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The "compulsory reading list" of the Labor Zionist youth movements in the 1930s and 1940s, which labor leader and Haganah head Israel Galili once drew up for me, featured two works by Brenner—"Self-Appraisal in Three Volumes" (1937: 6:219–67) and "He Told Her" (1937: 6:29–33)—and one by Bialik, "In the City of Slaughter" (1983: 168–74). These works were read and studied and provided food for thought and discussion in extracurricular national education. Bialik's poem was part of the Israeli literary canon and for years was also inserted into the high school syllabus. Their inclusion in Galili's list points to a convergence between Hebrew literature and Zionist discourse in the *Yishuv* period through the 1960s and the key role played by literature in molding the modern Israeli person and ethos. Collective memory chose to forget Brenner's story and extol Bialik's poem. I propose to examine the novelty of the two works, to compare them, and to explain why "In the City of Slaughter" remained fixed in our minds as a revolutionary period piece while Brenner's story was consigned to oblivion. Finally, I will look at the role that these works played in molding Israeli consciousness.

From a bird's-eye view of Jewish history in the twentieth century, the Kishinev pogrom looks like an unassuming opener for the horrors that followed: the riots in Russia of October 1905, the mass killings of 1919–20 in the Ukraine, and then World War II. In Kishinev, forty-plus Jews were killed—less than a speck in light of the hundreds, thousands, and millions of victims to whom we

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were subsequently conditioned. Yet Jewish collective memory reserves a special place for the Kishinev pogrom. Measured by contemporaries, it was not juxtaposed with events buried deep in the future, but events of the past, and, in its violence and brutality and in the conspiracy of silence between the rabble and the regime, it marked a quantum leap relative to previous incidents. Nevertheless, considering all that has happened since, it is doubtful that Kishinev deserves any special mention. Were it not for Bialik's "In the City of Slaughter," the pogrom might well have sunk into the abyss of twentieth-century Jewish suffering. As it is, it became associated in public consciousness with a profound psychological change in Eastern European Jewry regarding relations between Jews and non-Jews and with the birth of the ethos of Jewish defense: the emergence of the self-defense movement has ever since been connected to the pogrom and the poem "In the City of Slaughter."

One indication of the centrality of Bialik's poem in Jewish public opinion is the fate of the so-called "Secret Scroll," published after the pogrom by a group of Jewish intellectuals headed by Aḥad Haʿam and Simon Dubnow, with Bialik's participation. Pinning the blame for the pogrom on the abject condition of Jews in the Russian realm, which aroused the contempt and antagonism of the masses, the public appeal questioned the justice of Russia's legal system and called for Jews to organize to defend themselves: "It is a disgrace for five million human souls to unload themselves on others, to stretch their necks to slaughter and cry for help, without as much as attempting to defend their own property, honor and lives." Moreover: "Stop weeping and pleading, stop lifting your hands for salvation to those who hate and exclude you! Look to your own hands for rescue!" (Hebrew Writers' Union 1989: 158).

Its strong words notwithstanding, the "Secret Scroll" had no great impact: it was arcane, chasing its own tail until coming to the painful nub when it made self-defense conditional on the establishment of a Jewish defense organization and, in the interim, sought to convene a general assembly of public dignitaries to deliberate on the matter. The "Secret Scroll" was important in that highly esteemed intellectuals, such as Aḥad Haʿam and Dubnow, representing different and even opposing Jewish currents, both preached defense. But it was a bourgeois

appeal, respectable, restrained, giving no expression to the heartfelt rage, shame, and desire for vengeance. Since the Russian pogroms of 1881, which went down in Jewish history as s*ufot hanegev* (southern storms), the Jewish public had undergone rather rapid modernization and acculturation (note the need to translate "In the City of Slaughter" into Russian and the wide distribution enjoyed by Jabotinsky's version of the poem). This public was influenced by modern streams on the Russian street: among the revolutionaries who challenged tsarist rule, Jews stood out beyond their proportion in the population, and the authors of the "Secret Scroll" lagged behind the younger generation. They took no chances, they preached no rebellion, and, in order for the Jews to defend themselves, they wished to petition the authorities for permission: "We will be allowed to defend ourselves" (Goren 1994: 97).[1] The intent suited the solid bourgeois character of the signatories, who took care not to utter criticism of anyone.

Seen against the moderate "Secret Scroll," "In the City of Slaughter" was a radical outcry. As one critic wrote (Bahat 1994: 23), as in Dante's Purgatory, God, in Bialik's work, leads the poet from one horror to another, each progressively worse than the previous. As the poet depicts scene after scene, the reader feels a mounting aversion and expects to come upon bitter weeping and lamentation, the traditional Jewish reaction to pogroms. But here lies the difference: the poet neither wails nor mourns. If he is furious at the nations of the world, at their regimes, at the rioters, he ignores them; he does not ask the non-Jewish world for pity or intervention or justice. Nor does he offer solace to the victims. Instead, Bialik directs his fury inward with a rare power, shattering the conventional descriptions of Jewish disaster. The disaster becomes a lever for both merciless, internal criticism and a call for thorough change in Jewish conduct. The Kishinev pogrom becomes a physical disaster caused by non-Jews but exposing the bankruptcy of the internal Jewish world. This is the radicalism of Bialik's portrayal. His depictions of nature are symbolic: the blossoming spring, the shining sun—these are the neutral witnesses to the horrors, looking on from the sidelines, indifferent to the goings-on. Nature's apathy is the cosmic reflection of the indifference of the non-Jews: "For God called up the slaughter and the spring

together" (Hebrew line 21; English line 25)—both are "natural" processes, inevitable, and there is thus no point in railing against them. The rioters are human beasts, not worthy of the poet's entering into dialogue with them. The accusation, the rage, the shame are all aimed at the poet's own people, who have resigned themselves to their fate. "The sons of the Maccabees" (Hebrew line 89; English line 117) never thought to defend themselves, their loved ones, their honor. The wrath and denunciation are not universal but national-internal, a tribal discourse employing tribal codes. The description of humiliation, helplessness, spiritual emptiness, and, finally, the parade of the broken survivors, reminiscent of the dance of the beggars in Ansky's *The Dybbuk* or a procession of self-flagellating ascetics, leads to the conclusion that this cannot go on. The picture is of a people that has lost its human dignity and, hereafter, must change its course. Bialik ends his work with no catharsis, no consolation. He does not indicate a desirable direction, leaving it to his readers to decide what kind of revolution is demanded of the Jews.

Bialik later published "Beʿir hahareigah" (In the city of slaughter") in Odessa in 1906 in a slim volume titled *Mishirei hazaʿam* (Songs of wrath, containing two other poems as well, "ʿAl hasheḥitah" (Upon the slaughter) and "Yadaʿti beleil ʿarafel" (Out of the depth).[2] The former two were written after the Kishinev pogrom; the third, after the riots of October 1905—the wave of violence in the wake of the 1905 revolution. Bialik seems to have regarded the three poems as unique, sifting them out from the rest of his work and presenting them as a separate unit. All three examine anti-Jewish violence and the reaction to it. In the two shorter pieces, the poet deals with the universal significance of killing Jews: the murder shakes the foundations of the universe, wreaks havoc on the world order, and, like the blood of the prophet Zechariah, the blood of the Jews seethes in the earth and is not absorbed. "No, let that blood pierce world's profundity, / Through the great deep pursue its mordications, / There eat its way in darkness, there undo, / Undo the rotted earth's foundations!" ("ʿAl hasheḥitah" [lines 25–28]). "[W]ould that my people's ageless woe / Were stored deep in the bosom of the world . . . / Outsoaring generations, let that woe / Witness

to wrong eternal. Voiceless, dumb, / Oh, let that cry ring through the deep of hell / And pierce the heavens, everlastingly / Withholding the redemption of the world" ("Yada'ti beleil 'arafel" [lines 5–6, 13–16]).

"In the City of Slaughter," on the other hand, pans the internal-Jewish aspect. This inward call seems to have accounted for its great force and epoch-making cogency. In discussing writings that have changed history, Ziva Shamir places "In the City of Slaughter" next to Zola's "J'Accuse" (Shamir 1994: 136 n. 5). World history has set aside a separate shelf for *Qu'est-ce que le tiers état* (Abbé Emmanuel Sieyès) of the French Revolution, "Common Sense" (Thomas Paine) of the American Revolution, and our own *Der Judenstaat* (Theodor Herzl), the Zionist revolution. The interconnection between historical events and works that have shaped reality defies certainty. Historians and literary critics have pointed out that the picture painted by Bialik in "In the City of Slaughter" was fictional and exaggerated, that it did not do justice to the Jews of Kishinev, who at least, in some cases, did defend themselves as best they could, and that the self-defense organization in Homel preceded the poem. Nor did the above-mentioned writings re-create reality; rather, they gave clear and keen expression to a mood in search of a pamphlet—a mood that they hoped to strengthen, which crystallized in the wake of the pamphlets. Rather than creating a new reality, "In the City of Slaughter" reinforced and lent legitimacy to an existing mood. The power of poetry, precisely because it need not be faithful to fact or answer to formal logic, is far greater than that of political pamphlets. Bialik's poem was like a match struck to dry tinder. The Jews who read it were ripe for a culture of wrath and rebellion.

One indication of the poem's key role in shaping the ethos of the generation was the rapid penetration of its idioms and ideas into the contemporary public and cultural discourse. Its speedy translation by two preeminent literary figures—Jabotinsky into Russian, and I. L. Peretz into Yiddish—signals its tremendous demand across the Jewish public's ideological divides. The new defense ethos spoke just as strongly to members of the Bund (the General Jewish Workers Union), who were weaned on resistance to the tsarist regime, as to Zionists, who sought to formulate a new national ethos. Quotations from "In the

City of Slaughter" made their way into journalistic writings in almost real time: Brenner, for example, in his 1906 *Hameʿorer* column, "Mitokh hapinkas" (From the notebook; Brenner 1937: 6:48), quotes: "For great is the anguish, great the shame" (line 161), seeing no need to supply the reference, for his readers knew it well. And in rebuking his comrades for the rift between Zionists and territorialists, he declares, "And few know the songs of wrath" (ibid.: 6:53). Again, he had no doubt in his dialogue with his readers that the context was clear.

The poem's great popularity stemmed primarily from the meaning that readers bestowed on it: the censure hit home as truer, more honest, and more realistic than a poetic lament. In the emerging Zionist tradition, a critic could say anything he liked, rub salt on every wound, so long as the criticism came from the heart and the critic, in the final analysis, identified with the people. In stark contrast to the prevalent tendency to dress up reality, denunciation was thought to be insightful and reformative, stripped of the veneer of whitewash. Hard talk was considered "national poetry" and became part of the partisan literature molding the nation. Literary figures, as part of a self-evident convention, felt a commitment to do their share in the nation's renewal. Every success like Bialik's nourished and inspirited other writers. Little wonder, then, that Brenner, too, enlisted in the task.

In the summer of 1905, while living in London, Brenner learned of the Zhitomir pogrom and wrote: "Hu amar lah" (He told her; Brenner 1937: 6:32). After the disastrous "days of October 1905" and news of the violent death at Simferopol of Chaya Wolfson, a close friend from his time in Oriole during his service in the tsarist army — and, according to one version, his beloved — he ascribed the story also to these events as if foreseeing the catastrophes to come. Brenner not only wrote the piece but also laid out the pages and printed it at the press where he worked, publishing it as a separate brochure. "The proceeds to go to Jewish self-defense in Russia," he wrote at its head. That Brenner felt a need to enlist his talents for the benefit of self-defense reflects the influence of "In the City of Slaughter," the metamorphosis in consciousness that had taken place within the space of two years. Furthermore, while Bialik vented his wrath on the flock, Brenner argued that the change had already happened. "He Told Her" is

a short story built as the monologue of a young Jew addressing his mother and explaining why he is determined to join the self-defense organization. Bialik, in his poem, is a witness sent by God to report on the situation. He flees from human contact into anonymity and generality: the casualties—men, women, and children—are characterized by victimhood, having no personal name, image, or character. Brenner adopts a reverse strategy: by means of a young man's monologue, he portrays a seemingly specific family case but elevates it to the symbolic. Yet he, too, adopts anonymity: his characters are son, mother, father, "landlord's daughter," peasants. Not one has a name—in other words, Brenner's personal case is also a general, nonspecific case. Bialik swallows his pain and sentences himself to silence, nursing a venomous wrath. The silence harbors a pent-up energy that in the end erupts in the poem's outcry.

Brenner's hero, in comparison, does not stop talking. The story is constructed of two contrasts. The first is of Jews and non-Jews, and Brenner takes the well-trodden path of opposites, weak versus strong, helpless versus wild. The second is a depiction of internal Jewish relations: here, the dichotomy is, on the one hand, between mother and son; on the other, between "the landlord's daughter" and the common folk from whom the speaker springs. The mother is the guardian of Jewish loyalty, the keeper of collective memory. A simple, uneducated woman, she has read to her son in Hebrew-*taytsh* '*Emek habakhah* (Valley of tears) and *Shevet Yehudah* (Tribe of Judah) and other tales from the chronicles of Jewish suffering, instilling in him a sense of collective identity. The father is an itinerant peddler who, upon learning that a convert from Judaism had arrived in a village, "went to save her and speak to her heart" ("Hu amar lah," 6:30) and was caught and killed by the peasants. This alone already highlights the differing martyrology in Bialik and Brenner. Bialik presents the Kishinev victims as helpless sacrifices on an altar not their own: "neither I nor you / Know why you died or wherefore, for whom, nor by what laws; / Your deaths are without reason; your lives are without cause" (Hebrew lines 151–53; English lines 194–96).

Brenner, in contrast, endows the father's martyrology with a purpose and a goal: he consciously sets out on a dangerous national mission to restore a lost sheep to the fold. The contrast between the mother and "the landlord's daughter"

is a class-cultural distinction: "the landlord's daughter" was "Russified," educated, read not the old Jewish books but *Taras Bulba*. She is amused by Gogol's description of Cossacks tormenting powerless Jews, feeling neither pain nor solidarity. Not for her the Jewish fate of pogroms: come unrest, she will take her son and go to the government official, entreat him with gifts, and escape Jewish destiny. Wittingly or otherwise, Brenner introduces into the Jewish arena the widespread *narodnik* ideas on the common folk as the foundation of the nation. The popular classes are intuitively true to the Jewish collective, whereas the upper classes are cut off from the Jewish commonality both culturally and psychologically. The Kishinev pogrom was not free of the class element: the riots were carried out mainly in poverty-stricken Jewish neighborhoods. The victims, on the whole, belonged to the lower classes. Bialik ignores the class differences exposed in the pogrom. He does not distinguish between different types of Jews; all are one. This allowed him to create the clear polarity that made the Kishinev episode a national symbol. Bialik, in addition, was influenced by Aḥad Haʿam's petit-bourgeois liberal milieu. The ethos of the revolutionary class struggle was alien to him. Brenner, on the other hand, does not merely illuminate the conflict between Jews and non-Jews. He identifies class with national loyalties. He brings into focus internal Jewish opposing forces: those who identify with the nation, its past, and its future versus those who seek to elude Jewish destiny; as well as the generation gap — the generation of the fathers, who are resigned to indignity, versus the generation of the sons, who rise up against it.

Brenner's description of the father's flight from the peasants pursuing him and the father's hiding and death is evocative of the degradations in "In the City of Slaughter": "He tried to make a break for it, to hide in a foul and filthy hole. He was not handsome in flight" ("Hu amar lah," 6:30). As in Bialik, weakness is not aesthetic for Brenner. But here the similarity ends. Bialik presents weakness, cowardice, and the failure to defend oneself as immoral. He so builds up the contempt for the men who take cover while their wives are being raped and murdered that weakness becomes almost amoral. Brenner does not mix morality and weakness. He does not rage at the father; he identifies with his forefathers even though their ways are not his way: they trusted to heaven, to reciting Psalms.

Brenner demands blow for blow: "Hear O Israel! Not an eye for an eye: but two eyes for one and all their teeth for every and any indignity!" (ibid.: 6:32).

In the campaign to win over Jewish public opinion to the cause of self-defense, advocates had to contend with the age-old Jewish tendency to disregard "externals." The difference between a hero's death and a coward's death was merely on the outside: both died in the end. Brenner puts into the mother's mouth the traditional Jewish arguments against self-defense: "The city is Ukrainian, say you, cold comfort, say you, grabbing at straws, say you: they in their thousands and we in our quorums. Ours—banished to the four corners of the earth, while they are all here. All. With their wild hordes and their king at the head" (ibid.: 6:32). The mother's arguments are rational, voicing the natural reactions of a national minority that finds itself trapped amid a belligerent, hostile majority backed by the regime. Self-defense might hearten the soul, but it is doubtful that it could save the Jews from the unruly mob. Thus, from the mother's point of view, it is "cold comfort" or "grabbing at straws"—unnecessary risk and provocation. Brenner repudiates the mother's persuasive efforts: "I don't want to hear it. I can't hear it." And he explains: "You must know, that since the first moment of my being, I have been waiting for these times" (ibid.). The emotional gratification of the very ability to respond and the symbolism of the act, in the eyes of the younger generation, are no less important than the practical value of self-defense. "Not a remedy? Yet—comfort for the mourner, revenge and dignity—doesn't our people's world rest on these as well!" (ibid.). And echoing Bialik's descriptions of the unaesthetic attempts of Jews to hide wherever they could, he declares: "And skulker—accursed be he!" (ibid.; paraphrasing "Upon the Slaughter," Hebrew line 22).

In the poem "Im yesh et nafshekha lada'at" (Bialik 1970), written in 1898, Bialik extols Jewish martyrdom down the generations, the readiness of Jews to forsake their lives rather than their faith. He concludes this paean to passive steadfastness thus: "Who knows, perchance the torrents of their tears / Ferried us safely, hither bringing us? / Perchance with their prayers they asked us of the Lord, / And in their deaths bequeathed to us a life, / A life that will endure for evermore!" (lines 63–67). There seems to be a veiled dialogue between "In the

City of Slaughter" and "If Thou Wouldst Know." The very Jewish qualities that he eulogizes in "If Thou Wouldst Know"—for instance, "To meet grim death with joy, and bare the neck / To every sharpened blade" or "With shoulders stooped to bear a loathsome life, / And endlessly to suffer and endure" (lines 4–5, 13–14)—six years later, he condemns bitterly and with awesome wrath. The line "Your dead were vainly dead; and neither I nor you / Know why you died or wherefore, for whom, nor by what laws; / Your deaths are without reason; your lives are without cause" (lines 151–53) would appear to be the antithesis to "And in their deaths bequeathed to us a life." The comparison with "If Thou Wouldst Know" enables us to appreciate the depth of the change that occurred in Bialik in those years, mirroring the change in the Jewish public discourse.

A worthy versus a pointless death became a cardinal question for the crystallizing Zionist-national ethos. It found expression in the distinction between dying in defense of Jewish life, honor, and property in the Land of Israel and dying in a pogrom in exile. And note: not only Jewish life and property, but Jewish honor as well. Honor was an important element of the new national ethos: it was pivotal to the distinction between the New Jew and the Old. Bialik does not pose an alternative to the image of the Old Jew although what he considers desirable can be gleaned from what he condemns. Brenner has already begun to sketch an outline of the new figure, the young man volunteering to fight for the honor of his people. In Bialik, the discourse is conducted with Jews of the present. Brenner, on the other hand, in "He Told Her," launches a youth cult that embodies tidings of the New Jew rising to the mission of the generation. Following the appearance in 1911 of the memorial Yizkor book to the fallen of Hashomer (watchman association of Jewish guards in the Land of Israel, 1909–20), Yaakov Zerubavel speaks to Bialik's objections in "In the City of Slaughter"; in a paraphrase of the poet's lines, he writes of the casualties in the Land of Israel: "Fine were their lives and fine their deaths—their life was with reason and their death with cause" (Zerubavel: 1912). At the same time, the line "And in their deaths bequeathed to us a life" ("If Thou Wouldst Know"), in which Bialik pays tribute to Jewish martyrdom, became—in a reversal of the original intent—the motto and slogan of texts commemorating both fighters and non-fighters who fell in the

cause of settling the Land of Israel. In retrospect, the impact of "In the City of Slaughter" altered the meaning of "If Thou Wouldst Know"; what was originally a paean to time-honored Jewish steadfastness in exile was now commandeered by the protest movement against that selfsame passive stand, as well as by the call for a national stance, which valued the very fact of self-defense.

The backdrop to the Kishinev pogrom, and even more so to the pogroms of 1905, was the swelling revolutionary activity against the tsarist regime. The context of Bialik's *Songs of Wrath* and even of Brenner's "He Told Her" and, especially, his "Mikhtav arokh" (A long letter," 1937, 6:43), an article written in the autumn of 1905, was a growing disillusionment that the revolution would spell Jewish deliverance. It was the counterpoint to the apocalyptic discourse on the imminence of an earthly reign of justice and equality to be instituted by the revolution. When Bialik cries out, "If Right there be,—why, let it shine forth now! / For if when I have perished from the earth / The Right shine forth, / Then let its Throne be shattered, and laid low!" ("'Al hasheḥitah," lines 15–18), he is polemicizing with the Jews, particularly those acculturated Jews who embraced the Russian language and culture as the key to European civilization and placed their trust in modernization and progress. They believed that the Kishinev pogrom and similar incidents were merely miserable vestiges of yesterday's world, slated to vanish upon the rising of the revolution's new sun.

In "Upon the Slaughter," Bialik presents Jewish destiny as non-synchronized with world justice: How will justice help us if, before it appears, the Jews are destroyed? It is a prerevolutionary anxiety. In "Out of the Depth," however, the bitter accounts that he comes to settle with the revolutionaries follow the failed revolution. The hypocrisy of the revolutionaries with their full-throated exaltation of justice and their tidings of equality, who were careful not to censure the rampagers when the violence was unleashed, aroused Bialik to write what was one of the most acerbic of his *Songs of Wrath:* "And when, at end of days, the sun of guile / And counterfeited righteousness shall rise / Upon your slain, when crimsoned with your blood / The banner of deceit shall flaunt the heavens / Unfurled above your slayers, when their flag / Emblazoned with the spurious seal of God / Shall pierce the sun's bright eye, / . . . the sun / Shall redden to an orb of your

pure blood" ("Yada'ti beleil 'arafel," lines 17–26). Bialik turns a series of usually positive images into negative ones: the sun is beguiling, justice/righteousness is counterfeit, the banner — deceitful, God's seal — spurious, the sun becomes a stain of blood. The revolution proved to be yet another false messianic hope.

Bialik's bitterness, wrath, and pain over the revolution greased with Jewish blood was shared by Brenner. Brenner's rage is directed primarily at Jews captive to the revolutionary mystique, who eulogized the simple soul of simple Russian folk, who would blame the riots on the government and exonerate the Russian masses. "Only the pre-Constitutional government . . . makes them tear out guts; it alone is the villain that causes murderers to be murderers," Brenner notes sarcastically ("Mikhtav arokh," 6:43). The Russian peasants, who in "He Told Her" attacked and killed the helpless father, are referred to ironically three times as "good, innocent peasants" ("Hu amar lah," 6:30). In "A Long Letter," he gets back at the Jews who saw fit to absolve the Russian people with the claim that "not the Russian people are guilty of all these horrors, but the officials and the police and the military personnel." Brenner's reaction is: "As the people, so their rulers. Cruel and crude throughout their history, boorish and predatory throughout their past, slaves of slaves since time immemorial" ("Mikhtav arokh," 6:43). Against the naïve idealization of the Russian people by Jews in the revolutionary camp who pinned their hopes on regime change, Brenner posits a harsh thesis of the masses' eternal animosity toward Jews — the weak, the "others," the neighbors — which would not evaporate with a change in regime: the attempts of the Jews "to tame the volcano" are doomed. Whereas Bialik's criticism is aimed chiefly at the non-Jewish revolutionaries, who pretended to bring new tidings of brotherhood and proved to be a disappointment, Brenner targets the radical Jewish camp for turning a blind eye to the horrors. The disaster leads neither man to a pronounced Zionist conclusion: Bialik does not mention the Zionist option as a response to the events in any of his *Songs of Wrath,* while Brenner does not regard the Land of Israel as a realistic solution to the existential problem: "What matters to us the ancestral land, what matters to us a 'beauteous land' if there is no way to it? . . . Give us a cave and we'll hide in it" (ibid.: 6:45).

Jews were afraid to avenge their degradation and killing lest these acts invite even fiercer reactions from their strong-armed neighbors. Over the generations, this restraint became an imperative elevated to the status of Jewish moral superiority—Jews do not ape the negative traits of non-Jews ("*goyish* gratification"). This psychological barrier had to be surmounted on the road to Jewish self-defense, and, in this respect, the Russian revolutionaries had a great influence: young Jews were filled with excitement and profoundly impressed by the self-sacrifice of their Russian peers, men and women who were prepared to take revenge on the representatives of the abusive authorities. The penetration of the self-defense ethos into Jewish life went hand in hand with the penetration of the impact of revolutionary currents on the Jewish street, and Jewish avengers began to make an appearance at the beginning of the twentieth century: Hirsh Lekert, the youth who shot at the governor of Vilna and his companions, became the hero of the Bund. The shot fired by Pinḥas Dashevsky at Krushevan, the Kishinev journalist blamed for inciting the pogrom, lifted Jewish hearts.

The question of whether Jewish reaction should be limited to active self-defense or don the form of personal terror provided members of the generation with food for thought. Bialik was thoroughly opposed to reprisal. He seems to have been influenced by Aḥad Haʿam, who, apart from his participation in the above "Manifesto," vigorously rejected the very idea of Jews using physical force, viewing it as a distortion of the Jewish image. There is no mention in "In the City of Slaughter" of anything resembling vengeance as a possible option: the nation is depicted as the living dead, its death preferable to its life: "a people that is lost" (Hebrew line 180; English line 226); "shattered limbs" (Hebrew line 190; English line 242); "Their God / Has utterly forsaken every one" (Hebrew line 235; English lines 301–2)—such a people is not up to acts of revenge. Even if they had been, it is at heaven and God that Bialik expects them to raise their fists and protest. This follows from his words in "Upon the Slaughter," which, as is known, preceded "In the City of Slaughter." He says, there: "Who cries *Revenge! Revenge!*—accursed be he! / Fit vengeance for the spilt blood of a child / The devil has not yet compiled" ("ʿAl hasheḥitah," lines 22–24). In "Out of the Depth," the poet again turns his wrath on the world and identifies with

his people's anguish. But here, too, he does not even hint at Jewish retribution. Retribution belongs to God: "Until the Lord of Vengeance, stung to wrath / Shall rise and roar and with His sword unsheathed/ Go forth to strike" ("Yadaʿti beleil ʿarafel," lines 31–32).

In contrast, Brenner was already pondering the winds of change sweeping over the young: force was not to be rejected out of hand where social struggle or national justice were concerned. To counter evil, weapons did have to be wielded. For Brenner, the desire for revenge demarcates the young New Jews from their forebears. Vengeance is part of the healthy emotional fiber of a nation in renewal, whereas to shrink from vengeance is a symptom of disease, not a lofty moral quality. The war "of Yankl's miserable sons against Chmielnicki's muscular offspring" ("Hu amar lah," 6:32) was not a fight between equals. The Jews were doomed to lose, their blood destined to go on being spilled (e.g., "Mikhtav arokh," 6:43). The importance of the heroic act, however, is not measured by its ability to prevent bloodshed but by its role in the therapeutic process, restoring to the nation the natural, normal traits of a people, traits it had lost over time.

The works of Bialik and Brenner inhabit the field of tensions between tradition and secularism, faith and apostasy, God and man. Brenner's hero, thoroughly secular, squares up to the faith of his forefathers: they believed that the recitation of Psalms would save them from all foes. But at that terrible moment between life and death, they find that "the Master of the Universe would not save His devotees from the clutches of hell" ("Hu amar lah," 6:33). As opposed to the father, who at the moment of death suddenly beholds an empty sky, the son has stopped hoping for divine intervention: "Faith has mercifully been ripped out from within me, whatever works, let it be" (ibid.: 6:31).

Brenner's attitude in this story toward the faith of his forefathers is steeped in mercy and solicitude. He is not angered by the naivete of the believers nor does he reproach heaven. He seems to have put his ancestors' religion behind him and now relates to it with a mixture of indifference and nostalgia. Not so Bialik: he wrestles with his God in each of his *Songs of Wrath.* In the three poems, God plays a key role in the human drama. Whether present or absent, whether as a source of justice or as a source of revenge. In "Upon the Slaughter," the

poet searches for God in vain, in a world that has cast off justice and morality. In God's absence, the principle ruling the world is "might is right." But the consequence of a world without morality is the complete undermining of the world order: "No, let that blood pierce world's profundity, / Through the great deep pursue its mordications, / There eat its way in darkness, there undo, / Undo the rotted earth's foundations!" ("ʿAl hasheḥitah," lines 25–28). In "In the City of Slaughter," the poet puts into God's mouth His worst possible chastisement of His people: "Wherefore their cries imploring, their supplicating din? / Speak to them, bid them rage!" (Hebrew line 191; English lines 243–44). Guiltier than God, who hides His face from His flock, they are guilty of meekly submitting to the judgment, and while their hearts burn with anguish and fury, they beat their breasts over a sin that they did not commit and ask forgiveness for a crime not theirs. Bialik uses biblical and kabbalistic forms of rebuke to denounce the passive interpretation lent by Jews to the Torah. God Himself is recruited to demand mutiny and rebellion of them. In "Out of the Depth," God has lost control over His universe: His arm is broken, His spurious seal is unfurled on high. Only in the last line does the poet hint at a conclusion: "Until the Lord of Vengeance, stung to wrath / Shall rise and roar and with His sword unsheathed / Go forth to strike" ("Yadaʿti beleil ʿarafel" [lines 32–33]). In lashing out at non-Jews, Bialik depicts a world over which God's control has been shaken. In lashing out at Jews, he insists that they challenge heaven, revolt against Jewish destiny. Bialik's God has, on the one hand, ceased to play a role in the universe, allowing the monsters of the depths to take over. On the other hand, He is a formidable force with whom the poet, willy-nilly, conducts a constant dialogue.

Brenner's story belongs to the contemporary public discourse: the issue of self-defense is a major feature of the story, appearing as the only honorable option open to young Jews committed to their people. The internal Jewish debate between opponents and champions of self-defense, between liberals, confident of Jewish inclusion within Russian nationality, and "nationalists," eager to preserve Jewish identity, the class differences between the simple folk and the well-to-do, between "general" revolutionaries and "nationalist" revolutionaries — all these

emerge between the lines of the story. Though Brenner endows the story with historical depth, situating it on the historical continuum of Jewish suffering since the Destruction, it is in fact a contemporary tale, dealing with a range of contemporary problems. It straddles the seam between literature and political writing.

So long as the socialist-Zionist ethos reigned supreme, Brenner's story enjoyed a natural resonance. As times changed, however, it fell from grace, lacking the sophistication and ambivalence required by a tale of woe at the beginning of the twenty-first century. "In the City of Slaughter," in comparison, has retained its impact even for current readers: of the three poems of reproof, it is the least universal in its message, addressing a Jewish audience and only it. It is also the most concrete of the *Songs of Wrath,* less philosophical and more descriptive. Thus, as often happens with good "local" literature, it was received as truly universal: the poem is anchored in time and place, yet it is still a powerful voice against brutality toward the weak, the minority, the persecuted, as well as against the onlooker's ambivalence in the face of weakness. "In the City of Slaughter" can equally apply to the Kielce pogrom of 1946 or other massacres, and not only of Jews. It has withstood the test of time.

As noted, Brenner's and Bialik's works were part of the reading material of youth movements in the Land of Israel. The geographical and psychological distance between the young in the Land of Israel and the public addressed by Bialik and Brenner made these works pivotal in the inculcation of the idea of negating exile, in its Israeli version: negating the image of the Diaspora Jew. It was hard for Land of Israel youth, living in the freedom of an autonomous Jewish society, to understand the Jews of "In the City of Slaughter." Nor could they identify even with Brenner's positive Jewish figures: the father's martyrdom and the mother's arguments against enlistment were not part of their world. The defensive ethos was a natural, self-evident, and major component of their worldview. The realities that had given birth to the ethos and its carriers remained vague and remote, not truly understood. The more the works featured in ceremonies and memorials, the more they lost their association with flesh-and-blood people and became

ritualistic symbols of a life and a people foreign to the youngsters of the Land of Israel. For all the differences between Brenner and Bialik, both would probably have bemoaned the way that Land of Israel youth internalized their works.

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NOTES

1 The "Secret Scroll" was first published by Dubnow in *Hatekufah* and subsequently included in the complete works of Aḥad Haʿam, which appeared in 1947.

2 All English translations of Bialik's poems are taken from Efros 1948 except "Beʿir hahareigah," which is from Klein 1990.