of these works which reflected life during that period. While much literary criticism has been written on his works, it is not my intention to present another literary critique.

During Brenner's first year in Palestine he wrote his novel *בין מים למים*, *Between Water and Water*. It is important for my research to establish the approximate date of his completion of this work for several reasons. Though Brenner claims to have written it within several weeks of his arrival in Palestine, Yitzhak Bacon has shown that this is impossible. His novel included several events that were based on real incidents which were recorded in the press. Given the contents of this material, Bacon concluded that he spent at least six months writing it.<sup>2</sup>

This novel does not show the same depth or insight into life in the *yishuv* as in his later works. It is my contention that he had not lived in Palestine long enough to create a major work that incorporated the totality

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<sup>1</sup>The article "תורה מציון" (Torah from Zion) appeared in "יילקוט קטן" in "השלוח", 1911, pp. 360-366.

<sup>2</sup>See *בשנה הראשונה*, Yitzhak Bacon (Israel: Papyrus Publishing House, 1981), pp. 13-23.

of his surroundings. Lacking first hand experience, Brenner in all likelihood chose to use the press in an attempt to create an authentic novel written in Palestine. Brenner skillfully developed a plot which evolves around several different triangled relationships. The different themes in the novel, seemed to be of secondary importance to the actual plot. The intricacies of the relationships between the characters was more intriguing for Brenner.

The novel focuses primarily on Saul, who is a fairly stable character. He believes strongly in his ideals, is a committed teacher, and hopes to marry and have children. As he becomes disappointed in the pursuit of unfulfilled love, he becomes pessimistic and loses his zeal for life. His brother Aaron, on the other hand, is a Zionist who has faith in Palestine and devotes his energies to helping build a Jewish state. He is young and somewhat immature. Throughout the novel Brenner makes it clear that men like him were too intellectual to have successful marriages. He never has relationships with women. For Aaron, Palestine was home and he was not among those who sought to return to Europe. By the end of the story Aaron is happy being a guard in a *moshav* in contrast to Saul who feels a deep emptiness inside. The book ends with the feeling that no matter what, life will go on.

Most of the novel is set in Jerusalem. At different points in the novel people travel to the Valley of Jezreel, Jaffa, a *moshav*, and abroad to London and Vienna. From the beginning, Jerusalem is seen as a city with a mystical aura. The story begins with the contrasting image of a Jewish woman sitting on her porch reading Hebrew poetry aloud in a Sefardic accent, and three Arabs on camels who pass by peacefully below on the street.<sup>3</sup> Not long after that scene, two Hebrew teachers walking in the

<sup>3</sup>See כל כתבי ברנר, v. I, p. 293.

street, pass a young Arab woman who was carrying a bundle on her head. Behind her were young Arab boys leading donkeys carrying stones. Behind them was a Galician Jew on a *Shabbas* walk with his family.<sup>4</sup> Despite the obvious differences between the people presented, Brenner's Jerusalem was peacefully portrayed.

The two teachers came from a *moshav* to talk to Saul Gamzu. Their elitism was sensed immediately. When his sister Ahuda told them that she would get him, they in a typical pedantic fashion corrected her Hebrew. Upon her exit, they were quick to pick up her book to see what she was reading. Given that it was poetry, they discounted her ability to read anything that they would consider being serious or worthwhile. Accordingly, this book obviously reflected her low intelligence, otherwise she would have been reading a work of real literary worth.<sup>5</sup>

Saul's family was originally from Russia. His father Neḥemyā was a staunch member of חובבי ציון.<sup>6</sup> Neḥemya believed in the importance of working the land. Leah, his wife, told the family that Neḥemya believed that Jews were exiled because of their sins and therefore were distanced from the land. He insisted that until Jews return to the land, they will not be called Jews.<sup>7</sup>

Leah told a story about her husband which happened during a pogrom in their Russian village. This story illustrates Neḥemya's belief in the continuity of the Jewish people. As they were witnessing what was going on around them, Leah out of fear, asked him if he thought that they were

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<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.* p. 295.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.* p. 294.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.* p. 295.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.* p. 307.

going to survive. He responded: "Israel will live forever." She told him that she knew that, but that was not what she was asking.<sup>8</sup>

Nehemya, like most Jewish parents, wanted his children to have good educations. He sent Saul, the eldest, to Europe to study medicine. Nehemya died of malaria on their *moshav* while Saul was in Europe. Saul returned home without completing his education. The family then moved to Jerusalem.

Leah, the typical Jewish mother was worried about her sons finding work. She was not concerned with Ahuda's employment because it was not as crucial for her to work.<sup>9</sup> Saul was currently an unemployed teacher and Aaron worked as a farm hand.

Leah's neighbor, Shayna Hinda was the stereotypical yenta. This woman was not very bright and prattled endlessly. Shayna Hinda, for example, could not understand the importance of Jewish youth working the land.<sup>10</sup> Given that her own son owned a farm and the general atmosphere of the country at that time, it is hard to imagine how someone could not have at least understood the philosophy of Jewish labor.

Through a discussion with Leah, the poverty in Jerusalem became apparent. They talked about the lack of fish and meat for Shabbat. They made a passing reference to an unavoidable water shortage in Jerusalem. They noted that many impoverished people were falling ill. When Leah tried to explain that "those who know" were saying people were getting sick from the meat they were buying, Shayna Hinda brushed this aside claiming all the

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<sup>8</sup>ibid.

<sup>9</sup>ibid., p. 296.

<sup>10</sup>ibid., p. 307.

problems and diseases come from the wise who have all the answers.<sup>11</sup> It did not occur to her that they may be right.

Criticism was voiced in the novel about both the negative influence of the diaspora on the *yishuv* and a feeling of disappointment regarding the attitude of the generation born in Palestine. It was suggested that those emigrants should forget what they "knew" and start all over. There was a need for beginning Jewish agriculture, Jewish schools, Jewish factories and even a Jewish stage.<sup>12</sup> The native offspring of the farmers' loins were accused of being dreamers. They did not want to work and spent their time thinking about being in Paris or Barcelona. They also were reported to have no talent or training to do anything productive.<sup>13</sup> The irony of this criticism was that it covered all of the youth in Palestine whether they were immigrants or natives. This broad generalization discounted the worth of an entire generation and implied that they were incapable of creating what was needed in order to build a Jewish state.

Some of the major problems of the time were presented in the novel. First there was the problem of emigration. There were many people who came and left the *yishuv*. People who came to look at the country as if they were tourists, and then left not liking what they saw, were looked upon with askance. Brenner wrote that "the princes" were the ones who left. Both the *תלוקה* and the general distribution of charitable funds was called into question. The "French assimilationists" were blamed for causing problems in the *yishuv*. This was an attack on the *Alliance Juive* School.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>ibid. p. 297.

<sup>12</sup>ibid. p. 298.

<sup>13</sup>ibid.

<sup>14</sup>ibid.

There was a noticeable lack of culture in Palestine. Penina, Saul's foiled love, stated that life was monotonous. In the midst of an argument they were having over her desire to leave the country, she asked him what there was to do there. She complained that one could not even get a book to read and there was no theatre to attend.<sup>15</sup>

The problems of the *yishuv* could only be solved by the Jewish worker who, according to the novel, would bring about redemption. Aaron, in a discussion with his brother Saul, defined his commitment to the Jewish cause. He felt that no one had the right to live for himself. Saul, on the other hand, stressed the rights of the individual and felt that every healthy Jew had the obligation of building a home and having children. Aaron claimed that he could never marry and challenged Saul to point out one decent marriage and happy family either in Russia or in the *yishuv*.<sup>16</sup> Aaron's willingness to give up marriage for the "cause" is a noble act that in reality is a cover for something else. Perhaps Aaron represented where Brenner was at that point of his life vis-a-vis his own feelings of inadequacies with women.

Even though earlier in the book Arabs were described as blending in nicely with the local scenery, the Arab/Jewish problem surfaced throughout the work. The Arab influence was felt even in the language. The Arabic phrase, "לא חביבי" was used regularly by Brenner. Despite the negative incidents described in the book, there was also a peaceful and positive side of the situation presented. Saul for example, worked with Arab well--diggers in Jerusalem.

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<sup>15</sup>ibid. p. 307.

<sup>16</sup>ibid. p. 300.

in one instance, within a few days it was reported that the Arabs managed to uproot over 1200 newly planted saplings. When the Jewish guard finally realized what was going on, he called out for help. The Arabs found him and beat him up. The guard died from the beating.<sup>17</sup>

Part of the conflict between the two groups was the realization by the Jews that the Arabs were better workers than they were. This is made very clear in the following illustration. Issachar ben Gershon, Shayna Hinda's oldest son, preferred hiring Arab laborers over Jewish laborers. He complained that 20 years ago there were real Jewish workers. Times had changed. Jewish farmers were supposed to be able to afford to hire Jewish laborers who were not even capable of doing the work. He gave the following example.

Several weeks ago, when there was a need for digging holes for the saplings, I had to pay Aaron a *grush* for every hole. There was Aaron, digging 12 holes a day, and what kind of holes? Ruined, not fit for anything, and he received 12 *grush* and still wasn't satisfied. From the beginning, he would run into the city all the time, at the same time that the Arabs, a people similar to a donkey, each received only 8 *grush* per day and dug at least 15 holes, holes that the digger could be buried in, with his *kaffiyah*..<sup>18</sup>

At his own wedding, Issachar went into a diatribe against חובבי ציון for not doing business with the *moshav*. He questioned why they did not encourage industry in that area knowing that it had the manpower to support it. He was referring to the Arabs. The irony is that Issachar had married Saul's sister Ahuda with the agreement that he would not hire Arab laborers anymore. Realizing this, he dropped the monologue.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.* p. 298.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.* p. 307.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 317-318.

On April 27, 1909 there was a gathering held in Jerusalem at *Beit Am* for 3 workers who were murdered by Arabs.<sup>20</sup> Brenner worked this event into his novel through the death of Yankel, the guard from the *moshav*. He used this opportunity to raise many of the country's problems through the talks given at the memorial program for Yankel. It incidentally was also held at *Beit Am*. Aaron left his work with Issachar and took Yankel's job on the *moshav*.

In one of the impassioned speeches the workers' conditions were discussed. The speaker spoke with sadness about their lack of comfortable living quarters and hot food. They work in hot weather, their lives are endangered because of the Arabs, and in addition to which, the Jewish farmers prefer to hire Arabs. Justifiably so, he stated that due to the prevalent conditions, many workers want to leave Palestine. He went on to describe a life filled with pain and problems.<sup>21</sup>

He spoke of the conflict of the intellectual who comes to Palestine in search of a different life. The ideal or the dream passes very quickly as this person sees that the land is for Christian Arabs. This person then feels that there is no hope for him for he is without proper and useful talents and skills. The speaker said that this intellectual is analogous to a poet whose work is rejected and is told that he has no talent for writing. Where then does the poet turn? All of this is part of a national problem. He advocated training Jews for physical labor. Espousing Brenner's philosophy, he insisted that the youth of the *yishuv* can exist without Judaism. The whole nation is failing. The speaker referred negatively to Jerusalem, the Jewish ghetto filled with sick people, poor people and religious fanatics. He

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<sup>20</sup>Bacon, pp. 16-20.

<sup>21</sup>כל כחבי ברנר, pp. 308-309.

closed by pointing out that every movement has its martyrs but that does not give anyone license to kill.<sup>22</sup>

Another person spoke and said that there is something to be learned from this incident. Empathically he pointed out that even the Arabs are right in a certain way. He stated that "our chosenness" is not recognized by the rest of the world, and especially with regard to our rights to the land of Israel. He ended with the thought that the truth is dangling atop a volcano.<sup>23</sup> How prophetic were Brenner's thoughts!

David, a poet, who was unhappy with life in Palestine complained that there was no reason to make Yankel a hero because he died at the hands of Arabs. His reaction to the incident was most likely based on the information which came out following the deaths of the three guards who were really killed. Information not reported revealed that only one of the three was killed while on guard duty. This was Brenner's way of protesting the automatic hero status accorded to anyone who may have appeared to have died in the line of duty, so to speak. It appears that he was also challenging the right of the press to print sensationalist journalism and was calling them into account for not striving to report the truth.

Brenner's description of the crowd showed the types of people who lived in Jerusalem and were active in the Zionist cause. It was primarily an emigrant crowd, ghetto types, mostly Russian Jews. He wrote that had these same people been in New York, they were the ones who would have been attending picnics. Because they were in Palestine, they were loyal Hebrews (sic). The crowd included aristocrats, students, a doctor and his wife, clerks, a head of an institution, an old *Hovev Zionik*, and even a

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<sup>22</sup>ibid.

<sup>23</sup>ibid.

token Sefardic woman. He commented that she was probably the only Sefardic woman in Jerusalem who had attended the memorial gathering.<sup>24</sup>

David and Saul are pitted against each other over ideological conflicts and their feelings for Penina. The conflict between the two men as paralleled with their Biblical namesakes, has a predictable outcome from its very onset. David winds up leaving the country as does Penina. Even though it is not really clear whether they remain together abroad, Saul still loses in the end as Penina chooses to desert him.

Saul was angry with David and could not understand his dislike for teaching. Saul wondered how it was possible for anyone not to like teaching. Knowing that David wanted to return abroad, Saul told him that everything there was "artificial, unnatural and hurtful."<sup>25</sup> But in Palestine, before the schools were closed because of widespread malaria, he had a wonderfully uplifting teaching experience that could only happen there. During a Bible lesson, one of the students raised his hand and exclaimed that his father had taken him to the very place that Saul was talking about in the lesson. Saul was very excited about the thrill of being able to teach in the land where history was made.<sup>26</sup> Experiences like that could not be had in the diaspora.

As his friend, Saul tried to convince David to stay in Palestine, where he could be an individual, respected and not ashamed. His motivation was also centered around his fear that Penina would choose to go abroad with David. In contrast with the average Zionist, Saul admitted to David that he did not think that Pinsker and Herzl's dreams would be realized in the land

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<sup>24</sup>ibid.

<sup>25</sup>ibid., p. 302.

<sup>26</sup>ibid.

of Israel. He did not think that it was possible to solve the Jewish problem, but he did feel that they could work on saving themselves as individuals.<sup>27</sup>

Continuing his conversation with David, Saul gives a passionate speech trying to convince a person with talent to stay in Palestine. His arguments reflect the desperate feeling that this sensitive issue evoked. Saul told David that he felt that Russian Jews like themselves could make it there. If on the other hand a Jew from Vienna or Crakow were to ask him if he should make *aliyah*, he did not know how he would respond. He spoke of both the bitterness and the yoke of the diaspora being just as strong in Palestine as it was abroad. Even though it was not easy, everyone needed to figure out for himself how to adjust to this new life. Everyone comes there with a different history and background, with different dreams, seeking solutions to his or her own situations. They all had one thing in common and that is that they are in Palestine. Saul asked David to consider all the material that he had produced while living there as an indication of how well his adjustment had actually been.<sup>28</sup>

David is cast in a negative light from the beginning. He is not committed to the "Jewish cause" at all. It is probably coincidental that he happens to write in Hebrew. There is certainly no ideological pull towards the language. He is basically a playboy and enjoys toying with women. Like most of Brenner's male characters, he is young and immature and thoughtless. One of the main reasons that he was so willing to leave the country was the fact that there was nothing special about the women there. In Vienna, on the other hand, girl-watching was a pleasurable pastime for

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 303.

him.<sup>29</sup> Through David, Brenner is pointing out that people leave the country for a variety of reasons, some more "legitimate" than others.

In another conversation with Penina, Saul tells her that if the quality of life is poor in Palestine, then it is their fault. They could be richer.<sup>30</sup> Referring back to David, he stated that if there was not enough culture in Palestine for him, that he should dedicate himself to building a culture.<sup>31</sup> Saul believed in the individual's responsibility to take control and make changes. He was not willing to accept deficiencies as excuses for leaving the country.

Brenner incorporated a suicide into the story that was based on an actual suicide reported in the news.<sup>32</sup> The shared details of two suicides included the fact that both threw themselves into a well, both had hats located in close proximity to the bodies, and both had a doctor at the scene who played the role as social commentator, if nothing else. In the novel, the Doctor accused the younger generation of wasting itself. This, according to the doctor, was seen in direct comparison with the previous generation which had ideals on which to build.<sup>33</sup>

The future of Jewish Palestine and the Second *Aliyah* is called into question in this novel. The characters caught in the middle of the water, *Between Waters and Waters* really do not know where they stand. They faced difficult times and had no immediate solutions in sight. Brenner leaves them with no future. He does not marry anyone off who is capable of having children. Those eligible either leave the country, do not want to get

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<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 313.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 314.

<sup>32</sup>Bacon, p. 20.

<sup>33</sup>כל כתבי ברנר, p. 317.

married, or are incapable of sustaining a relationship with a member of the opposite sex. In order to insure survival, major changes had to take effect. Brenner indicated this throughout the novel. Ahuda through her marriage, became a sacrificial lamb for Zionism. Her marriage assured the pioneers that at least one farmer would continue to hire Jews.

Water symbolizes life. By being caught between the waters, the characters dangled between life and death. This work, Brenner's first in Palestine, represented that constant tenuous struggle to remain alive.

Brenner wrote *מכאן ומכאן* *From Here and From There* between the winters of 1910 and 1911.<sup>34</sup> This novel centers around three characters, all Russian Jews. Arie Lapidot, is a *Maskil* who served as a government rabbi in Russia. Unable to find work as a rabbi after making *aliyah*, Arie becomes thoroughly encompassed in the philosophy of Jewish labor and the importance of returning to the land. Arie is a prototype of A.D. Gordon. His nephew, David Diasporen, came to Palestine after living for a short time with his sister's family in Crakow and then with his brother in Chicago. David, an advocate of revolution, has no Jewish connection whatsoever in the beginning of the novel. His making *aliyah* was part of his own idealistic search to find out more about himself. While in Crakow, he meets a Hebrew writer who at that point was an ardent Zionist. The writer upon making *aliyah* becomes very disillusioned with the *yishuv* and constantly attacks its inaction. There are no real solutions offered in the book by Brenner. It, too, ends like most of his works on a note of resolve, that life will go on with all of its challenges and disappointments.

<sup>34</sup>See *ילקוט לבית-הספר*, Brenner, Y. H. (Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1977), p. 209.

Perhaps Brenner's endings do not offer solutions because he himself honestly did not have them.

*From Here and From There* opens in Poland. The story moves to Russia, back to Poland, to Chicago and finally ends in Palestine. The primary setting in Palestine is an established *moshav* that is located beside an Arab village, approximately 3 hours walking distance from Jaffa. The plot moves on several brief occasions to Jaffa and the road between these two places.

The three main characters in the novel are all stereotypes. Each one represents a segment of the emigrant population in the *yishuv*. By looking at the character development of each, the reader will have a clearer image of both the complexities and the make-up of the *yishuv* during the Second *Aliyah* period.

David Diasporen was educated in Russian state schools. His father, a religious Jew, did not provide his children with a traditional Jewish education. David could not read Hebrew upon his arrival to Palestine.<sup>35</sup>

David had an antagonistic relationship with his father as a teenager. Curiously, his father did not look like a stereotypical Jew. He was built like a strong Russian. He believed that a man had to take care of himself and prided himself on his reputation of being able to do business with the Russians at the fairs.<sup>36</sup>

David read a lot of secular literature which served as a source of conflict between him and his father. He was also involved with a Russian study group that met to discuss different works. As a socialist, he was not

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<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.* p. 146.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.* p. 140.

particularly interested in anything Jewish.<sup>37</sup> His father feared that he had raised a "little goy."<sup>38</sup>

One night after returning home from the study group, goading David, his father asked him if "Bogdan Chmielnicki" was still around. He was referring to Anton, one of David's friends who was "cruel, simple and had a Russian soul."<sup>39</sup> David was angry and claimed that his father manipulated history for his own benefit. He challenged his father by asking him if he really knew anything about Chmielnicki. He proceeded to tell him that in 1648, this Russian patriot fought against the Poles, who had oppressed the Ukrainians. His father asked him what he knew about the Massacres of 1648. David told his father that he was not interested in knowing about them and dismissed them.<sup>40</sup>

David, a typical rebellious son was not interested in learning anything from his father. He rejected his values and his Judaism. The following story illustrates how little he really knew about Judaism. He remembered going to synagogue once with his father as a child. Standing under his father's *tallit*, he recalled hearing the words, "חתן בראשית" and "חתן תורה." He assumed in retrospect that it must have been the celebration of the Festival of *Shavuot* and wondered if Jews still observe that holiday.<sup>41</sup> As an anti-nationalist, he had no desire to know anything about **that book** which his father referred to sentimentally.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>ibid. p. 142.

<sup>38</sup>ibid. p. 143.

<sup>39</sup>ibid. p. 144.

<sup>40</sup>ibid. p. 145.

<sup>41</sup>ibid. p. 146.

<sup>42</sup>ibid. p. 147.

The third main character, the Hebrew writer, met David at his sister's house after his parents had died. In the beginning, David did not like the writer. David was only acquainted with Jewish writers who wrote in Yiddish and did not understand why this man wrote in Hebrew. David also expected anyone who was interested in Jewish "things" to be pious. The writer did not fit any of David's preconceived notions.<sup>43</sup>

The writer's agenda was the Jewish need to break out of the ghetto. He favored removing from the prayerbook all the passages suggesting that Jews were the chosen people. He also advocated removing anything that hinted of nationalism. Jewish national pride would not heal the wounds, and flowery writings on nationalism were not the answer either.<sup>44</sup> His suggestions were very similar to the changes made by the early Reformers.

The writer felt that their times demanded action. Young Jews needed to have an understanding of what their nation is. He claimed that for hundreds of years for example, they have lived amongst the Poles. The Poles in turn have spit in Jewish faces for hundreds of years, while Jews just wiped their faces and continued to write *pilpul*. The time had come for Jews to start valuing their lives. He advocated listening to the poetry of Chernichovsky, and learning how to work the soil. By making *aliyah* and working in the fields, Jews would regain their honor.<sup>45</sup>

Listening to him talk about the Poles and the "Jewish condition" David essentially concluded that he was an elitist racist, and accused him of being an antisemitic poet. The writer told him that he understood the Polish

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<sup>43</sup>ibid. pp. 151-152.

<sup>44</sup>ibid. p. 137.

<sup>45</sup>ibid. p. 152.

nature and their desire for Jews to assimilate. He claimed that they only wanted Jews on their side for political reasons.<sup>46</sup>

David went to America and joined his brother working in a hat factory in Chicago. He wrote to his friend the writer who had since made *aliyah* about the discussions evolving around Zionism at work, the unions, his involvement with the Jewish theatre and his desire to go to Palestine to see it for himself. He was not particularly fond of his brother's values and was not happy living in America.<sup>47</sup>

Brenner then shifts the setting to Palestine where we meet Arie Lapidot, David's mother's brother, and his family. Arie had two sons. One was a hunchback and had been a teacher in Russia. He was married and had two sons, Amram and Herzl. When they immigrated, he had a difficult time finding a job. People were not compassionate towards him, and he was maltreated because of his physical disability. He was told that he was too quiet, not smart enough and would not be able to handle the children in the *yishuv*, because they were "different" from the children in Russia. He received his teacher's license and bounced around unsuccessfully from one teaching job to the next.<sup>48</sup>

Seeing his son's failures, Arie suggested that he work for him. Real work according to Arie, required using one's hands. His son drank too much water while working and came down with malaria. Herzl also got sick and died from his illness. Arie's son, who was referred to as the hunchback, decided that since he was much more successful in Russia, his family should return there so he could teach. He walked to Jaffa to get his

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<sup>46</sup>*ibid.* p. 155.

<sup>47</sup>*ibid.* pp. 160-164.

<sup>48</sup>*ibid.* p. 171.

passport. While walking home, he met up with his brother, Tzvi, who worked in a factory in Jaffa. Tzvi was described as a revolutionist, an anarchist, who looked for revenge after the Russian pogroms. He did not act upon these feelings.<sup>49</sup>

Brenner worked in the conflict between the Arab and Jew in a violent way. While walking home, an Arab horseman rode up to them and spoke to them. They did not reply because they did not understand "the language of the land." The Arab became agitated. There was a skirmish, which left the hunchback wounded and Tzvi, without his gun and knife. The hunchback was brought to the hospital in Jaffa where soon after he died. The *moshav's* reaction to this incident was very interesting. They were happy that Tzvi did not shoot the Arab for fear of a revenge attack on the *moshav*. The incident left them all feeling vulnerable and scared.<sup>50</sup>

Brenner always has characters who feel that life was better in the diaspora than it was in the *yishuv*. He sets the hunchback's death up to point this out. This time he adds an ironic twist in its presentation. When consoling his wife Hinda, Ariele reminds her that they left Russia before the pogroms. They could not judge life in Russia without acknowledging the horror life held for Jews there. Hinda, complaining that she came all the way to Israel just to see her son killed, is answered again by Ariele the pragmatist. He tells her that the only sure thing in life is the fact that the angel of death has eyes everywhere.<sup>51</sup>

We learn more about all three of the main characters when David comes to Palestine. He moved in with his uncle's family and the writer also

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<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 172-175.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 177-178.

joined them on the *moshav*. The writer had deep discussions with Ariele and spent much of his time trying to explain to David who Ariele was and what motivated him.

Ariele had a hard life. He was over fifty, grey, bright, and a חובב ציון. He did not despair when he was unable to find work as a rabbi in Palestine, he simply changed his goals.<sup>52</sup> The adjustment to a new life was harder on his wife, who was used to being a *rebbetsen*, than on him. Now instead of doing traditional chores, she was responsible for hauling the milk to the market daily to sell it.<sup>53</sup>

Ariele chose to channel his beliefs in a different direction. He felt that "work is our life, it will save us from our troubles." Their task as he saw it was to become masters over the land on which they dwelled.<sup>54</sup>

Ariele saw himself as a teacher for the younger generation. He felt that it was his responsibility to transmit to them a feeling of responsibility for the *yishuv*.<sup>55</sup> According to his definition of his role in life, he failed miserably with both of his own sons, neither of whom wanted to work the land. This fact did not seem to interfere with him or stop him from espousing Gordon's philosophy.

The writer respected the fact that Ariele held fast to his beliefs. He saw the religious side of him and explained to David that Ariele was not a mystic. He prayed his own prayers when he felt the need and did not follow rote fixed prayer. He suggested that David notice Ariele's hands, claiming that they were the hands of Michael the angel.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>*ibid.* p. 180.

<sup>53</sup>*ibid.* p. 167.

<sup>54</sup>*ibid.* p. 182.

<sup>55</sup>*ibid.* p. 183.

<sup>56</sup>*ibid.* p. 185.

Arieh was a typical pioneer who felt that one had to be in the *yishuv* to be a Zionist. He advocated working with the people who were actually there and developing the potential from within instead of focusing on people who were still in the diaspora. He felt that was the only way they would achieve happiness. He claimed that the *yishuv* provided them with a special kind of life. Their problem and war as he saw it, was the war against materialism.<sup>57</sup> This same war is being fought in Israel today.

Arieh who never professed to be a man of politics, suggested buying as much land as possible and working it. Then when it came time to establish the Jewish state, they would already own a portion of it. He also suggested looking for the truth, and living one day at a time. Being a positivist, he said that if the answers to their problems could not be found in the *yishuv*, then they do not exist.<sup>58</sup>

David was an idealist about life in general. He was happy living in Palestine and soon forgot about his life in the diaspora, despite his last name, Diasporen. He enjoyed inhaling nature and his surroundings. He told his friend that lying in the grass looking at the flowers, he felt like a son who had come home to his mother.<sup>59</sup>

Arieh also failed to transmit his message to his nephew. David wanted to learn as much as possible about life, the conditions of the *yishuv* and how to exist within these conditions for one specific reason. David wanted to be the first known actor in Palestine. Arieh wanted him to stop his naive dreams which prevented him from doing "real" work. David did not think it was worthwhile to work as he preferred to spend his time

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid. p. 201.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid. pp. 202-203.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid. p. 187.

memorizing monologues. As far as the reader knows, David's naivete' was still in tact at the end of the story.<sup>60</sup>

The person who changed the most in the novel was the writer. He became much more disillusioned as the novel progressed about the situation in the *yishuv*. The writer was troubled by the pettiness of daily life in the *yishuv*. An example of this is seen through Brenner's descriptions of the people on the *moshav* and their interactions with one another. In one situation at a meeting of the *moshav*, the jealousy and bickering between the people was quite apparent. People wanted to know the following: Since one family received a loan, why didn't another one? Since this person had hope of going to the Galilee and becoming a farmer, why didn't that one? So and so left the *moshav*, why hasn't so and so? The writer had different expectations from the country as a whole.<sup>61</sup>

Arieh also told the writer that he too should do real work. For after a while, his blisters would harden and he would be able to write fresher, better and healthier material.<sup>62</sup> David accused the writer and his generation of seeing everything cast in a negative light.<sup>63</sup>

We learn about the condition of the worker from a discussion the writer had with David. He described the workers as being young, intellectual, single, and alone in Palestine. There were all types of people, some who went barefoot, some who were wild, some enjoyed life, some were sick of the "future," and some were not future oriented at all. They all brought their hard bread to work with them and were never sated by it.

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<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 187-188.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.* p. 197.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.* p. 189.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.* p. 190.

They wrote to either their parents or relatives abroad and asked them to send them the things that they needed.<sup>64</sup>

The writer complained that the problem with these workers was the fact that they were idealists. Their power was only in their mouths and not in their hands. He was frustrated by the lack of action taken to improve the *yishuv*. There was too much talk. Proof of this problem were the number of people who chose to leave the country rather than stay and help it.<sup>65</sup> He recognized this same naive idealism in David and wondered how long it would take before this too would pass.<sup>66</sup>

We learn more about the young worker and the older generation's view of the situation from the following conversation. Through their insensitive conversation, everyone learned that Arie's son Tzvi, the revolutionist, was about to lose his job in the factory. He was organizing a strike for the Zionist cause. This whole issue was debated by the group. They claimed that the problem in the factory boiled down to the fact that no one wanted to work under anyone else and therefore, nothing was getting done. One person sarcastically pointed out that evidently farming was not the only thing that the younger generation was failing at. Another stated ironically in light of the present day State of Israel that, "Israel is not a place for strikes." They all agreed that people would be fired as a result of the strike.<sup>67</sup>

In an explosive conversation with Arie, the writer challenged the notion that the *yishuv* really represented a Jewish country, and suggested

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<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.* p. 192.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.* p. 193.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.* p. 187.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 197-198.

that it was just another shelter.<sup>68</sup> He questioned whether people were making the *yishuv* into a new diaspora or if perhaps, they were just returning to the old one. He wondered if he were to write about this subject, if it would even be published. He questioned what it would even be worth if he could manage to stir up his readership. He resigned himself to taking a passive role personally because "everyone was going to eventually die anyway." He knew that he would not be around for ever. The writer was not interested in being a farmer and questioned whether or not this should be just cause for him doubting his self worth.<sup>69</sup>

The irony is that the writer was the only one in the novel who pessimistically gave up. All three characters represented a part of who Brenner was. He respected Arie's philosophy and stability. Brenner like David, struggled with his own father over secular beliefs. He also desired to go to America. Like the writer, he was resigned to living in Palestine but he too wanted to see change. Maybe like the writer, he could not envision a solution that would be accepted by his readership and therefore did not provide us with answers at the end of the novel.

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid. p. 202.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid. p. 206.

CHAPTER 5 - AN ANALYSIS OF *BREAKDOWN AND BEREAVEMENT*

...as readers of *Breakdown and Bereavement* will observe, his work is marred by frequent flaws that make one fervently wish that it had passed under a firmer editorial hand than his own. Nor is it simply the passion for honesty with which he wrote, the satirist's incorruptible eye for the exposure of pretension and sham. Perhaps above all it is that in an age when to be a Hebrew writer automatically meant to be part of a national struggle whose claims upon one's energies and commitments were immense, he stayed true in his work to his own tragic sense of man's private condition, of the prison house of the self in its ultimate isolation and anguish. That he should at the same time have been the major Hebrew author most intimately involved in the early years of the Zionist struggle in Palestine—should have, in fact, become after his death one of its public martyrs and legends—typifies the polarities that ran through his life and art.<sup>1</sup>

Reading Brenner's novels against the social milieu in which they were written gives the reader a much richer and keener awareness of the juxtaposition of the world of fiction pitted against the realities of the world. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the novel *שכול כשלון*, *Breakdown and Bereavement* in light of the recurring themes presented in the previous chapters. This novel is a period piece that is infused with Brenner's personal life as well as his own surroundings.

I will begin this chapter by giving a brief synopsis of the plot. The hero of the story is Yehezkel Hefetz, a European Jew who has travelled throughout Europe before arriving in Palestine. The novel opens in a *kevutzah* setting in the Negev. Hefetz is ill and needs to be accompanied to Jerusalem where he has relatives and can receive care. Menahem, a volunteer on the *kevutzah* offers to take him to Jerusalem where he is hospitalized for six months in an asylum. When he leaves the asylum, he moves in with his poor uncle, Reb Yosef and his two daughters, Esther and

<sup>1</sup>Halkin, Introduction. pp. v-vi.

Miriam. Hefetz becomes enmeshed in an unrequited love triangle with his cousins. Esther, the eldest, casts her affections on him knowing that he is physically and mentally ill. Hefetz in the meantime, fantasizes about being with Miriam who is in love with an old rival of his.

Jerusalem, the main setting of the story, is depicted with all of its poverty, beggary, daily struggles and the mismanagement of public funds by those who control them. The story moves from the *kevuṭzah* to Jerusalem, Jaffa, Tiberias and European locations out of Hefetz's past.

Brenner focuses on the problems of the individual, primarily Hefetz as microcosm of private illness juxtaposed with the macrocosm, being the collective sickness of the community. Different characters come to terms with their lots in life as the novel comes to an end. Towards the end there are signs that Hefetz is getting well and the story ends peacefully on a note of acceptance of life.

It comes as no surprise to the reader of this thesis to learn in the opening of the novel that the main protagonist Yehezkel Hefetz, is suffering from an unidentified illness. By introducing this in the beginning of the work, Hefetz's illness becomes a theme central to the development of the book. The plot evolves around Hefetz's healing process.

Hefetz is a typical Brenneresque character. He displayed classic symptoms of depression throughout the novel. Food disgusted him and he grew thinner every day.<sup>2</sup> He had difficulty sleeping because of his "weird" complicated dreams.<sup>3</sup> His physical pain, described as being located below the waist, symbolized his unfulfilled desires and sexual neurosis, and was a

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid. p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. pp.13, 114.

source of embarrassment for him.<sup>4</sup> He was at a loss at how to get along with women.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the novel, he was unable to express either his love or his passions.<sup>6</sup> Esther, a homely spinster, who nursed him back to health in the asylum and then at home, fell in love with him. Instead of showing gratitude for her kindness, Hefetz treated her miserably.<sup>7</sup> The nicer she was to him, the more abusive he became towards her. The deeper their involvement became, the more obvious it was to the reader that Esther was also mentally disturbed. Esther knew that he loved her sister and could not accept it. Hefetz while desiring Miriam continued seeing Esther and was even ready at one point to marry her although he was not in love with her. In a moment of utter rage and frustration, seeking revenge for all the hurt she experienced, Esther dumped her full chamber pot on Hefetz's head.<sup>8</sup> This grotesque act forced him to realize that he was using her and she was fully aware of this. He suddenly understood that they were together out of mutual pity and for no other reason. This loaded act ended their relationship.

There is a lot of physical movement throughout this work. Everyone has come from abroad to Palestine and brings with him or herself an individual chapter of Jewish history. The constant movement is unsettling. Hefetz typifies the unhappy restless wandering Jew who is never happy or at home any place. He is the symbol of the uprooted.<sup>9</sup> He always wants to

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid. p. 38.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid. p. 11.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid. p. 144.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid. p. 76.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. pp. 257-259.

<sup>9</sup>See *The Uprooted, Study of the Protagonist In Three Novels*, William Cutter, (University Microfilms, 1971) p. 97.

be some place else because no matter where that place is, it is better than the actual place in which he is situated.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to him is his acquaintance from the *kevutzah* Menahem, who is happy and fits in wherever his path happens to take him.<sup>11</sup>

Towards the beginning of the novel Brenner raises an interesting point. Europe on one level represented freedom from the responsibilities of the "Jewish cause" for the settlers. There were no inherent responsibilities for Jews toward each other in the diaspora compared with the *yishuv*.<sup>12</sup> By returning to Europe, one was freed from the yoke of Judaism. The concept of "all Israel being responsible for one another" did not seem to extend beyond Palestine according to this novel.

In contrast to this attitude was the feeling of betrayal held by those left behind in the *yishuv*. During the meeting of the *kevutzah*, no one showed any empathy for Hefetz because he had already left the country once. It was clear that his commitment to the *yishuv* was held in suspect and therefore no one wanted to be bothered with his problems. Anyone who left Palestine was viewed as one who "betrayed the ideal."<sup>13</sup> Referring to Hefetz one member commented, "We all know that you have to be mad to want to leave this country, don't we, my friends?"<sup>14</sup>

Jerusalem in its decadent piety is seen as the locus of illness.<sup>15</sup> Brenner writes with scorn about its inhabitants as well:

The courtyards of Jerusalem's hospitals, like corridors of its

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<sup>10</sup>Halkin, p. 26.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup>Cutter, p. 123.

charities, were filled to overflowing with the sighs and groans of the ill and afflicted, the indigent and in need, invalids on crutches and in bandages... 16

Later on Hefetz states that Jerusalem is not a model city.<sup>17</sup> Given his opinion of Jerusalemites it is easy to understand why. On his way to the hospital, Hefetz overheard a discussion between two Orthodox women which reminded him very quickly in a negative way that he in fact had arrived in Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup> While he waited in the courtyard of the hospital to see a doctor, he turned to Menahem and said, "Now I'm a real Jerusalemite. What I mean is, now I'll stand around and do nothing. Or rather I'll sit."<sup>19</sup> Brenner harshly returns to this theme of laziness when he wrote about getting the city's youth to be useful, rather than waste away in "this rubbish heap of idleness people called Jerusalem."<sup>20</sup>

Hefetz spoke of Jerusalem being a city entirely "dependent on the whims of philanthropy! A city which if you deprived it of the handouts it gets from all over the world- would die of starvation."<sup>21</sup> He spoke of the injustice of the system of distributing the money.<sup>22</sup>

Brenner wrote with disdain about the Orthodox Jews who filled their childrens' heads with the dust of prayerbooks and *Talmud*.<sup>23</sup> In a city supposedly filled with such piety, Hefetz's uncle could not find anyone who was willing to lend him a tub for soaking. He commented: "Borrowing, it

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<sup>16</sup>Halkin, p. 27.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid. p. 133.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid. p. 30.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid. p. 32.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid. p. 186.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. p. 33.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid. p. 35.

went without saying, was out of the question: who in Jerusalem would lend them a tub? Jerusalem wasn't Gomel or Kiev."<sup>24</sup> Jerusalem instead was filled with fanaticism, bickering and backbiting.<sup>25</sup> This unfriendly people hated the Russian newcomers because they polluted "the air of the Holy City spiritually."<sup>26</sup>

Getting ahead in Jerusalem depended on whom one knew, on *proteczia* <sup>27</sup> A Jerusalemite had a reputation of selling anything for his own gain.<sup>28</sup> Jews were known for taking advantage of other Jews for "in a word, they fleeced you coming and going."<sup>29</sup> Brenner referred to the city as a den of swindlers.<sup>30</sup>

Given the difficulty of finding housing in Jerusalem, it was no wonder that there was a regular ongoing exodus from there.<sup>31</sup> Brenner describes the annual housing lottery which forced people to move every year. Some people wound up staying in temporary guesthouses because they had no place to live.<sup>32</sup>

The ambivalent feelings which governed relationships between Jews and Arabs are reflected in this novel. Every morning the Jewish workers would have to go out and compete "with hordes of strange Arabs" for work.<sup>33</sup> Some Jews in an effort to earn their passage out of Palestine,

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<sup>24</sup>*ibid.* p. 99.

<sup>25</sup>*ibid.* p. 133.

<sup>26</sup>*ibid.* p. 185.

<sup>27</sup>*ibid.* p. 139.

<sup>28</sup>*ibid.* p. 138.

<sup>29</sup>*ibid.* p. 134.

<sup>30</sup>*ibid.* p. 191.

<sup>31</sup>*ibid.* p. 184.

<sup>32</sup>*ibid.* p. 195.

<sup>33</sup>*ibid.* p. 12.

subcontracted Arabs to do their work for them at lower wages.<sup>34</sup> This ostensibly freed them to take on additional employment.

The Jewish fear of the Arabs is portrayed as well. Hefetz was afraid of the Arab national awakening and its anti-Jewish sentiments. He feared a pogrom in Palestine. In an uncanny way, he foreshadows the recurrent nightmares of Israelis who survived the Holocaust that they might ultimately be massacred by the Arabs.<sup>35</sup> At one point, an incident is reported about a Jew who was imprisoned on a false charge brought against him by an Arab woman whose son had disappeared just before Passover.<sup>36</sup>

Arabs were generally much more aggressive than their Jewish counterparts. The Arabs in the Jezreel valley filled the colonies as hired hands and became squatters, taking whatever they wanted, "whatever they laid their eyes on, and they stole the land too."<sup>37</sup> In Tiberias, an Arab managed the baths, and of course, took advantage of all of the Jews.<sup>38</sup>

The Bedouin at the end of the novel were described in superhuman terms. A party of Bedouin went into the ocean for a winter swim. Haim, Hefetz's uncle stood and observed them. He thought to himself while being sprayed by the cold water, "they didn't seem cold in the least...they hadn't the same type of blood."<sup>39</sup> He also marvelled at their swimming ability.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>ibid. p. 282.

<sup>35</sup>ibid. p. 14.

<sup>36</sup>ibid. p. 113.

<sup>37</sup>ibid. p. 57.

<sup>38</sup>ibid. p. 292.

<sup>39</sup>ibid. p. 309.

<sup>40</sup>ibid.

An ironic thought occurred to Haim as he continued to watch them in the water. In the baths they were equal, for there "the Bedouin would have no advantage over his brother or himself."<sup>41</sup>

Several Jewish men who did not fit the stereotype of the ghetto Jew were described in hyperbolic metaphors. The first was Hanoach, Haim's son. Brenner's language sounds like he is describing Moses. He wrote that there was no one like Hanoach and never had been. He was a healthy, robust, hard working man who was full of life.<sup>42</sup>

The conflict between Arab and Jew is spoken of metaphorically and in bad taste in the following passage. Hanoach owned a horse that was described as follows:

It wasn't just an ordinary horse, either; no, it was a headstrong, crazy Arab stallion, more suited to fighting, as wild as the Bedu who bred it. You'd think it had been bitten by a mad dog to see it act up when hitched to the plow. Hanoach would grab hold of the reins as hard as he could; the Arab (sic) might throw him, drag him, but Hanoach, who was far from an expert plowman, would hang on for dear life.<sup>43</sup>

The message in this passage implies that the Arab who is stronger than the Jew does not like to be confined. In the long run, the Arab will not give up, no matter how hard the Jew tries to overtake him.

There is a description of a Syrian Jew whose features alone separate him from the Jewish masses. The following passage shows how much a person's stature influences others.

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<sup>41</sup>ibid

<sup>42</sup>ibid, p. 58.

<sup>43</sup>ibid, pp. 58-59.

It was the head attendant who spoke in Hefetz's defense, a Syrian Jew whose pock-marked face and burly waist, **so un-Jewish in its powerful girth**, made him seem someone special, one of a kind.<sup>44</sup>

Hamilin, a doctor who was Hefetz's antithesis and rival, loathed treating his patients. Brenner's descriptions of them fit the stereotype of the ghettoized Jew that one would expect to find on any page of a Mendele novel.

How disgusting they were and how weak! It was ingrained in their nature to avenge themselves on the healthy and strong. All their talk of morality amounted to one great act of vengeance, the vengeance of lowly, groveling cripples. They actually prided themselves on their ugliness and deformity; they openly displayed their wounds so as to poison the lives of the healthy and beautiful, whom they hated...<sup>45</sup>

Given Brenner's personal problems in relating to women, it is interesting to see how much insight he had when he was writing about them. On one hand he provides the reader with a male's perspective of the "female condition" while at the same time he presents a fairly modern view from the female perspective. Because much of the book is centered around traditional Jewish men, comments regarding the woman's role in life and her needs are stereotypical and expected. Examples of this are: Women have no business studying at all. They should marry and be some man's cook.<sup>46</sup>

In the following passage we find Hefetz's assessment of Esther's needs:

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid, p. 114.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid, p. 162.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid, p. 53.

A woman like her needed to be kissed, needed to be taken in someone's arms and hotly, passionately kissed. Let her be fed the strong meat that she craved! Let her remember forever that a man had stroked her thighs with fierce hands, kissed her chapped lips, her coarsened cheeks, her eyes of longing and desire- let her remember and take pleasure!<sup>47</sup>

In another situation, a "pious" man refused to sit behind Esther in a coach. Some of the "idlers" standing by in the street watching this jokingly commented, "There isn't a trouble in the world that doesn't go back to a woman!"<sup>48</sup> In a conversation that ensued between Esther and the passenger, he told her that she should not try to tempt him with sin. He would sooner sit behind a lion than a woman.<sup>49</sup>

Miriam recognized the traditional mold into which she had been cast. Miriam was not going to let herself be bound by male expectations of who she should be. Speaking to herself she thought about men who assumed that women were only good for cooking. She felt that if that was all she did, then her life was not fit for a dog.<sup>50</sup> As the story progressed Miriam rebelled by neglecting to do traditional womens' chores. She stopped taking care of her father, she neglected her household duties, and sought advice outside of her home. <sup>51</sup>

Out of frustration, seeking a better life, Miriam left Jerusalem and moved to Jaffa. She hoped to be able to sail to America in pursuit of happiness. Miriam died in Jaffa as a result of a psychotic act of desperation. She pricked herself several times with an unclean hairpin, in an attempt to release her internal pain.

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<sup>47</sup>ibid. pp. 67-68.

<sup>48</sup>ibid. pp. 271-272.

<sup>49</sup>ibid. p. 272.

<sup>50</sup>ibid. p. 65.

<sup>51</sup>ibid. p. 183.

All of a sudden, without knowing why, she took the hairpin from between her teeth and pricked the little finger of her left hand with it. A fraction of a second before she'd had a sort of unconscious premonition that something was about to happen that would make everything seem better. At exactly that moment she had thought of Shneirson. Once he had read her a story about a young princess who had done the same thing. In a flash she pricked herself again in the same place. This time it bled and hurt too, hurt more than she'd expected.<sup>52</sup>

Miriam probably contracted tetanus as a result of sticking herself. Not only did she release her pain metaphorically speaking, but she also released her troubled soul.

Esther also had trouble relating with men. As she sat in the carriage:

... her thoughts flit from one thing to another. From time to time a wave of protest swept over her, a wave of protest...against men. No, not against men, only against their callousness! Not even against Hefetz, who was sitting in front of her next to her uncle.<sup>53</sup>

Remembering the chamber pot incident, she thought:

He couldn't have been coming to see her that time, couldn't even have known that she'd done it on purpose...and anyway, she had finished her accounts with him. Perhaps she should have told him...but no, there was no need to say anything, it would only have made him think that she was trying to apologize, that she wanted to make up. He wasn't worth it. She no longer even thought of him. He meant nothing to her any more.<sup>54</sup>

Esther harbored much resentment and anger against her unfeeling father. This is made clear in the following passage:

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<sup>52</sup>ibid. p. 266.

<sup>53</sup>ibid. p. 274.

<sup>54</sup>ibid.

Her father too-always the Talmud, always chapter and verse. And yet he had a heart of stone. It was he she'd had in mind when she'd thought of the callousness of men. Look at him sitting there. Just a short while ago he'd said he had no one in Jaffa. In other words, he disowned his own daughter. What did he want from her? What harm had she ever done him? Pure male egotism! Since the day Miriam left home he'd never even asked how she was. Once she had heard him complain, "How can I get along with people if I can't even get along with my own daughter?" -yet even then she hadn't been sure which daughter he was referring to. Perhaps he wouldn't want to see her now either. Perhaps he would refuse, leave Jaffa tomorrow without even knowing she was in danger. Men were so willful.

But she, Esther, could be willful too. She would pay him back tit for tat. She wouldn't tell him anything, not even why she was making the trip. She wouldn't speak a word to him. Let him get what he deserved.<sup>55</sup>

Brenner's portrayal of both Miriam and Esther's inner thoughts showed incredible sensitivity and insight into women from a male author.

Another major sub-theme which ran throughout the novel was the Orthodox Jew's view of Judaism, Palestine and the secular Jew, and likewise, the secular Jew's perspective on the same topics. Aside from issues already discussed, other issues were further developed. Reb Yosef, Hefetz's uncle was rather progressive for an Orthodox Jew. In addition to having a traditional education, he had quite a broad background in secular philosophy. He was acquainted with Hume, Schleiermacher, and Kant. Unlike the typical secular Jew's attitude toward religion and secular knowledge, Reb Yosef felt that his secular knowledge of philosophy only brought him closer to God. Speaking with Hefetz he said:

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<sup>55</sup>ibid., pp. 274-275.

-therefore, the more a man knows, the more intelligently he inquires after the truth, the more he frees himself from necessity and the laws of the environment and cleaves to God.<sup>56</sup>

In contrast with Reb Yosef's neo-Orthodox views, is the rigidity of some of the other Orthodox characters. Hefetz's Uncle Haim recalled an incident when the colony of Jezreel was being founded that reflects this unwillingness to be flexible.

Goldmann somehow got it into his head to make everyone pray according to the liturgy of "the divine rabbi," Rabbi Isaac Luria. What for? he was asked. They all preferred the Ashkenazic liturgy, to which they were accustomed. But Goldmann insisted, that was the kind of man he was. It came to a quarrel and in the end Goldmann won: little by little, those who favored the Lurianic liturgy gained the majority.<sup>57</sup>

The youth on the other hand represented another generation with different values and ideals. While some of Reb Yosef's former students took jobs as private tutors or lecturers in German and other European universities, the highest job a Jew could hold without converting,<sup>58</sup> he also had a student who converted to Christianity in order to receive a professorship at a university in Western Europe.<sup>59</sup> (This was a position that Brenner personally advocated as a means of advancement into Western civilization.) Reb Yosef contended that the younger generation in Palestine did not even know how to honor its elders and betters.<sup>60</sup> Both their attitudes and actions reflected their disrespect. In contrast with this, Reb

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<sup>56</sup>ibid. p. 42.

<sup>57</sup>ibid. pp. 55-56.

<sup>58</sup>ibid. p. 49.

<sup>59</sup>ibid. p. 46.

<sup>60</sup>ibid. p. 49.

Yosef once remarked, that "even the worst antiSemite admired a Jew who was truly a man of faith, that is, who insisted on keeping his religion."<sup>61</sup> If he had been able to influence his former students, he would have recommended that they remain practicing Jews.

In an interesting discussion between Reb Yosef and Shneirson, a young man who ate with them regularly and tutored Miriam, Shneirson favors using free biblical criticism and the national historic perspective in order to learn about Scriptures, a view contrary to Orthodox Judaism. Shneirson saw himself as a modern Jewish intellectual and could not imagine a world without the Bible. Acknowledging that it was the greatest gift that the Jews gave to mankind, he stated: "Generations came and went, but the Bible remained forever. The Bible was eternal."<sup>62</sup> He believed that even a non-religious person could appreciate the strength found in the Bible.

This view of the relevance of the Bible was challenged indirectly in a dream by a member of the younger generation, Hanoach, Haim's son. He did not see how the Bible helped him face his daily hardships and did not find inspiration or fortitude in it. He had the following conversation via a dream with his father :

Father! Don't listen to what they tell you about the greatness of "the eternal book"! The eternal book-what does it have to say about all the solitary years that I've spent here by the millstones? What does it have to say about my anguish, my life, and my approaching death? At the very most- a word here, a word there- some paradox about the justice of God...about the justice of what doesn't exist. Or is it that my years simply don't matter at all? That my life is unimportant, insignificant, undeserving of mention? Two or three years on the job in some forsaken mill...ah? You say they're nothing

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<sup>61</sup>ibid, p. 47.

<sup>62</sup>ibid, p. 75.

to speak of against the background of eternity? The book of eternity passes over them in silence? Eternity?<sup>63</sup>

Recognizing the need for sensitivity in order to keep the youth within the fold, Reb Yosef advocated treating them with leniency. For "if the youngsters did sin, their parents were partly to blame. Pull too hard on the reins, as the saying went, and they were bound to snap."<sup>64</sup> He also understood the rebellious nature of youth and claimed that if rabbis did not forbid the trimming of beards, "for example, which was actually permitted by law, the young people wouldn't go about completely clean-shaven and break the Mosaic command."<sup>65</sup> He also felt that the problem with the youth of Jerusalem was that their education included everything except religion. Not only were they apathetic towards religion but they were also no longer exposed to it.<sup>66</sup>

Playing off of both superstition and *midrash* there is an interesting diatribe on the insects and animals found in the Holy Land. Mosquitoes and bedbugs (the eleventh unmentioned plague in the Bible<sup>67</sup>) "were inhabitants of Jerusalem from time immemorial."<sup>68</sup> Animals in the Holy Land according to Reb Yosef had faculties that they did not possess any place else. The stray cats for example that never had enough to eat lived in his building from time immemorial.<sup>69</sup> Cats in Russia and other countries had no

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid. p. 91.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid. p. 131.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid. p. 132.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid. p. 247.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid. p. 220.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid. p. 187.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

memories because they ate rats. Not the cats in Jerusalem, they remembered everything.<sup>70</sup>

Brenner worked the Hebrew language battle into his novel from all angles. He discusses the poor quality of Hebrew literature and paucity of it, the low level of Hebrew journalism,<sup>71</sup> the conflict of which pronunciation to use: Sefardic or Ashkenazic pronunciation<sup>72</sup> and whether Hebrew or Yiddish should be the national language.<sup>73</sup>

In one instance, Brenner focused on the impropriety of the Hebrew press. An article was published about the depopulation of Jerusalem and the fact that the youth was leaving Palestine for America. Of the eight people who were reported to have left, the article failed to mention that two were a couple in their eighties. He accuses the press of purposely distorting reality to suit its views.<sup>74</sup>

The novel frequently alludes to the disappointment with living in the *yishuv*. There was no end to the anger centered around the injustices present in daily life: Jerusalem was not a bad place to live if you had money.<sup>75</sup> Most of the settlers did not have money. Reb Yosef had valuable books sitting in customs because he could not afford the duty owed on them.<sup>76</sup> The irony of that situation was absurd. The "people of the Book" could only read if they could afford paying duty. Another problem was the feeling that everyone had his price and only wanted to make money. It is as

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<sup>70</sup>ibid. p. 188.

<sup>71</sup>ibid. p. 157.

<sup>72</sup>ibid. p. 50.

<sup>73</sup>ibid. p. 196.

<sup>74</sup>ibid. p. 219.

<sup>75</sup>ibid. p. 220.

<sup>76</sup>ibid. p. 39.

if there was no feeling of compassion amongst fellow Jews.<sup>77</sup> Speaking with a stranger, Reb Yosef asked, "what did you come here for, what did you expect to find in the first place?"<sup>78</sup> The stranger's response encapsulated the disillusion with the country.

...he was from Russia, that was where he lived. And why had he come to Palestine? He himself wasn't sure any more; in fact, he was beginning to wish that he hadn't, except what alternative had he had? One had to go somewhere, after all. The Jews in Russia were finished, finished and done for.<sup>79</sup>

America is seen as the place to go if one wanted instant success and an easier life.<sup>80</sup> One person questioned why he should have had to come so far to slave for a piece of bread when life in America would not be so difficult.<sup>81</sup>

Zionists were viewed contemptuously by non-Zionists. They were phrasemongers and traitors to their religion.<sup>82</sup> The Russian Zionists who were lax in religious observance were "hardly any better than the gentiles."<sup>83</sup>

The following is a description of what the typical Zionist saw when disembarking in Jaffa and what he experienced in Palestine:

They admired the splendid scenery from the deck of the ship, went into town feeling dreadfully moved, lost their temper at the Arabs who approached them on the way, ordered their meals at the hotel, told tales about the local farmers who weren't hiring Jewish

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<sup>77</sup>ibid. p. 281.

<sup>78</sup>ibid. p. 213.

<sup>79</sup>ibid. p. 214.

<sup>80</sup>ibid. p. 212.

<sup>81</sup>ibid. p. 215.

<sup>82</sup>ibid. p. 130.

<sup>83</sup>ibid. p. 290.

workers, set out to work one morning with a hoe on their shoulder and a bottle of water and half a loaf of bread tucked under their arm, wandered about the settlements, made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for one of the holidays, looked forward to seeing the Galilee, and when they were through tramping about- ended up with some trivial post as a secretary or teacher in Jaffa or Jerusalem.<sup>84</sup>

The Zionists who were the most dedicated to the ideals of building the *yishuv* had the most difficulty adjusting and being accepted by the rest of society.

At a banquet given in honor of Reb Yakov Goldmann, a guest got up and started making an embarrassing speech accusing the Jews of only caring about making money. Someone who spoke out against him declared: "Enough! Enough! We're none of your *Zionisten*!"<sup>85</sup> He implied that it was the Zionists who were interested in making money. Another countered this accusation by saying :

Whereas the situation of our brethren in Russia in general, and my own in particular, is exceedingly grave, yea, even unto 'chaos, disorder and the shadow of death'; and whereas the wickedness of the gentiles who oppress us had surpassed all bounds, so that there is no longer the least hope of self-advancement; therefore, in these days of darkness, the desire awakened amongst us to set out for the Land of Israel; and the fire burning within us had sent forth a fierce new flame to put an end to the long night of our Exile, wherein our lives hang in the balance; wherefore I have resolved to dedicate my life to our People in distress and to labor with all my might for the Country of our Lord, and to set out for the Holy Land, the Land of our Fathers....<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>ibid. p. 68.

<sup>85</sup>ibid. p. 238.

<sup>86</sup>ibid. p. 239.

Before he could finish his speech, he and others were accused of "setting out from Israel" soon to be followed by many others who are waiting for a signal from the leaders to leave.<sup>87</sup> This was not an easy time to be a pioneer in Palestine.

The despair of the *yishuv* is reflected in the title *Breakdown and Bereavement*. Everyone is affected by loss. Whether it is the loss of a family member or a general feeling of being uprooted and disconnected. Haim's son Hanoach died. Reb Yosef lost Miriam. Hefetz did not have parents. Everyone was in a state a flux. No stability was portrayed in the novel. The housing lottery in Jerusalem forced people to move annually. The entire *yishuv* could be compared to the waves in the ocean. The inhabitants, like sand, were constantly carried to a new place by the water. Nothing was constant.

The irony was that Brenner actually lived in Jerusalem. This city depicted with all of its faults was not very attractive and certainly not spiritual or inspiring. The Jerusalemites were so cruel and inhospitable to Russian immigrants that it causes the reader to stop and really wonder about what kind of life and reception Brenner had in Jerusalem.

Brenner's novel, is a troubling literary work. The pain and hardships of daily life coupled with the aimlessness of the characters, reflects a sad existence. Perhaps Brenner's own pain is what kept him from publishing this novel when it was finished. Perhaps he himself was too close and too involved in the tragic experience of the pioneers of the Second *Aliyah*.

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid

## CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

Y.H. Brenner, in *From Here and From There* (1911) wrote in pessimistic tones of the Jewish people, Eretz Yisrael, and their interrelations. He was forced to conclude, nevertheless, that although "it may be that it is impossible to live here... there is no other place." Brenner himself saw only the foreshadowing of the trauma that was yet to come: Homel and Kishinev were but dress rehearsals for Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen. Still, he observed life in Eretz Israel with a fiercely sober eye. Not romantic pioneers, but the realities of Arab labor, the French-Levantine culture, and the sons of the farmers who were emigrating provided the substance of his writings. (Only the occasional odd idealist tried to work the land and to better himself.) Brenner - who rejected the term "chosen people" and even proposed that it be dropped from the prayerbook - nonetheless believed that Israel was the place for a Jew to live, under all circumstances, and unconditionally. In Israel, the struggle for gradual change in the way of life of the individual could proceed.<sup>1</sup>

Yoseph Hayyim Brenner was a provocative writer. His writings reveal a talented, yet troubled persona. It is hard to separate the author from his writings. His "fiction" is autobiographical by his own admission. Brenner lived a tormented and painful existence. He believed in the Zionist cause and fought for it, although he was already disillusioned with it prior to his arrival in Palestine. Life in the *yishuv* only confirmed his apprehensions regarding the possibility of fulfilling the Zionist dream and the resolution of the "Jewish problem."

Brenner's fictional portrayal of the *yishuv* reflects its problems more accurately and in greater detail than his non-fiction writing. In his fiction, he was able to fully develop many issues and present different perspectives through his various characters. He offers no solutions to the problems, perhaps because he realized that he had none. His own ambivalence and struggle are expressed in the three novels examined in this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup>See *the shadows within*(sic), Gershon Shaked (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1987), pp. 187-188.

Much insight into Brenner's character can be gained from his personal correspondence. Brenner was not a well man. His letters reveal his swings of mood, his overall depression and the fact that he was ill more than he was well. Knowing this helps the reader understand his preoccupation with illness in *Breakdown and Bereavement* as well as the negative attitude which permeated all of his works. Had Brenner lived in a later period, he would have definitely benefited from psychological therapy.

Brenner's non-fiction reveals a caustic, bitter though insightful critic. Perhaps these articles can be better understood, if we realize that within six months of his settling in Palestine he was so unhappy that he wanted to leave. Yet the very man who actively sought to leave, bitterly complained about diaspora Jewry's lack of interest in settling in the land of Israel. His work is riddled with contradictions. He did not encourage his personal friends to come to Palestine because life was so difficult, yet this was not the stance he took publicly.

For several years, he waited to hear positive news that would enable him to go and live in America. This must have influenced his life daily. It is not hard to imagine the depression that was cast over him as he checked his mail hoping to finally receive the money he needed to leave. Brenner constantly struggled to make a living, an ongoing battle which was reflected in so many of his letters. The hardships he faced made him realize that idealism did not make life any easier.

Brenner had difficulty relating to women. This is apparent in all of his writings. It is interesting to note that with the exception of one meagre reference to getting married, none of his correspondence spoke of his marriage. He did inform several people when his wife gave birth. He never discussed how his marriage changed his life or his needs, other than a letter

which expressed the need to find a larger apartment. Given the lack of success that his characters had with women, it is not surprising that his own marriage did not last very long. If he did not have the capacity to portray a successful fictional relationship between a man and a woman, it was not likely that he had the capacity to experience a successful one himself.

Many of the problems which Brenner chose to write about still exist in Israeli society today. The same or similar tensions prevail between: religious and non-religious Jews, Arab and Jew, the role of diaspora Jewry and policy made in Israel, and the financial dependence of Israel on foreign sources. Although 74 years have past since this material was written, solutions still have not been found to many issues that troubled Brenner. Many of the problems that Israel faces today are rooted in Brenner's period.

Brenner's recurring presentation of the pogroms, which were fresh in his mind, are so uncannily similar to that recorded by Holocaust writers. His characters have nightmares about the pogroms and live in terrible fear of their recurrence. It is curious to note that he takes the classic blood libel experience and puts it in a Palestinian setting with an Arab woman accusing a Jew of murdering her child. The message was clear. Jews were not even safe in Palestine, and therefore needed to organize their own defense units for protection.

Brenner was a sharp critic of his surroundings. He was a committed secular Jew, who taught and wrote and died for the Zionist cause. Though his fictional characters lived in a make-believe setting, they depicted all of the stereotypes which could be found in the *yishuv*. Had he had a different temperament, the thin line that separated his fiction from his non-fiction would not have been so blurred.

Brenner's rebellion against his East European Orthodox upbringing is continued throughout his writings. His characters represent the weak, impotent typical diaspora Jews whose very existence repelled him. His characters remain uprooted, alienated and frightened as they continue to search to realize their personal and Zionist ideals.<sup>2</sup>

The feeling of despair that one senses in his non-fiction writing, did not match that which emanated from his personal letters. Brenner believed in the possibility of changing the Jewish predicament. He chose to express his frustrations, his hopes and aspirations for the Jewish nation. Through secular Judaism, Brenner advocated establishing a homeland with a new culture and Hebrew language and literature. Like his fictional characters, Brenner too was resolved, that since he was in Palestine, he should make the most of being there, and partake actively in a historical process.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p.12.

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