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Mordekhai David Brandstetter: A Maskil Beyond His Time

Abstract: Mordekhai David Brandstetter (1844–1928) was one of the prominent creators of Hebrew Haskalah literature in its latest phase. His most celebrated contribution is connected with *HaShahar*, the leading periodical of late Haskalah literature, edited by Peretz Smolenskin between 1869–1884.
Most of the readings of Brandstetter's writings have focused so far on the dozen short stories and novellas he published in *HaShahar*. Much less attention has been devoted to the later stage of his literary work that outstretched far beyond that era. This study focuses on those late works, some twelve stories that were written after the publication of Brandstetter's collected writings in 1891. These stories are still rooted in Galician Jewish life, but they reflect the ambition to adhere to new materials and poetics, following the radical changes in Hebrew literature from the 1880's onward towards realism, modernism and Zionism.

Keywords: Hebrew literature, Haskalah, Mordekhai David Brandstetter, HaShahar, Galicia, Hebrew press

I

Any comprehensive survey of Hebrew Haskalah literature includes a chapter dedicated to the unique figure of Mordekhai David Brandstetter (1844–1928). In an era characterized by a relatively short life expectancy (most authors of his time died around the age of sixty or even earlier), Brandstetter lived to the ripe old age of eighty-four. In a time when most writers experienced a life of wandering from one location to the next, Brandstetter kept to one place all his life. From his marriage at the age of fourteen, to his death seventy years later, he lived in the town of Tarnów in Western Galicia, save for his forced exile

to Prague and Vienna during World War I. He was known as one of the city's most distinguished citizens and even performed executive and judicial roles in the local municipal system.

Despite his established reputation as an important author, for most of his life Brandstetter considered himself a mere occasional writer, as most of his time was dedicated to his work as a successful merchant and industrialist, the owner of an oil factory. All of his life, he showed an abundance of humility and self-effacement toward key figures in the literary world, and was in the habit of introducing himself as a chance caller to the hall of creation, an occasional writer, an amateur not worthy to stand among giants. "I am a mere dilettante," he wrote in reverence to Yehuda Leib Gordon in 1884, "I possess a photographic machine, with which I play and replicate from time to time a few images of the world of reality encompassing me, halfheartedly and murkily, for I have never been trained and am, as I say, a mere dilettante."[1] In one of his later stories, he described the division of different areas of his life in the following manner: "And I became a merchant, busy with the business of negotiation, and also a bit of a Hebrew author, busy with the writing of stories with which to weary the dear reader, as I am doing in this very story."[2] In a literary period engulfed in ideological passion and profound maskilic rage at the way of life of devoutly religious Jews, Brandstetter's criticism of the Jewish realm was concealed behind a forgiving smile, and expressed from a relative distance, described by literary criticism as a stoic standpoint: "Brandstetter created out of moderation and stillness, articulated his descriptions and exposed his heroes without a hint of hatred or anger."[3] He portrayed real and imagined confrontations between Haskalah and Hasidism as a human comedy, laden with human weakness on both sides, and as a vision whose ridiculous aspects quite often upstage its serious ideological essence.

Other writers of his time were fascinated by the maneuvers he was forced to take in order to maintain his place as a legitimate member of Tarnów's traditional, chiefly Hasidic, Jewish community, while still

[1] Brandstetter's letter to Y.L. Gordon, 27 December 1884. Gordon's archive, The National Library, Jerusalem, Brandstetter file.

[2] Mordekhai David Brandstetter, "Avraham Ben-Nachum from the Village of Makh'owicz," *Luah Ahiassaf* 9 (1901), 68. (All references are in Hebrew, unless explicitly cited).

[3] Yehuda Aryeh Klausner, "A Man of One Trade: The Novelist Mordekhai David Brandstetter," in *The Novella in Hebrew Literature* (Tel-Aviv, 1947), 68.

acting as a Maskilic writer, criticizing and mocking that very same community. An example of this phenomenon can be found in a letter Peretz Smolenskin wrote to Yehuda Leib Gordon: "This man is a Hasid. He wears a shtreimel and a gartel, and to this day still frequents the Tzadik, and not one man knows he writes for *HaShahar*, and when he was asked by Hasidim why he is credited as the author of many of its articles, he replied that some malicious joker had written the articles and signed them in his name in order to shame him, but that he was completely innocent."[4] Similarly, the author Avraham Ber Gottlober reported three years later, on the pages of the weekly *HaMagid*, on his meeting with Brandstetter in Tarnów during his journey across the towns of Galicia. According to him, Brandstetter's clothes and demeanor is no different than those of any other member of the city's traditional Jewish community. Throughout the week, he takes care of his business and maintains a kosher Jewish-Polish household just like any other Jews in the town, all the while wearing long clothes and a shtreimel. However, when departing on one of his trading journeys, he changes his clothes at the city's gate, wearing instead utterly European clothing, and thus seemingly transforms himself into another man altogether: "So I saw him for the first time in his Jewish-Polish clothes, and for a second time, in his European attire, and I scarcely recognized him."[5] These words bring to mind the motif of masquerading, impersonation and deception so common in Brandstetter's stories – for example, in "The Wonders of the Town of Zhiditshovka" ["HaNifla'ot MeIr Zhiditshovka"]. But more than that: they demonstrate rather figuratively his special stance, essentially tensionless, between worlds. He lived peacefully in both attires, was apparently a part of the Hasidic community, and yet was still able to observe it as an outsider and reveal its faults to the maskilic readership. Understandably, his activity as a maskilic author could not go forever unnoticed by the people of Tarnów, but even if he did receive a few jeers from members of his community, his strong economic and public standing meant they could not cause him any real harm. It would appear his peers found it quite easy to overlook his "transgressions," because they did not have any actual sanction that could possibly be used against him. Even his devout father-in-law, influenced by his son-in-law – Gottlober

[4] Peretz Smolenskin's Letter to Y.L. Gordon, March 1871, Gedalyah Elkoshi (ed.), *A Batch of Letters from Peretz Smolenskin to Yehuda Leib Gordon* (Jerusalem, 1959), 17–18.

[5] Avraham Ber Gottlober, "A Travel Letter," *HaMagid*, 5 August 1874, p. 276.

relates in astonishment – had grown to become a bit of a Maskil himself. Brandstetter would read his father-in-law his satirical stories that had been published in the monthly periodical, *HaShahar,* and the older man would find them quite pleasurable.

Indeed, out of the whole of Brandstetter's sixty years of literary activity, the zenith was undoubtedly those fifteen years he was among the regular contributors to *HaShahar*, the leading periodical of late Haskalah literature, Peretz Smolenskin's own creation and life's work. The periodical was edited and printed in Vienna, where the editor resided, but its readership was chiefly dispersed in Eastern Europe, Austrian Galicia and the Russian empire. Brandstetter enjoyed describing his first acquaintance with Smolenskin on various occasions, likening the event to a purification rite before hearing God's prophecy. On one of his trading journeys he was passing through Vienna, and daringly decided to call upon the author and editor he so admired and to reverently submit to his review his own story entitled "The Prophet Elijah" ["Eliyahu HaNavi"]. The image of Smolenskin at his desk, writing his stories, brought to Brandstetter's mind a high priest praying at an altar. To his utter astonishment, Smolenskin came to his hotel room the very next morning and handed him the revised pages of his story, on which he had been working the night before, preparing it for print. "I hereby consecrate you and designate you as an author in my periodical for that is your purpose for which you were brought to this earth," he said to him.[6] From that initiation ceremony on, Brandstetter became one of *HaShahar*'s most prominent authors, until the periodical was discontinued in 1885 following the death of Smolenskin. There, Brandstetter established his reputation, with both his short and lengthier stories, published from 1869 onward and enjoyed immensely by the periodical's readers. In his stories, including such staples as "Mordekhai Kizovitch: The Jew-Hater from the City of Grieleb" ["Tzorer HaYehudim MeIr Grieleb"], "The Wonders of the Town of Zhiditshovka" or "Dr. Yosef Alfasi," all written during the 1870s, he expressed a variety of confrontations between idealistic Maskilim and the traditional Hasidic community in the Galician region he knew so well. In the writing of these stories, he utilized realistic credibility and a talent

[6] See, for instance: Moshe Aharon Vizen, "Mordechai David Brandstetter – His Life and Activity," in *Luah Shaashu'im for the [Hebrew] Year 603* (Kraków, 1902), 181. The author cites the story of Brandstetter's first acquaintance with Smolenskin from one of Brandstetter's letters to him.

for observation and description together with satirical sarcasm, humorous wit, poetic sophistication and structural refinement. In the words of Joseph Klausner, these qualities qualified him for the title of "the one and only short-story writer of the Haskalah period [...] He is also the one and only humorist in Haskalah literature."[7] Readers found his writing, with its succinct quality and comedic tone, a lighter complementing contrast to Smolenskin's verbose grim style. This perception was illustrated by Yeruham Fishel Lachower: "M. D. Brandstetter, the uniquely colored bright star accompanying Smolenskin ever since the sun rose on *HaShahar* [in Hebrew, "HaShahar" literally translates as "the dawn"]."[8]

Most of the readings of Brandstetter's writings have focused on the dozen short stories and novellas he had published in *HaShahar*, and those have also been recognized as the lion share of his contribution to Hebrew literature. Brandstetter himself knew that Smolenskin's death in 1885 would mark the end of the principal chapter of his own work, never to come again, and that it was time to consolidate it. And indeed, at that time, his good friend and supporter, Yehuda Leib Gordon, sent him spirited words of encouragement, urging him to collect his stories in a book: "Behold the stories and poems you have penned, so good and true – see how they enlighten and uplift the spirit; should you not collect these works, dispersed in so many a periodical and forgotten on old pages of *HaShahar*, and join them in one volume, to be read by our people?"[9] Such encouragements by Gordon and others made their impact, and Brandstetter collected the bulk of his stories from that period into a two-volume edition of his works, published in 1891.[10]

As the years went by, and Brandstetter lived on to become a venerable man, he was shrouded in an air of legend. He was described as a remnant of the Haskalah period, persisting into the twentieth century, apparently defying the laws of nature.[11] When his works were collected again in

[7] Joseph Klausner, "The Generation of *HaShahar*," in *History of New Hebrew Literature*, vol. 5 (Jerusalem, 1955), 239.

[8] Yerucham Fishel Lahover, "The Way of Life – Haskalah Story," in *History of New Hebrew Literature*, vol. 2, (Tel-Aviv, 1966), 237.

[9] Y.L. Gordon's letter to M.D. Brandstetter, second day of Hanukkah 685 (14 December 1884), "From the Writings of the Late Y.L. Gordon," in *Luah Shaashu'im for the [Hebrew] Year 603* (Kraków, 1902), 189.

[10] *All the Stories of M.D. Brandstetter in Two Parts* (Kraków, 1891).

[11] See, for instance: Raphael Rosenzweig, "A Remnant of the Haskalah Era (A Portrait of M.D. Brandstetter)," *HaZefirah*, 19 August 1927; Zvi Romald, "The Last of the Mohicans (After M.D. Brandstetter's Bed)," *HaZefirah*, 30 May 1928, 31 May 1928.

three volumes after the turn of the century,[12] his writing was described in the anthology's introduction as an artifact from a time long past and as a source of nostalgic pleasure to his long-devoted readers, now ripened and aged.[13] But his works were not limited to the stories published in *HaShahar*. As opposed to most of his contemporary maskilic authors, stepping off the literary stage under varied circumstances until the end of the 1880s, he continued to write and publish works to the very end of the first decade of the twentieth century, and was clearly trying to remain a part of living literature.[14] Then, he relinquished. Even if his voice was still heard on rare and sporadic occasions, until his passing in 1928, it was clear he recognized that his literary time had passed, and he made a few unequivocal remarks to that effect, captivating in their sober modesty. Critic Shalom Shtreit quoted from a letter written by Brandstetter to a young poet curious for the reason he had stopped writing:

> My instinct whispered to me at the right moment: desist! And it did not lead me down the garden path. I read what the younger generation was writing, without envy or rivalry, and it became apparent that the time has come for me to depart from the literary world, if not from the living world altogether. And I am glad I acted on that feeling.[15]

Brandstetter's works of the *HaShahar* period had been discussed by those who first researched him (Joseph Klausner, Yeruham Fishel Lachower, Yehudah Arieh Klausner), and further methodical strata were added to the elucidation and understanding of this corpus in the later works of the two leading scholars of Brandstetter's works, Ben-Ami Feingold[16] and Ortsion Bartana.[17] And his works still remain on the agenda of Haskalah literature scholars of the last generation. Moshe Pelli described Brandstetter's literary poetics on the basis of one key

[12] *All the Writings of M.D. Brandstetter, Old and New*, 3 vols. (Warsaw, 1910–1913).

[13] M. Rabinsohn, "M.D. Brandstetter," in *All the Writings of M.D. Brandstetter, Old and New*, vol. 1, Warsaw 1910, v–xiv.

[14] For a comprehensive chronological list of his publications, see: Ortsion Bartana, *Trends and Stages in the Stories of Mordecai David Brandstetter*, PhD Thesis, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan 1980, 36–40.

[15] Shalom Shtreit, *Faces of Literature*, vol. 1 (Tel-Aviv, 1939), 106.

[16] Ben-Ami Feingold, "Introduction," in idem (ed.), Mordecai David Brandstetter, *Stories* (Jerusalem 1974), 7–34.

[17] Ortsion Bartana, "An Example: The Development of Intrigue Stories in the Corpus of M. D. Brandstetter," in *Uprooted and Pioneers: The Formation of the Neo-Romantic Trend in Hebrew Prose* (Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv, 1983), 25–47.

story from his *HaShahar* days.[18] Yair Mazor observed instances of rhetorical and structural sophistication in three of Brandstetter's stories of that time.[19] Tova Cohen characterized and mapped the models of female character types in his most prominent stories.[20] Einat Baram Eshel discussed Brandstetter's *HaShahar* stories' characteristic integration between satire and humor, and construed it as a part of the author's tendency to build bridges of reconciliation between the two spiritual polar opposites present in his writings, Hasidism and Haskalah.[21]

Scholars' focus on Brandstetter's stories from the days of *HaShahar* reflect the common recognition that his writings from the 1870s onward are but an inconsequential appendix, of lesser quality and lesser relevance to the history of Hebrew literature compared to his earlier work. Avraham Shaanan expressed this view explicitly: "It was at the very moment he was disconnected from his maskilic background and tried to break ground on a new spiritual path for his stories, that all the imperfections and shortcomings, barely noticeable in his early works, suddenly stood out."[22] The diversity of these stories made it difficult for scholars to pinpoint their shared qualities and to make adequate generalizations concerning them, as stated by Ortsion Bartana: "Even the act of classifying the genre of the later stories is more difficult. They could be viewed as either realistic, parodistic or humoristic stories."[23] The chief common denominator he finds between all the later stories, compared to the earlier ones, is their more realistic nature and their petit bourgeois Galician setting. Additionally, he mentions that these stories lost almost any trace of the satirical tendencies and plot-intrigue patterns characteristic of the ones published in *HaShahar*. And so, the last decades of his

[18] Moshe Pelli, "The Narrative Poetics of M.D. Brandstetter in 'Mordekhai Kizovitch'," *Bitzaron* 67 (1977), 28–30; idem, "Mordekhai Kizovitch Becoming Enlightened in a Short Story by Mordekhai David Brandstetter," *HaDor* 2 (2008), 138–147.

[19] Yair Mazor, "Mordekhai David Brandstetter: 'The Prophet Elijah', 'The Persecutor of the Jews in the Town of Grieleb', 'From Success to Success'," in *A Well Wrought Enlightenment* (Tel-Aviv, 1986), 151–164.

[20] Tova Cohen, "'A Convention and Its Alteration in Shaping the Ridiculed Woman: The Stories of M.D. Brandstetter'"; "'The Perfect Heroine Described by Novel Creators': The Romance Heroine in Brandstetter's Stories," in *One Beloved, Other Hated: Between Fiction and Reality in Haskalah Depictions of Women* (Jerusalem, 2002), 94–111, 203–211.

[21] Einat Baram Eshel, "Mordekhai David Brandstetter," in *Representations of Reality in Hebrew Haskalah Literature, 1857–1881* (Tel-Aviv, 2011), 260–282.

[22] Avraham Shaanan, "A Transitional Phase in the Development of the Hebrew Story: Braudes, Dik, and Brandstetter," in *Trends in Modern Hebrew Literature*, vol. 2 (Tel-Aviv, 1962), 86.

[23] Ortsion Bartana, *Trends and Stages*…, 160.

literary work remain almost an uncharted scholarly territory, considered to be a mere appendix to an oeuvre essentially limited to the Haskalah period. Nonetheless, Brandstetter's later stories raise interesting questions themselves, since they demonstrate a number of processes that are not confined to his own work. This has been observed by Ben-Ami Feingold in his preface to a collection of Brandstetter's writings, edited by Feingold and published in 1974:

> In spite of it being considered an inconsequential part of Brandstetter's work, this period is the most interesting, given the author's incessant search for new models and new material. A secret inner struggle could be discerned in his works of that time – the struggle of an author belonging to an obsolete literary movement, trying to find his place in a literary world inhabited by numerous new movements – to keep up with the times. It would seem that in not giving Brandstetter's stories of the 1890's the same serious and respectful consideration that it did his stories of the 1870's, literary criticism has done Brandstetter's work an injustice.[24]

In the following pages, I will try to rise to the challenge implied by Feingold's words, while reviewing stories written by Brandstetter after the publication of his collected works in 1891.

II

An author like Brandstetter, whose taste and ideas had crystallized in the 1860s, inevitably stood back in wonder, peering at the overwhelming tides of change, washing over Hebrew literature from the late 1880s to the turn of the twentieth century. It was a bustling time like no other, whose events followed one another at a dizzying pace. In only a few years, the foundation for the growth of modern Hebrew literature was laid down. In 1890, Hebrew literature was still clouded with an air of summarization and contemplation in light of the end of the Haskalah period, but soon after, there followed a sequence of steps establishing a modern Hebrew literary system, complete with the necessary centers and institutions, writers and readers, expression devices and communication channels. At the very outset of the twentieth century, these resources enabled it to become a complex sensitive expression mechanism, of the diverse Jewish experience in an age of historical changes.[25]

[24] Ben-Ami Feingold, "Introduction," 24–25.

[25] We still lack an integrative, updated scholarly summary of Hebrew literature created in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, with all their revolutionary significance.

Literary prose saw the fall of the ideological novel and the rise of the psychological or pre-psychological short story. The realistic-naturalist school, established by Ben-Avigdor and named "Hamahalakh hehadash" (literally: The New Movement), was materializing with the essential goal to faithfully portray the reality of the lives of common Jews. The synthetic style of Mendele Moykher-Sforim was crystallizing, merging different historical layers of the Hebrew language, eventually to become a major influence on the language of twentieth century Hebrew prose. The opposing modern consciousness of Hebrew prose, established by Micha Josef Berdyczewski, was materializing, delving into the mind of the young Jew standing at an existential-cultural crossroads. Prose and poetry were influenced by neo-romanticism, Nietzscheism, symbolism and decadence of contemporary European literature, especially through Russian and German channels. Philosophical, critical and journalistic modern writing was dawning, with the crystallization of a precise nonfiction prose language in the writings of Ahad Ha'am, David Frischman, Nahum Sokolow, Mordecai Ehrenpreis and others. First Hebrew-language daily newspapers were established (*HaYom*, *HaẔefirah*, *HaMeliẓ*) alongside several literary periodicals of European style, of the likes of *HaShiloaḥ* and *Luaḥ Aḥiassaf*. Modern Hebrew publishing houses of European standards were coming into being (Aḥiassaf, Tushiya), and thus the system of book production and distribution was branching out. Hebrew children's literature was being expanded and elaborated. A new geographical map of Hebrew literature was forming – a map consisting of two chief influential hubs, Warsaw and Odessa, and drawing from these, a vast periphery in Europe and outside it, i.e. in the United States and in Eretz Israel. Numerous preeminent writers of poetry, fictional prose, essays and critical texts, were emerging concurrently and would leave a deep impression on future generations of writers (Bialik, Tchernichovsky, Berdyczewski, Frischman, Ahad Ha'am, S.Y. Abramowitz in his second Hebrew incarnation). An intricately branched network of tensions and connections was being crafted, between Hebrew

There are, however, important descriptions of certain segments in this field. See, primarily: Hillel Barzel, *A History of Hebrew Poetry,* vol. 1: *The Chibbat Zion Period* (Tel-Aviv, 1987); Simon Halkin, *Trends and Forms in Modern Hebrew Literature,* vol. 1: *Chapters in the Literature of Haskalah and Hibbat-Zion* (Jerusalem, 1984); Benjamin Harshav, *Language in Time of Revolution* (Stanford, 1993); Dan Miron, *When Loners Come Together: A Portrait of Hebrew Literature at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Tel-Aviv, 1987); Gershon Shaked, *Hebrew Narrative Fiction 1880–1980,* vol. 1: *In Exile* (Tel-Aviv, 1977).

literature and the Zionist movement. A sequence of principled literary debates filled the literary air, some very subtle and complex, culminating in the formulation of the conception of secular Hebrew culture as one of the channels and goals of the modern Jewish revolution. In only a few years, Hebrew literature, or at least those at its helm, extricated itself from the control of the Haskalah movement, rapidly absorbed the principles of romanticism, and thereby entered the realm of modernism. This shift marked the formation of a sequence of fundamental tensions: between traditional and innovative trends; between intra-Jewish poetic and lingual models and European ones; between realistic-mimetic inclinations and romantic-symbolist, aesthetic or expressive ones; between collective-national affinity and individualistic impulses.[26]

After he had published a collection of his stories from *HaShahar* period, Brandstetter wished to find his place in the new literary climate. This desire is indicated by the effort he put into getting a foothold in the new literary periodicals of the 1890s. He first tried to find a place in the periodical entitled *Mi-Mizraḥ u-Mi-Ma'arav* (literally: From East and West), edited by his acquaintance, author and critic Reuben Brainin. This literary stage was established in Vienna in 1894 to loud cheers of exultations, and was actually intended by the editor as an instrument of expression for the younger generation, aspiring to revolutionize Hebrew literature. In its first issue, Brainin included a story by Brandstetter, whose title, "From the West to the East" ("Mi-Ma'arav Le-Mizraḥ"), was apparently meant to suit the spirit of the publication.[27] The author later renamed the story "Kfar Mezagegim" ["Village of Glass-Makers"]. The inclusion of the story caused wonder and grievance among Brainin's other collaborators. "We hoped for a belles-lettres of sorts, for a new life," complained Micha Josef Berdyczewski in a letter to his friend Alter Drujanow, "and here are some dry bones of Brandstetter's."[28] Berdyczewski and his thirty-year old friends considered fifty-year-old Brandstetter to be a relic of an outmoded movement, whose mere inclusion in their periodical, God forbid, mars it with archaic traditionalism.

[26] See: Avner Holtzman, "'The Strong New Fermentation in European Life': Premature Modernism in Hebrew Literature," in *Times of Change: Jewish Literatures in the Modern Era. Essays in Honor of Dan Miron* (Beer Sheba, 2008), 163–172.

[27] Mordekhai David Brandstetter, "Mi-Ma'arav Le-Mizraḥ" [From West to East], *Mi-Mizraḥ u-Mi-Ma'arav*, No. 1, July 1894, 17–30. Collected in his writings (above, note 12), vol. 3, 7–29.

[28] M.J. Berdyczewski's letter to Alter Druyanov, December 1894, in Avner Holtzman (ed.), *Micha Yosef Berdyczewski: Studies and Documents* (Jerusalem, 2002), 75.

Two years later, Brandstetter was once again trying to find himself a place in the new literary landscape, and upon learning that Ahad-Ha'am would be establishing a new monthly periodical entitled *HaShiloaḥ*, he hastened to send him his story "Zalman the Gentile" ["Zalman Goy"], whose discernible agenda, much like that of "Village of Glass-Makers," was unambiguously Zionist. His letter to Ahad Ha'am reflects his deep desire to take his place in living literature, as well as the routine humility that characterized his communications with any eminent figure in the literary world: "I would be extremely honored to count myself among the contributing writers of this periodical of whom you, sir, are the editor. From time to time, I will try and compose new pieces to the best of my ability, with the hope I could hone my style to that of the contemporary literature of our people, for its features have changed for the better, and are no longer the same as when I had first joined the ranks of its authors."[29] Ahad Ha'am did accept the story and even included it in the monthly magazine's first issue.[30] However, in a typical misanthropic move, the editor split the short story of no more than twelve pages and published it in two installments, in a way that deeply damaged its effect. Brandstetter was outraged and rightfully so, but expressed this feeling of abuse only halfheartedly to the editor: "By severing my brief story, whose length did not call for such a division, I believe you did wrong."[31] In spite of all this, he did not despair and suggested other stories to be published in *HaShiloaḥ*, but those were not accepted. After these two attempts, Brandstetter did finally find a more favorable literary publication in the Warsaw-based literary annual *Luaḥ Aḥiassaf*, founded in 1893. Although that periodical too was under the spiritual influence of Ahad Ha'am, it was much more open and accommodating and less elitist and fastidious, giving voice to all parts of the multi-generational literary spectrum of the time. Between the years 1897 and 1902, Brandstetter published six new stories in this publication. At that time he did not have difficulty finding Galician periodicals that would publish his writings, such as the Kraków-based *HaEshkol* and *Luaḥ Sha'ashu'im*, and also published some of his stories in Hebrew-language publications in

[29] Brandstetter's Letter to Ahad Ha-Am, 12 September 1896, Ahad Ha-Am's archive, The National Library, Jerusalem, Brandstetter file.

[30] Mordekhai David Brandstetter, "Zalman Goy", *HaShiloah* 1 (1896–1897), 48–54, 116–122. Collected in his writings (above, note 12), 3, 30–53.

[31] Brandstetter's Letter to Ahad Ha-Am, 4 November 1896, Ahad Ha-Am's archive, The National Library, Jerusalem, Brandstetter file.

the United States. A total of twelve new stories written by him were published between 1894 and 1905, the same as the number of his stories to be published in *HaShahar*.[32] He also authored at least six new stories that would be first published in 1913, in the third volume of his collected works.[33] This was a sizeable book, three hundred pages in length, containing the bulk of his later works.

What are the characteristics of Brandstetter's later works? More than anything else, stands out the ambition to adhere to new materials and poetics, following the changes in Jewish society from the 1880s onward. Most of his stories were still set in the Galician vicinity, stretching between Kraków, Rzeszów, Lviv and Brody, at the center of which were located the fictional towns of Wratnó and Grieleb, whose names were transparent anagrams of Tarnów and Briegel, the only two towns in which he had ever lived. By that time, the drama of the struggle between Hasidism and Haskalah in those places did not have any bearing on reality, and so was pushed aside to the margins of his writing. The only remnants of this struggle were short anecdotes ridiculing the tzadikim and their followers, in such stories as "Two Disks" ["Shney Igulin"], "Lag BaOmer", "The Righteous' Vice and Virtue" ["Tzadikim Be'Kalkalatam uVeTakanatam"] and "Rabbi Yoskeh Hindas and His Dream" ["Rabbi Yoskeh Hindas vaḤalomo"]. Alternatively, he focused on the portrayal of a quarrelsome deceitful society of traditional ne'er-do-wells such as the one in the story "The House of Rabbi Gimpel Gluska the Entrepreneur" ["Beyt Rabbi Gimpel Gluska HaKablan"]. Another characteristic discernible in these stories is the effects of the spirit of the

[32] These are the stories in the order of appearance: "Mi-Ma'arav Le-Mizraḥ" [From West to East] (above, note 27); "Shenei Igulin" [Two Disks], *Ner Ha-maaravi*, 2 (1896), 1: 20–23; "Zalman Goy" (above, note 30); "Bank LeMisḥar ve-la Ḥaroshet HaMa'aseh" [The Bank of Trade and Industry], *Luah Ahiassaf* 5 (1897), 37–44; "'Doctor Peuter Bardelas", ibid., 46–52; "HaBarbur" [The Swan], ibid., 53–59; "Beyt Rabbi Gimpel Gluska HaKablan" [The House of Rabbi Gimpel Gluska the Entrepreneur], *Luah Ahiassaf* 6 (1898), 93–107; "Tzadikim Be'Kalkalatam uVeTakanatam'" [The Righteous' Vice and Virtue], *Luah Ahiassaf* 8 (1900), 79–85; "Avraham Ben-Nachum miKfar Makh'owicz" [Avraham Ben-Nachum from the Village of Makh'owicz] (above, note 2); "Mi-Krinitsa" [From Krinitsa], *Luah Shaashu'im* 1 (1902), 33–42; "Talmud Torah" [Torah Study-House], *HaEshkol* 4 (1902), 70–84; "Lag BaOmer" [Lag BaOmer Jewish Festival], *HaEshkol* 5 (1905), 132–136.

[33] The stories are: "Haver Tov" [A Good Friend], "Rabbi Ahrale," "Rabbi Lemmel Tarvad," "Rabbi Yoskeh Hindas vaḤalomo" [Rabbi Yoskeh Hindas and His Dream], "Asefat HaKahal BiKehilat HaKodesh Avdora HaKtanah" [The Public Assembly of the Jewish Congregation of little Avdora], "Al Yad Ḥalon Beiti" [By my House Window].

time, loosening the customs of yore and breaching the boundaries of traditional religious existence.

The weakening of the old communal way of life ushered in a new narrative pattern in Brandstetter's works. In complete opposition to the purposeful one-way narrative line characterizing his stories published in *HaShahar*, these new stories' material and structure expressed hesitation, multiple possibilities and an openness to new directions. One prime example of this is the story "Torah Study-House" ["Talmud Torah"] of 1902. This is but one link in a rich tradition of the portrayal of the heder and its educational methods in Hebrew literature.[34] The story is shaped in a two-act plot structure. Its first part describes a visit of four of the community's most distinguished members to the only heder in town, motivated by the wish to observe the teaching methods held in it. It is a traditional old-fashioned strict heder. The building is located in an impoverished suburb and holds dozens of boys, jailed within its walls from dawn till dusk, starved and exhausted, supervised by a sole melamed (Torah teacher) struggling to keep them all under control. Even more so, he struggles to collect their tuition from their parents. Nevertheless, when asked to display their knowledge in front of the distinguished guests, they recite the scripture with fluency and confidence. Brandstetter modeled the four visitors as representatives of different views regarding the heder's fate and future. One is the new rabbi of the congregation. He is delighted by the boys' knowledge and is naturally in favor of the conservation of the old ways of teaching. The second is the wealthiest man in town, Yona Kaftor, charged with the community's financial dealings. He too prefers things as they are, despite the current situation's obvious iniquity, of fear that any initiative to improve the learning conditions and hiring more teachers would take a heavy toll on the public budget. The third is doctor Pifiyot [allusion to the Hebrew biblical expression 'ḥerev pifiyot', double-edged sword], a young and reputable lawyer working in the state's courts of justice. He denounces the heder's teaching methods and the sort of knowledge taught in it, and recommends that the boys be transferred to the modern governmental educational system. The fourth, the merchant Lapidot, is a factory owner and a renowned maskilic author of his day, and these identifiers hint at his affinity to the writer. As a former pupil of

[34] See: Avner Holtzman, "Between Denunciation and Embracing: The Heder in Memoir and Modern Hebrew Literature," in David Assaf and Immanuel Etkes (eds.), *The Heder: Studies, Documents, Literature and Memoirs* (Tel-Aviv, 2010), 77–110.

that very heder, he is overcome with nostalgia for the teaching method held in it and he follows the boys' display of knowledge with affectionate enthusiasm. He says that he is of the opinion that the traditional way of teaching is the basis of Jewish identity and the assurance of its preservation, and that the community must nourish and fund it in order to provide these boys with suitable learning conditions. The second act of the story takes place after a few weeks, at the community assembly, in which these four participate, each expanding and deepening his own argument. Lapidot, striving for a compromise, suggests founding a revised heder, employing a Christian teacher to teach secular subjects in addition to the Jewish melamed. As expected, his suggestion is met with strong objection from the Hasidic community members, who demand to keep things exactly as they are, and so the assembly is dispersed without reaching an agreement. For now, concludes the narrator ironically, the heder will continue its current pitiful practices, probably until the coming of the Messiah.

The differences between this story and the stories published in *HaShahar* are unmistakable. Contrary to the belief in maskilic values flowing through the earlier stories, here, secular education is only one out of the array of views expressed. The option preferred by the author is a fusion of some kind between the introduction of modern general studies and the continued learning of Hebrew Scripture, but he does not come out against the positions held by his opponents. The characters are not divided into either Sons of Light or Sons of Darkness, but rather they are joined together as a complex orchestra of views and opinions, each with its own justification and inner logic. The satirical basis is completely absent, and in its place there appears to be an attempt at reflecting the complex social fabric of a typical Galician town at a crossroads of cultural influences. The town's Jewish community is divided into Hasidic and assimilated Jews, moderate maskilim and merchants whose only interest is in their money, wealthy people and paupers. The story does not strive to reach a sharp closure or teach a clear lesson, and its end remains unraveled, leaving the characters with uncertainty. The eventful storyline of his *HaShahar* days had dwindled, almost completely disappearing. In its stead, the author constructed a symposium-like story, a long-drawn-out debate allowing him to show a wide variety of different opinions and views. In no way does the author's own position, as construed from his

other writings, obscure other voices expressed within the story, especially as it does not eventually prevail over them.

"Torah Study-House" is not the only example in Brandstetter's works of what could be called the unresolved symposium-esque story. Another example is the story "Good Friend" ["Ḥaver Tov"], first published in 1913. It takes place in a Galician town and its characters' gentile names indicate their identity as assimilated Jews. The plot follows a young single doctor by the name of Carl Blind, who is morally incarnate, supporting his impoverished patients and treating them with no reward in mind. The doctor falls in love with one of his patients, a young woman by the name of Clara, a wife and a mother to a baby, and she in turn, develops similar feelings toward him. This does not escape the notice of her mother, Yeti, who had been born to a distinguished Hasidic family but rebelled against the tradition of her ancestors and married her daughter off to a maskilic pharmacist called Jonas Frash. Having already discovered that her son-in-law was a coarse man of ill-repute, she encourages the secret fondness developing between her daughter and the physician, in hope of bringing about the daughter's divorce and joining the more desirable couple in holy matrimony. This plan does not go unnoticed by Doctor Fux, who has been posing as Blind's friend while actually secretly envying and despising him. Fux puts his own efforts to encourage the developing love between Clara and Blind in order to tarnish the young doctor's reputation by creating a scandal that should result in his downfall. Meanwhile, another incident is uncovered, complicating matters further. It is discovered that Frash, the pharmacist, Clara's husband, had forced himself on the maid and she bore him a child, and upon this discovery, Clara, outraged, leaves the house and moves in with Blind, her beloved. Fux's dual enticement scheme does its trick, culminating in a fist fight between the two rivals: Blind, Clara's lover, and Frash, her husband. Blind leaves town, bruised and wounded, Clara returns to her mother's house for the time being, and it is not clear what will come of them.

Getting to this point in the story, it would seem this is a light tragicomic melodrama set in a Jewish Galician provincial town at the beginning of the twentieth century, but the twists and turns of the plot are reminiscent of today's soap operas. Indeed, the story even gathers the following of an emotionally involved audience, for the whole town follows the mercurial love story unfolding with fascination and amusement. And here, to the reader's surprise, this light gossipy discourse be-

comes an ever-branching symposium on this affair and its implications, participated by representatives of all the social circles in the town. It appears as though the story's events are only relayed in order to facilitate the branched discussion that constitutes its second half. This part details three separate hubs of discussion and debate. The Hebrew Club, which serves as the regular meeting place of the town's maskilic Zionist-inclined population, is the scene of a half-joking discussion on the topics of marital relations, the advantages and shortcomings of the institution of marriage and a woman's right to her independence. In the Hasidic synagogue, the kloyz, the devout and pious converse the events from their traditional standpoint. They find the source of all evil in Yeti's abandonment of her Hasidic roots, and vehemently condemn Blind, the physician, for taking lightly the prohibition of approaching another man's wife. Here, the narrator takes snide potshots at the Hasidic tzadik worship, one of his favorite topics from the days of *HaShahar.* Another discussion, tumultuous and passionate in itself, is held by women of various social groups: "Indeed, whether be they as chaste as Hasidic women, or enlightened and maskilic, or only simple Jewish women – they've all turned into loafers and hagglers – 'raising havoc' at the rumor they've been hoping for, deliberating the facts, condemning or condoning the persons involved, each from her own position and standpoint."[35] Their remarks are brought in direct speech, quotes from an inclusive group discussion spanning many pages, examining the issues from any and all possible facets. One voice stands out above the rest, the clear voice of a woman named Marina, who explains to the others that romantic love is the most crucial element, trumping all other considerations in such matters. It is the thing that connects men and women – a marriage void of love, for that fact alone, should be dissolved. Nevertheless, the story ends without a lesson or any clear conclusion. In a way, the open ending signals the reader that life is complex, that it holds innumerable possible paths, and that therefore, one should not try impose on it any pre-existing ideological or moral notion.

A third example of Brandstetter's new poetics, much bolder than the others, is the story "By My House Window" ["Al Yad Ḥalon Beyti"]; it too was first published in 1913. It this case, the author forwent any central storyline. The narrator, an elderly man, is a prisoner of sorts, confined

[35] "A Good Friend," in *All the Writings of M.D. Brandstetter, Old and New*, vol. 3 (Warsaw, 1913), 84–85.

to his house on account of his illness. He spends most of his days sitting by the window and peering out at the people passing by in the street or else strolling through the park. Having spent most of his life in the small town, all its secrets are known to him, and so he knows the history of anything and anyone his eyes fall on. And thus, the story is broken down into around ten episodes, forming a mosaic of characters, life stories and the author's musings accompanying all descriptions. At times, these images are light and joyful. For instance, the narrator follows a distinguished woman walking down the street with her baby and his wet nurse, and upon encountering two smooth-tongued officers, is instantly given to temptation and thereafter disappears with them into the park's bushes. After that, he witnesses a courting conversation between two lower class people, a soldier and a maid, meeting by chance at the street corner. As their needs are very basic, it is obvious the romantic date they spontaneously set would ultimately lead to marriage. At other times, the images are dark and tragic. A young man suffering from tuberculosis is strolling in the park with his wife, an exhausted seamstress. Even though his disease is fatal and it is infecting his young children, the rabbis do not allow the two to divorce, and so they bear three daughters with the disease. A woman is selling pastries at the street corner and her good-for-nothing criminal of a husband demands that she give him some money; their multi-talented son inherited something of his father's qualities, and the narrator wonders what judgment fate has in store for the son.

The gallery of characters stretching before the narrator's eyes is a vibrant human comedy: mothers chasing possible matches for their daughters, distinguished women pretending to be of high birth while actually being nothing more than plebeians that have married up, ambitious Maskilim, scheming businessmen, women who have adopted something of the mannerisms of Polish society, masters and servants, merchants and layabouts. The narrator watches all these with impertinent irony, mixed, perhaps, with some forgiveness – the impertinent but forgiving irony of a person who has already seen it all and has been tired by it all. His adopted position of an outside observer is also an expression of his growing abhorrence of the endless rush of life and of its masses. It is, therefore, not without reason that he interrupts the sequence of episodes and soliloquizes, in the style of the Book of Job, Ecclesiastes or the Mishnaic *Pirkei Avot*, on the futility and chaos that lie at the core of human existence: "how short do the years of kindness and grace seem

to a man happy with his life on the earth; and how long seem to him the moments of sorrow and suffering."[36] Following these musings, he likens his sitting by the window to God looking scornfully down at his creatures running around before him, but he knows he himself is no less insignificant in the eyes of his creator, and that his allotted time on this earth will soon be running out completely:

> sitting there, up above, laughing – why shan't I, his lowly creature, no better than a worm crawling on the earth, laugh too as long as I am able; as long as my mouth, unlike the worm's, is yet to be full of dirt. And even if as I laugh, my heart aches within me, no matter – for when, if not now? The sun has nearly set on this, my day, and not much more laughter remains to be laughed, in my futile life.[37]

So different is this bitter sober position from the prevailing humoristic--satirical mix of Brandstetter's stories from his *HaShahar* days, based on a foundation of optimistic thinking. It is obviously no accident that after "By My House Window," Brandstetter refrained almost entirely from writing and publishing new stories.[38] He dedicated himself to composing short philosophical essays, parables and epigrams he would publish from time to time, until the last years of his life.[39] According to his admiring grandson, the Polish author Roman Brandstaetter, a book filled with additional epigrams was left in his estate, but it was lost during the Shoah. Additionally, during the last few years of his life, Brandstetter had been working on his autobiography, but he has never finished it and eventually destroyed the manuscript.[40]

[36] "By My House Window", ibid., 239.

[37] Ibid., 240–241.

[38] The only two stories he published in his last fifteen years are: "Ehad mi-Lamed Vav" [One of the Thirty Six Righteous], *HaDoar*, 2.11.1921 and "Temunot mi-Krinitsa" [Pictures from Krinitsa], *HaDoar*, 26 March 1922 to 25 May 1922, in 13 installments.

[39] These works were published in many installments in the New-York based Hebrew weekly *HaDoar* between 1922–1924, under the title "Splinters: Parables and Aphorisms in Prose." For details see: Ortsion Bartana (above, note 14), 38. Another batch of twenty aphorisms was published at the tenth anniversary of his death. See: Avraham Kahana, "To the Memory of Mordekhai David Brandstetter", *Davar*, 10 June 1938.

[40] Roman Brandstaetter, "The Death of my Grandfather", *Davar*, 4 July 1941, 25 July 1941. More about the connections between the grandson and the grandfather, see: Ruth Shenfeld, "The Literary Work of Roman Brandstaetter between the Two World Wars," in Chone Shmeruk and Shmuel Werses (eds.), *Between Two World Wars: On the Cultural Life of the Jews in Poland in Its Three Languages* (Jerusalem, 1997), 321–369.

III

Another indication of the spirit of the time sipping into Brandstetter's stories after his *HaShahar* days is his scornful observation, half-amused and half-disgusted, of the new position of Jewish bourgeoisie striking roots in the towns of Galicia, inclined toward assimilation and the adoption of the mannerisms of Polish society and something of German culture. He was occupied to no small extent by the cynical match-making market that had become commonplace in these circles, utilizing its various characteristics and represented in the stories "From Krinitsa" ["Mi-Krinitsa"], "Doctor Peuter Bardelas" and "Village of Glass-Makers." Mothers and fathers try to hunt down potential son-in-laws holding such splendorous epithets as 'doctor' or 'advocate.' In turn, the only thing occupying the minds of the husbands-to-be is the fortunes that would fall to their lot; the nature and qualities of their bride being of no real consequence to them. Well-off widows are tempted to marry seasoned money-hunters and then tossed aside when their new spouses realize nothing has remained of their fortune. All this serves as a fertile ground for acts of hypocrisy, deceit and impersonation, exposing the full range of human malice. Basic human connections, such as love, faithfulness and children's duty to their parents, are of no real importance, compared to bare economic self-interest. Brandstetter's satirical nature, expressed before in his maskilic stories, found a new wide expanse of virgin soil in Jewish bourgeoisie.

Behind the topic of matchmaking is a wide fundamental issue, encompassing several of his stories. This new direction in Brandstetter's writing fits in with the growing interest of Hebrew literature of the 1890s in the economical mechanisms shaping society and deciding the fate of the individual. Alongside works occupied with matters of grave consequence and dealing with the innermost chambers of the soul, the changes in time ushered in a new widespread literary movement focusing on the daily hardships of actual Jews of various social standing. First and foremost, these are people under the constant cruel struggle of economic survival in the "market of life." Instead of the usual confrontations between Maskilim, rabbis and Hasidim, or between rebellious youths and their authoritative fathers, a new branch of literature represented fights over a piece of bread. The confrontations it portrayed were amongst the poor, between them and their strict Jewish employers, or between

them and the authorities and the grievances thereof. Occasionally, conflicts arise between the heartless bourgeois Jew and his employees, or between him and his idealistic sons, trying to instill within him the values of morality and justice. A wide array of characters and archetypes took the literary stage: peddlers and hagglers, grocers and venders, workers and tradesmen, brokers and moneylenders, industrialists and traders, beggars and criminals, immigrants and drifters. Questions of ownership, property, inheritance and bequeathal, getting rich and losing everything, the difficulty of life in the big city, the struggle to make ends meet and looking for a roof over one's head – these filled literary prose of that decade, along with half-concealed themes of the contemplation of questions of social justice and the theory and practice of socialism in the Jewish community and outside it.[41]

Brandstetter too made his modest contribution to this movement. Most of his stories of that time are set in the economic sphere and their characters are "economical people" in the sense Gershon Shaked used to describe the characters of Mendele Moykher-Sforim. This refers to people whose main motivations in life are the search for basic means and the need to amass a fortune in money and property.[42] There is no doubt that Brandstetter the merchant and industrialist, who has spent his whole life in the realm of business and finances, comes here to the aid of Brandstetter the author. To name a few examples, these stories relate tales of moneylenders and landlords devising schemes for the continued exploitation of their victims of clients ("The Bank of Trade and Industry" ["Bank LeMisḥar ve-la Ḥaroshet HaMa'aseh"]); bankers on the verge of bankruptcy ("Village of Glass-Makers"); big-time operators of the community who embezzle public funds and then escape with their plunder ("The Righteous' Vice and Virtue"); malefactors commandeering the community's institutions by force of their riches, robbing the public while trampling anyone standing in their way ("The Public Assembly of the Jewish Congregation of Little Avdora" ["Asefat HaKahal BiKehilat HaKodesh Avdora HaKtana"]); Jews gaining wealth by exploiting the weakness of declining Christian nobility, and relying on the state legal system to do so ("Rabbi Ahrale"); struggling peddlers, making a meager

[41] See: Avner Holtzman, "On the Birth of Hebrew Literature as an Economical System," *Ot* 3 (2013), 21–42.

[42] Gershon Shaked, "The Economical Man," in *Between Laughter and Tears: Studies in Mendele Moykher Sforim* (Ramat-Gan, 1965), 13–21.

living by pawning and selling valuables ("The Swan" ["HaBarbur"]); and even conmen luring young Jewish maidens with promises of marriage, only to remove them from the safety of their families and sell them as prostitutes to be taken overseas ("Rabbi Lemmel Tarvad"). Even the typical maskilic-styled symbolic names of people and places relate to the murky, malicious, predatory nature of the world depicted in these stories: the town of Tohuvavohunitz ("Tohu vaVohu," literally "chaos," alludes to the words of Genesis 1:2), the city of Ravhashav [literally: "much is in vain"], the village of Makh'owicz ("makh'ov" literally means "pain"), doctor Bardelas (literally: "cheetah") or advocate Petaltolowicz ("petaltol" literally means "shifty").

However, this Valley of Tears is but one aspect of the world-view portrayed by Brandstetter. Just as his *HaShahar* stories had depicted the stark contrast between the enlightened Maskilim and the Hasidim, still left in the dark, so did a similar dichotomy materialize in his post-maskilic stories, only to change the identity of the two opposites. The dark side was now occupied by the Galician bourgeoisie, laughable and corrupt, while the idealistic side of light and good was reserved for "Hovevei Zion" (Zion Lovers), and especially those among them true to their values, who immigrate to the Land of Israel. These two polar opposites were laid bare, quite schematically, in the story "Village of Glass-Makers" of 1894. Its inspiration was undoubtedly the news Brandstetter had read in the weekly newspaper *HaMagid*, between 1891 and 1893, concerning the initiative by Baron Edmond de Rothschild to build glass-bottling factory near the beach of Tantura, south of Haifa.[43] This news led him to weave the fictional storyline. Once, there was a widow by the name of Adella Ḥap, whose late husband, a trader, left her a fortune he had made dishonestly. She herself falls prey to a banker from Lviv, very appropriately named Natan Salamander. This man tempts her into marrying him with the intent to take hold of her possessions, but to his fury and frustration, it then turns out she keeps all of her money from

[43] See, for instance: "In the Holy Land," *HaMagid*, 18 June 1891; "Constantinopl," *HaMagid*, 7 July 1893. The factory was intended to supply bottles for the wine produced in local wineries. Its founding manager was Meir Dizengoff, a young Zionist from Odessa who studied the art of glass manufacturing in France. Many years later he became known as the first legendary mayor of Tel-Aviv. The factory was abandoned after five years due to severe production difficulties (the sand in Tantura beach was not suitable for glass production), and its huge building stood neglected for almost a century. Today it is located in the grounds of kibutz Nahsholim, and serves as an Archaeological Museum.

harm in the bank. When the bank manager embezzles clients' money and takes his own life, it is discovered that all of Adella's money is irrevocably gone, and thus her husband immediately throws her out of his house. Her children from the first marriage also abandon her because she lost their inheritance and so she is condemned to a life of poverty and squalor.

Against the backdrop of this tangle of corruption stand the two good and fair heroes of the story: Elisha, Adella's son, and Loyra, Natan Salamander's daughter, who fall in love with one another, and decide to get married and make aliyah to Eretz Israel. At the climax of the story, Elisha attends a Hovevei Zion meeting in his town, and makes an impassionate speech praising the settlement in Eretz Israel. He says he himself plans to align the course of his life to the four-fold ideal: "the People of Israel, the religion of Israel and the language of Israel, in the Land of Israel!" [44] Elisha and Loyra do make aliyah, found a glass factory and live in on an agricultural pastoral estate. Eventually, they take in the aging father and mother, who have finally uprooted from Galicia and reconciled, and now join their son and daughter in the celebration of Passover, the Festival of Freedom, in the land of their fathers. The story's idyllic conclusion shows the wondrous transformation of Natan Salamander, from a Galician con artist into a farmer and winegrower in Kfar Mezagegim (Village of Glass-Makers).

This notion, that had been rather simplistically put in "Village of Glass-Makers," was given a complex and interesting expression in the story "Zalman the Gentile" of 1896. The main character is a fifty-year-old merchant, as old as the author was at the time of writing. He is a man of extraordinary rectitude as well as a successful businessman, and also a religious Jew and an observant one – but his fearlessness and his heightened politeness, stand out as abnormal compared to his fellow citizens and he is therefore nicknamed Zalman the Gentile. And when, to the wonder of the people of the town, Zalman betrothes his daughter to a simple blacksmith, they feel he went too far. Furthermore, a rumor spreads through the town that Zalman the Gentile is selling all his belongings and intends to move, together with his family, to one of the new settlements in Eretz Israel. Zalman himself wholeheartedly confirms these rumors and even breaks into a lengthy speech, listing all the harms

[44] "From West to East," 28.

of Jewish existence in the Diaspora and the dangers the future holds. He compares the lowly existence to which the Jews of Eastern Europe are reduced, to the salvation of the Zionist solution. The authentic passion surging in this speech, and the methodical and ordered nature of his arguments reinforce the hypothesis that what we have here is the comprehensive credo of the author. Also recognizable are the various sources fused into Zalman's speech, all close to Brandstetter's heart. On the one hand, it was clearly influenced by the series of polemic articles entitled "A Time to Plant" ["Et Lata'at," an allusion to Ecclesiastes] (1872–1875), that Peretz Smolenskin directed against the wave of assimilation in the maskilic community of Berlin, and against their source of inspiration, the ideas of Moses Mendelssohn.[45] On the other hand, the story was also influenced by the Zionist discourse in Tarnów, Brandstetter's home town, during the 1880s and 1890s.[46] The ideal Jewish village Zalman plans to settle in is the facsimile of Maḥanayim, the short-lived settlement, located in Upper Galilee, whose lands were acquired by the Ahavat Zion association of Tarnów in 1891, and whose first settlers from Tarnów arrived in 1898.

One could assume Brandstetter constructed the character of Zalman as a portrait of his ideal self, complete with the relationship between himself and his surrounding. Zalman's strong economic standing, as the one of his creators, grants him the freedom and the self confidence to do as he wishes, even breaking social norms, without losing the respect of his community. When a group of Jews gathers in a public house and gossips about him, he happens to come by, listens to their arguments amusedly and then informs them good-naturedly that his actions are his own business and no one else's, but that he would gladly tell them his views and plans. Brandstetter obviously had an inner voice wishing to do as Zalman does, to uproot himself from the world of Galician trade and join his fellow-citizens in boldly striking roots in the soil of Galilee. Clearly, he did not follow this voice within him, but his support of the aspirations of the Zionists of Tarnów is undoubtable. The affinity between the author and his hero could help explain the story's relative complexity, its manifold deviation from its manifesto-esque ideals and its building of a char-

[45] See: Shmuel Feiner, "Smolenskin's Heresy of Haskalah and the Roots of National Jewish Historiography," *Ha-Zionut* 16 (1991), 9–31.

[46] See: Nathan Michael Gelber, *History of the Zionist Movement in Galicia*, vols. 1–2 (Jerusalem, 1958), according to the name index.

acter with a certain human depth and a believable realistic context. The story's unrefined structure, too, its second half consumed by an element of oration, is intriguing precisely due to the fact that its roughness differs so greatly from the well-constructed compositions of Brandstetter's *HaShahar* stories. The main character could be considered one of the first realistic depictions of the character of the "maskilic man of tradition": the Jewish middle-aged bourgeois rooted in the realm of tradition yet open to the spirit of the times, an admirer of the Zionist movement and a consumer of contemporary Hebrew literature. When members of the congregation try to accuse him of reading secular modern literature, he is not alarmed in any way. On the contrary, without a hint of fear, even with an air of pride, he declares himself to be a faithful reader of such literature, and admits wholeheartedly it has influenced the shaping of his Zionist views.[47]

However, this story can also teach us of the limits of the author's literary world, compared to another story, written only two years after it and published in the very same literary monthly. I am referring to the well-known novella "Whither?" ["Le'an"] by Mordecai Zeev Feierberg (1874–1899), one of the key works of that time, written in 1898 and published in several installments throughout 1899. The hero of the novel is Insane Nachman [Nahman HaMeshuga], the outcast prodigy who dramatically abandons the world of religious belief and secretly formulates a doctrine of the national salvation of the Jewish people. This powerful figure has touched the hearts and stirred the minds of the best readers of the day. Feierberg was an avid reader of *HaShiloah* and was undoubtedly familiar with Brandstetter's story. It is likely that something of Zalman's impassionate speech in "Zalman the Gentile" was absorbed into the pool of various sources kindling Nachman's blazing sermon, plotting his people's way eastward.[48] But precisely due to the certain affinity between

[47] The most typical incarnation of this character in Hebrew literature is Yitzhak Israelson, the traditional Zion-Lover *Pater Familias*, who is the protagonist of Yeshayahu Bershadsky's Novel *Neged HaZerem* [Against the Stream] (1901). See: Avner Holtzman, "Neged HaZerem by Yeshayahu Bershadsky: A Juncture in the History of Hebrew Novel," *Loves of Zion* (Jerusalem, 2006), 77–90.

[48] See: Shmuel Werses, "Nahman's Final Speech in 'Whither' and its Origins," in *From Mendele to Hazaz: Studies in the Development of Hebrew Prose* (Jerusalem, 1987), 137–157. Werses calls attention to the influence of Brandstetter on Feierberg's story, but assumes that he was influenced by the Zionist speech of Elisha in "From West to East." For various reasons it seems more likely to me that "Zalman the Gentile" was the main source of influence. In any case, Werses's conclusion in this matter suits both Brandstetter's stories:

these characters, one cannot help notice the vast distance between the two, for the torn and tumultuous mental world of Feierberg and his hero, with its modern sensitivities and intensive mode of expression were already beyond the reach of Mordekhai David Brandstetter. The interesting nature of Brandstetter's later stories' way of casting about indicates he did not stagnate after the days of *HaShahar,* but in fact kept trying and at time succeeded in renewing his work with new materials and narrative patterns. He has made a unique contribution to the landscape of Hebrew literature of the last decade of the nineteenth century and beyond. However, as he himself acknowledged with clear sobriety, all that was left for him was to look from the sidelines, as Hebrew literary prose continued to march on; to stare in wonderment as it broke new ground and entered new realms, in the beginning of the twentieth century.

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"The concluding section of 'Whither' seems to us as a profound antithesis, shrouded with sadness and melancholy, to the joyous optimism in Brandstetter's story" (ibid., 151).