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Literature in a National Context:
The Case of Mori Ōgai and Haim Nachman Bialik

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Abstract:

The emergence of nationalism in the late 18th century greatly impacted human society and culture, making it impossible to think outside its framework. This impact also resulted in the emergence of the concept of “National Literature”. To better understand this concept, it is necessary to look into literatures that have been affected by this. Two such examples are modern Hebrew and modern Japanese literature which both developed in the late 19th century in direct correlation with the appearance of Zionism and Japanese nationalism. Writers of these literatures began to create works that reflected the new framework of “National Literature”. Mori Ōgai’s novella *Maihime* (1892) and Haim Nachman Bialik’s novella *Me’akhorei Hagader* (1909) both attempt to address questions of national identity and belonging, and both reflect the ideology of nationalism. Comparing these works shows that even though nationalism affected literature in general, the way each author interpreted this concept differed according to their own background.

Keywords:

Nationalism, National Literature, Zionism, Mori Ōgai, Haim Nachman Bialik

1. Introduction

The emergence of nationalism in the late 18th and 19th centuries had a far-reaching impact on human culture and society, one that is still felt today. As Benedict Anderson asserts, nationalism is a "cultural artefact of a particular kind," which, reaching maturity during the 19th century, has exerted an immense influence on the modern world.[1] This influence touched all aspects of human culture with almost no community escaping its ideological reach. One aspect of human culture which has been impacted by nationalism from its earliest stages of development, as Anderson also notes, is literature. During the 19th century, the term "national literature" came to describe the dominant framework within which literature is composed, consumed, and thought of, a dominance which still persists even in academic circles today. But what is this national literature? And what was the actual impact that nationalism had on literature?

Questions such as these have been addressed by many literary scholars, both within the boundaries of the "national literature" itself and in a comparative perspective.[2] However, these studies, in particular the comparative ones, have tended to focus on so-called "Western" literature, that is, literature written in European languages such as English, German, French, etc. This also reflects an understanding of "national literature" as something that developed in the West and influenced other literatures. As such, comparative studies have often concentrated on tracing this influence. While such an influence cannot be denied, it is also necessary to study the ways in which writers of non-European languages interpreted the concepts of nationalism and national literature, how they reflected this in their own writings, and how this deferred from culture to culture. Two literatures which are ripe for such examination are modern Japanese literature and modern Hebrew literature. In the late 19th century, both the Jews and the Japanese were undergoing national transformation with the emergence of Japanese nationalism and Zionism, prompting many writers to grapple with questions of nationalism and national identity. Two such writers were the Japanese novelist Mori Ōgai and the Jewish poet and writer Haim Nachman Bialik. Both began writing during the 1890s, a period of surge in nationalistic sentiments in both of their communities, and a period in which both Japanese and Hebrew literature began to emerge as "national literature". Hence, by analysing and comparing their writing, it is possible to see how ideas of nationalism were integrated into literature during this period.

By looking into two literary works from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the novella *Maihime* by Ōgai and *Me'akhorei Hagader* by Bialik, this article will argue that by subverting literary conventions both from their own literary traditions and from

Western literature, these writers tried to renegotiate the representation of their nationality, and to redefine their national identity.[3] And while there were some similarities in their methods and conclusions, their definitions depended on their own ideology and cultural background, with each interpreting the ideas of nationalism and national literature differently. Whereas his time in Germany and involvement with the Japanese government and army guided much of Ōgai's writings, a secular approach to Judaism and cultural Zionism was the main influence behind Bialik's compositions.

2. Nationalism and Literature

Before discussing the two novellas, it is first necessary to explore certain theoretical matters concerning the concept of national literature, asking what national literature is, and how it should be defined. The term "national literature" is comprised of two elements: "national" (which is derived from "nation") and "literature". So, in order to find a definition for national literature, first the two terms will be considered separately.

"Nation" is a highly contested term. There is no clear consensus as to whether it has existed since time immemorial or whether it is a modern creation. Here, however, I follow the theory developed by Benedict Anderson that the nation is a modern concept which began to emerge in the late 18th century, and mostly developed during the 19th century. Anderson defined the nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[4] According to him, it is imagined because most of the members of a certain nation will never know each other no matter how small it is, but will still believe themselves to be members of this community. In this definition, nations are not necessarily tangible things. They exist in people's mind, and it is the people who give them their characteristics, who imagine them to have tangible assets. Another definition comes from Anthony D. Smith, who, using more concrete elements, defines the nation as "a named human community residing in a perceived homeland, and having common myths and a shared history, a distinct public culture, and common laws and customs for all members."[5] However, these elements cannot create a nation by themselves, as they need something to legitimize them. This legitimacy comes from nationalism.

Nationalism is another ambiguous term. A good definition of this concept comes from Smith who argues that it is "[a]n ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential 'nation'."[6] In this sense, nationalism is an

active movement, something that is constantly at work for the well-being of a certain nation. Another useful definition comes from Umut Özkirimli who defines nationalism as a discourse, that is "a way of seeing that is at once socially constituted and institutional, hence 'real' in its consequences."[7] The claims of this discourse revolve around elements connected to the nation: identity claims (who are 'we'), temporal claims (proving authenticity), and spatial claims (connections to a homeland). This means that nationalism is an action connected to a nation. Whether as an ideological movement or as a discourse, it is constantly attempting to define and legitimize a certain nation. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that nationalism is an ideological movement involving a distinct discourse which attempts to legitimize a conglomeration of shared elements such as homeland, history, culture, laws, and customs as the unique assets of a specific nation, the members of which believe themselves to be one distinct and autonomous community.

Literature, like "nation" and "nationalism", is also a contested term that has had a variety of definitions over the years. A major question that arises in regard to these definitions is whether literature can have an objective definition, or is it simply whatever scholars, writers, or readers decide it to be. The literary scholar Terry Eagleton addresses this question, concluding that literature is neither "an 'objective', descriptive category," nor is it "just what people whimsically choose to call literature."[8] He instead states that literature is determined by social values which are historically variable, as well as having a close relation to social ideologies. These social values, argues Eagleton, are not private preferences, but instead refer to "the assumptions by which certain social groups exercise and maintain power over others."[9] Hence, what constitutes literature in a certain society is determined by the social ideology of a dominant authority (this can refer to the dominant ruling class, but it can also mean the academia, for example), and as such is probably composed of works which reflect the morals and values of this authority, meaning that the definition of literature can change with time. Therefore, literature can be understood as a variable product of social ideology.

Going back to "national literature", it is possible to understand the term as "literature of the nation". This can mean two different things: firstly, that it is a literature belonging to the nation, and secondly, that it is a literature representing the nation. The first meaning implies that there is an established literary canon that is the possession of a certain nation, and which only the people of that nation have the right to its composition, its meaning, and its interpretation. The second meaning implies that the said literary canon is an expression of the essence of a specific nation. In this sense, national

literature is a literature tied to a certain nation in the minds of both those who belong to the nation and those who do not. Considering Eagleton's definition of literature as something that is shaped by prevailing social ideology, it is possible to understand national literature as a literature shaped by the prevailing ideology that comes with the nation, i.e. by nationalism. National literature, then, is a specific canon of literature which is shaped by nationalism, and understood as belonging to a certain nation and as representing its national essence. Hence, national literature can be understood as constituting part of the discourse of nationalism.

If national literature can be understood as a kind of discourse of nationalism, then what exactly is the function of this discourse? In her survey of the relationship between literature and nationalism, Julia M. Wright identifies two main functions national literature can have: firstly, as an expression of the nation's character and identity, and secondly as evidence of the nation's merit and legitimacy.[10] The first function is the more obvious one. Forming part of a nation's national culture, a national literature can stand as an expression of cultural identity, being seen as the amalgamation of the nation's literary tradition, and consequently a manifestation of the presumably unique character of its culture. Not only that, a national literature, particularly one written in the vernacular, can be a medium for spreading national identity, and become essential to the spread of nationalism and the process of nation building.

The second function has to do with the emphasis put on creativity in human society.[11] Because so much emphasis is placed on creativity, there is a tendency to measure the worth of a people by the quality of their creative output. This is also applied to nations. In his research into the development of Irish national literature, David Lloyd formulated a theory regarding the relation between the idea of autonomy and literature. He argues that people often categorise literary works into either 'major' or 'minor'. A 'major' literary work is a work "directed toward the production of an autonomous ethical identity for the subject," making the work itself self-contained and original, as well as universal.[12] Essentially, a major literary work is universal and can be included in a literary canon, while a minor literary work is neither. In a society that determines worth through creativity, this idea seeps into the realms of politics; a nation that is creative enough to produce a major literary work is seen as mature, in the sense that it is like an adult, capable of self-determination. On the other hand, a nation that has not produced such a major literary work is perceived as not capable of political autonomy. Hence, it is possible to conclude that the two functions of national literature have to do with legitimization: either cultural legitimization (i.e. creation of a national identity), or

political legitimization.

3. Mori Ōgai' and *Maihime*

Mori Rintarō (1862-1922), better known by his pen name Mori Ōgai, was a Japanese author of the Meiji Period. Growing up in a time of change for Japan, he was one of the first distinctly modern authors of Japanese literature. As a youth, he studied medicine and became a doctor in the Japanese Army. In 1884, he was sent to Europe to study Western medicine and hygiene, and consequently spent four years in Berlin, Leipzig, and Münich. During this time, he became familiar with European culture, in particular with German literature, which had a great impact on his writing later on. After returning to Japan he translated and published several literary works, and in 1890, published his first novella, *Maihime* ("The Dancing Girl"), thus beginning his literary career. Ōgai contributed much to the modernization of Japanese literature. Firstly, his Japanese translations of major European literary works such as Goethe's *Faust* and the works of Henrik Ibsen introduced the Meiji reading public to Western literature and influenced the emerging generation of writers. As J. Thomas Rimer argues, this introduced "Western modes of psychological expression in Japanese literature," and "[enlarged] the scope of Japanese fiction to include intellectual and philosophical themes once reserved to poetry and essays."[13] Secondly, he himself developed a new style of writing in his own work which managed to fuse together Western and Japanese styles of writing. In particular, he introduced into Japanese literature themes from German literature such as "the psychology of marital discord … or the relationships between political and personal malaise" which were not part of traditional Japanese writing until then.[14]

His first, and perhaps best-known work, the novella *Maihime* is of particular interest when looking at the development of Japanese national literature. Being his first original publication after publishing translations of several European literary works, it is clearly a work attempting to create Japanese literature similar to the Western European literature and is abound with ideas about nationalism and national identity. The story, which takes place entirely in Berlin, is inspired by Ōgai's time as a student in Germany, with some theories suggesting that it describes a love affair Ōgai himself had with a local girl while in Berlin, though this idea has mostly been discredited.[15] *Maihime* tells the story of Ōta Toyotarō, a young diplomat on a study mission in Berlin. During his stay in Berlin he is torn between his duty to the state and his young German lover Elise (Erisu in the

Japanese original), a dancer at a local theatre. At the climax of the story, Ōta is persuaded by his friend Aizawa Kenkichi to return to Japan in order to take up a prestigious position, abandoning the pregnant Elise, who goes mad from grief over losing Ōta. As Tomiko Yoda notes, the novella is considered "to be one of the earliest examples of the full-fledged modern novel in Japanese," mainly due to its use of a self-conscious first-person narrative and its themes.[16] By adapting these themes and forms to Japanese literature, Ōgai was attempting to redefine Japanese literature.

The most obvious influence on the novella, as Masao Miyoshi pointed out, was the *Bildungsroman*, a genre which was prominent in European literature of the 19th century.[17] A *Bildungsroman* usually dealt with the moral or spiritual growth of a youthful protagonist, with the latter often coming to terms with the rules and restrictions of society through harsh experiences. These thematic lines are clear in *Maihime*. The only difference is that where European readers except to find a German, French, or English protagonist, Ōgai placed a Japanese youth. By doing so, he in fact places Japanese people in the same context as Europeans, saying "Japanese people can have the same experience of spiritual growth as the Europeans do". Moreover, through his relationship with Elise, Ōgai lets Ōta have a kind of authority which is rarely accorded to Eastern characters in Western literature. The story of a doomed romance between a European and a non-European (usually a European man and an Eastern woman) appears very frequently in European literature. An example involving a Japanese context is Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthéme* (1887), which influenced Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly*. Usually in these stories, the relationship is unbalanced; the European man, who is seen as enlightened and thus more powerful, normally has authority over a subjugated Eastern woman, and at the end, returns to his country, leaving the woman behind. In *Maihime*, however, Ōgai subverts these conventions by having Ōta, the Japanese man, being the enlightened and educated man who constructs an unequal relationship with and eventually deserts the socially weaker Elise, who is described in similar terms to how Eastern women are usually described.[18] All of this works to reimagine the Japanese not as they were conventionally represented in Western literature, but in the same context as the Europeans, thus seeking legitimacy for the idea of "Japanese nationality".

Still, the main function of the novella is as a *Bildungsroman*, and as such, the main focus is on the protagonist's attainment of some sort of ideal or spiritual awareness. But what is this ideal in the context of this novella? Christopher Hill suggests that this is a national identity. Hill argues that the narrative of the story is that of "the emergence of consciousness of oneself as national," which parallels a narrative of the nation coming to

self-consciousness.[19] Hence, Hill argues that Ōta's decision at the end to leave Elise and return to Japan represents a rejection of a universal and cosmopolitan identity in favour of a national one. This theme is developed through the contrast between, on the one hand, Elise and the city of Berlin, representing the European cosmopolitan identity, and on the other, Aizawa Kenkichi and Count Amagata, representing a Japanese national identity.[20] Ōta is torn between the two, and has to decide which to choose. Two things influence his choice: his desire for honour and success, and his realisation of his supposed primordial belonging to Japan.

At the beginning of the novella, Ōta sets out for Berlin with a desire to make a name for himself. However, he soon starts to feel dissatisfied with his position, with the impression that he is being treated as a "living dictionary" or "a machine".[21] What he wishes for is something to give him a sense of self confidence. He gains this when he begins taking courses on culture and literature, and when he meets Elise. Elise is a kind of blank slate, having neither real personality or character. Instead, she becomes a kind of canvass upon which Ōta can project his own ideals and desires. Being less educated than Ōta, Elise allows him to act out his cosmopolitan idealism, by teaching her German diction and literature. However, while his relationship with Elise gives Ōta a way of living a cosmopolitan life, it also makes him lose the thing he set out to achieve in Berlin in the first place, that is, his honour and good name.

A way to regain these appear when Ōta's friend Aizawa arrives in Berlin. This places Ōta back in a Japanese context, eventually leading to Count Amagata offering him a position in the Japanese government. Accepting this will mean giving up Elise and the cosmopolitan ideal she represents, while turning this down will mean giving up on recovering his honour. This leads Ōta to realize that he does not want to remain in Berlin after all; he is struck by the fear that "[he] might die in this sea of humanity, in this vast European capital," and that he might lose his homeland and his chance to regain his honour.[22] Clearly, it is at this moment that Ōta becomes aware of his own identity as a Japanese, and of his primordial tie to his homeland to which he is bound for life (hence he does not want to die on foreign shores). He also realizes that what is most important to him is his honour, and the only way to regain it is to embrace his Japanese identity. Therefore, Ōta must return to Japan, and leave behind all that is not Japanese about his life: the German Elise and his unborn child who is neither German nor Japanese, and whom he only scarcely recognizes as his own (he refers to him at the end as "the child that I had left in the womb of the poor mad girl").[23] It becomes apparent, then, that Ōgai is urging for the realization of a national identity, and one that is created through the

state (Ōta attains his national identity by returning to work for the state). This bodes well for Ōgai's own support of the Meiji Government's efforts to create a unified Japanese nation.

One problem with this interpretation, though, is Ōta's concluding remarks: "Aizawa … to this very day there remains a part of me that curses him."[24] These are clearly words of resentment towards Aizawa, and thus against the identity he represents. However, this can be explained by Ōgai's understanding that the enforcement of a Japanese identity dictated by the government entails some degree of oppression and requires certain sacrifices from the population. Ultimately, it is assumed, it will all be for the best. After all, Ōta is narrating this story on his way back from Berlin, only a few weeks after the events have taken place. Whether he will feel differently after more time has passed is left to be seen.

4. Haim Nachman Bialik and *Me'akhorei Hagader*

Haim Nachman Bialik (1873-1934), a Jewish poet, author, editor, and publisher from Volhynia in modern day Ukraine, was one of the most impactful figures in the early development of Modern Hebrew Literature (MHL). Often considered Israel's "National Poet", it is hard to deny the influence that his writings had on shaping the language, form, and history of MHL. Bialik began writing at a time when MHL was beginning to fully form; he contributed to its growth in particular through his creative expressiveness in the Hebrew language which combined modern ideals with "rare virtuosic mastery of Biblical and Talmudic Hebrew."[25] Bialik's rise to prominence was quick. By the time he moved to Odessa, at the age of 27 in 1900, he was already hailed as the "national poet" of the new Jewish Nation, and as a leading voice of the Zionist movement.[26] At a young age, Bialik was inspired by the ideology of Hovevei Zion, especially by the writing of Ahad Ha'am who later became his mentor. And although he was very critical of Political Zionism, he had great concern for the state of the Jews in the diaspora, and from early on his works was concerned with themes of Jewish identity.[27]

By 1909 when *Me'akhorei Hagader* was originally published, Bialik was already a well-known and respected figure in MHL circles, and had previously published several short stories beside his prolific output of poetry. The story is heavily influenced by Bailik's own childhood in modern day Ukraine. The story itself is a Romeo and Juliet-like love story between two neighbours, the Jewish boy Noah and the Christian orphan Marinka, whose abusive guardian is entangled in a bitter feud with Noah's

parents. Growing up, Noah is differentiated from his Jewish family and neighbours through his love for nature and all things that grow, something that is alien to the Jews, many of whom are in the lumber business, which involves cutting down things that grow. Noah's love for nature becomes the foundation of his friendship with Marinka, which through the years and despite the many obstacles grows into a sincere attachment between the two. At the climax, Noah and Marinka are united, only for the narrator to immediately tell us that Noah soon abandons Marinka and marries a Jewish girl, a marriage arranged for him by his parents, with Marinka left to care for their love-child, while watching Noah and his wife from behind the fence.

Like *Maihime*, *Me'akhorei Hagader* is also a *Bildungsroman*, tracing the protagonist's growth from childhood to adulthood, with his initial rebellion against his society's conventions eventually turning to acceptance, ending with the protagonist's full initiation into his parents' values, morality, and identity. Also like in *Maihime*, Bialik deals with ideas of national identity by subverting literary conventions. However, in this case, these conventions are Jewish ones and not European ones. As Ziva Shamir points out, the world created in *Me'akhorei Hagader* is almost the opposite to the one portrayed in Jewish literature up until then.[28] In most Jewish literature (at least that of European origins), Jews are portrayed as a persecuted minority, reflecting the situation of the Jews in the Diaspora. Protagonists of Jewish literature were usually in a weak position, often even disabled or sick, and were seen as persecuted by the Christian European majority.[29] But in *Me'akhorei Hagader* the story takes place in a suburban area in which the Jews are the majority, having driven out the Christians except for Shakoripinshchika, Marinka's guardian, who is a target of persecution and abuse from the Jews. Furthermore, Noah, the Jewish boy, comes from an affluent home with loving parents, while Marinka, the Christian girl, is an orphan who is abused by her guardian. In their relationship, it is Noah who has the upper hand, the one who has the higher social standings, and it is Noah who abandons Marinka to her desolate end.

By doing this, Bialik was not attempting to degrade Jewish identity. On the contrary, he was attempting to show the need to reform Jewish identity by showcasing how much it has been corrupted. This stems from Bialik's own belief in Cultural Zionism. The idea of Cultural Zionism was largely shaped by Ahad Ha'am, who argued for a secularization of Jewish identity, with a national identity that is based on culture, and for Palestine (or the Land of Israel) to act as a cultural heart for the Jews.[30] This ideology is apparent throughout Bialik's writing, in which he often uses Biblical and other Jewish literary sources as a cultural background. By having this background, his aim was to express his

own ideas about Jewish national identity. In *Me'akhorei Hagader*, as stated previously, this appears as a criticism against the state of Jews in the diaspora, and as an incitement to reconfigure Jewish national identity.

But how is this portrayed in the actual text? Again, similar to *Maihime*, it is done by placing the protagonist between two contrasting choices of identity. These two are described as being in many ways, the opposite of each other and are represented in the story by the two neighbours, Noah's parents (including their house, their society, etc.) and Marinka together with her guardian's garden which she protects. The Jews, who make up the majority of the inhabitants of the suburbs, are mostly, like Noah's parents, lumber merchants and thus are often described as being dry and dead like the lumber they handle. A lot of these images are conveyed through the contrasting description of the two neighbouring houses of Noah's parents and Shakoripinshchika's. Noah's parents' yard, for example, is described as being filled with "heaps and stacks of beams, boards, sticks, poles, shavings, and plain wooden utensils."[31] Even the name of area is part of this metaphor: "The Lumber District" ("*parbar ha'ezim*" in Hebrew) implies that nature there is supposed to be cut down, to be used as dead wood. The message here is clear: the Jewish spirit, the Jewish identity in the diaspora is as good as dead. On the other hand, Marinaka and her guardian's house and garden are described in relation to nature, and as being one with nature. For example, the roof of the house is described as sprouting "all sorts of vegetables, grasses, and thistles."[32] Marinka, in particular, is usually encountered in natural environment, in particular Shakoripinshchika's garden, which, as many critics have pointed out, can be understood as standing for the Garden of Eden, the original source of life and creation, with its orchard full of apples and its fresh and verdant foliage.[33] Thus, the metaphor here is also clear: Marinka represents the source of new life and rejuvenation.

As a child of Jewish lumber merchants, Noah is expected to be like his parents, and grow to have a Jewish identity. However, Noah's own inclinations seems to be towards nature and growing things, something that is already apparent from his first encounter with Marinka, during which Marinka sees him through a hole in the fence running joyfully, clutching the seeds he manged to steal from his mother in order to plant them and shouting: "Everything, everything; there's everything here!"[34] He often rebels against his community as represented by his parents and his teachers at the Cheder and later on even refuses to take part in communal activities such as going to the synagogue, or Jewish activities such as praying with his Tefilin. In fact, he does not even have a proper Bar-mitzvah, as his father guides him through it instead of a rabbi. He frequently

longs for the village his family had left when he was little (as seen at the beginning of chapter 4) and has a constant hunger for fruits and other products of nature, always taking or even stealing fruits and mushrooms from Marinka's garden, from the wilderness behind his house, and from anywhere else he can find. That is why Noah becomes friends with and later develops a passion for Marinka, who is a representation of nature in its purest form. Noah's rebellion against his parents and their community and his affinity for nature places him in a position to bring change, and create a new identity for himself. By choosing Marinka and consequently nature, he could fashion for himself an identity different from his parents', one that is in fact inspired by the origin of Jewish belief, the Book of Genesis and the Garden of Eden.

However, Noah's understanding of nature is only superficial. He yearns for it, but he does not truly comprehend it. This is apparent from the scene previously mentioned, when he steals seeds and attempts to plant them. As he scatters them in the alley, Marinka tells him there is no sunlight in the alley, which means the plants will not grow properly. But Noah does not seem to understand this. "So what? (*wu ma bekhakh*?)" he says to Marinka when she tells him of the sunlight, and proceeds to call her a liar when she explains to him that the plants will not grow.[35] Noah also seems to share in his parents' destructive tendencies towards nature, as seen when he and Marinka encounter a snake in the wilderness; Noah immediately wants to kill it, while Marinka protests saying, "killing snakes is forbidden!". "We are commanded to kill them," Noah replies, telling her that in the countryside their yard was full of their carcases, as his father would "go out with his axe and kill them off."[36] As such, his love for Marinka is also superficial and not based on a full understanding of the girl. His inability to truly understand nature means that even though he almost succeeds in breaking free, like the apple he cannot reach, he is ultimately doomed to fail.[37] He is, after all, his parents' son, and the bonds of their identity are too difficult to cast away. So, despite having had a chance to reform Jewish identity by choosing Marinka and rejuvenating his stagnant identity, Noah conforms to his parents' version of Jewish identity. The tragedy of this outcome is well portrayed in the first sentences of the last chapter: "*wu be'ekhad haleylot 'amad noach vebarakh 'im marinka?...* (And so did Noah get up one night and elope with Marinaka?)".[38] The question mark followed by the ellipses says it all. The reader's hope that Noah will do the right thing and seize the opportunity for change (as well as giving the romance a happy ending) is completely betrayed. "You do not understand the mind of an inhabitant of the lumber quarter!", reads the next line.[39] And just like that Bialik makes his point, simply and clearly. The spirit (*nefesh*) of the Jews will not change. As

long as the Jews remain set in their Diasporic mindset, Jewish spirit/identity will remain dead, confined to its bare garden, with all chances of change shut out on the other side of the fence.

5. National Literature: A Comparative Perspective

As has been discussed so far, it is clear that both Ōgai and Bialik attempted to grapple with newly emerging ideas about nationalism and national identity which were coming to dominate their respective societies. Their novellas, *Me'akhorei Hagader* and *Maihime* seems to be reflecting these changes in distinct ways. Although there may be some reservations regarding comparing these two works, such as the fact that they were written almost two decades apart, and the quality of their composition (*Me'akhorei Hagader* is written with all of the sophistication of Bialik's long career as a poet, while Ōgai's immaturity as a writer is still apparent in *Maihime*)[40], the historical and cultural background of the authors, as well as the issues the two works deal with justify a comparison.

The most obvious similarity between the two novellas is their plot, which follows the protagonist's mental growth through his experience of a love affair with a young girl from a different nation, ending with the tragic abandonment of the girl and their child by the protagonist. Both follow the basic themes and narrative elements of a *Bildungsroman*, which usually traces a protagonist's growth from immaturity to maturity. The protagonist's maturity in this case is in fact his initiation into a national identity, which is explored through the contrast with an "other", a foreigner. In both novellas, the protagonists are placed between two contrasting identities. The protagonists begin by resenting and rejecting their national identity which they feel is imposed on them by a figure of authority (Noah's parents, Ōta's supervisors). Instead they choose to align themselves with an identity offered to them by an "other", in both cases a girl from a different nation. However, this does not last, and by the end of the novellas the protagonists willingly return to their national identities. By doing so and placing their protagonists between two contrasting possible identities, the authors were able to highlight certain aspects of their ideas regarding national identity. This use of the form of the *Bildungsroman* suggest a preoccupation with idea of growth and development typical of newly emerging nations. Another similarity between the two which has been pointed out is the way in which Ōgai and Bialik subverted literary conventions in order to illustrate their points. Through this subversion, the authors attempt to negotiate their

national identity not only internationally, but also internationally, in opposition to established European nations. Hence, the "other", into which position Jews and Asians are usually coerced in Western literature, is instead occupied by those dominant powers (the poor, defenceless Elise instead of the typical white colonialist of most European literature, and the orphaned Marinka instead of the Christians of most European and Jewish literature) creating an inversion of power relations which allows the authors to negotiate their perceived right to nationhood. Here, then, there is similarity in theme (national identity), form (the *Bildungsroman*), and technique (subversion).

However, this last part is also where the principal difference between them start to become apparent. By putting the Japanese in the position of the Europeans, Ōgai gives them a sense of dignified power, while the Europeans are portrayed in the figure of Elise, easily dominated and abandoned. This puts the Japanese on the same platform as the Europeans, portraying them as having the potential of going above them. On the other hand, Bialik's portrayal of the Jews in the traditional position of the Christians is a negative one, for the Christians in the Jewish mind (especially in the Pale of Settlement) are violent, abusive figures. And so, Bialik's use of subversion is a criticism of the Jewish state, not an assertion of possible power. Furthermore, the figure of Marinka with its association with the Garden of Eden holds within it the possibilities for correction of this negative state, and her abandonment at the end is tragic because of the loss of these possibilities. As such, in this novella, Bialik seems to exhibit a more open approach to the source of national identity, that it does not necessarily have to be based on the total denial of the "other" as is the case in *Maihime* in which Ōta has to abandon everything not associated with a "Japanese identity", but rather that it can be made through the maintenance of a relationship with it. These differences may be prescribed to the difference in the situation of the two authors and to the nature of Japanese and Hebrew national literatures at that time. Considering the fact that national literature is formed through the influence of the elite ruling class, then there is a great disparity between the Japanese situation and the Jewish one. At the end of the 19th century, it had already been 20 years since the Meiji Restoration, and Japan had formed a strong ruling and intellectual elite with distinct governmental and academic institutions. Hence, it is not surprising that the government plays such an integral role in Ōgai's novella. It is strong, governmental figures who define and enforce national identity, and hence it is a narrow and absolute one. In contrast to this, the Jews had no central authority, and the intellectual elites, to which Bialik belonged, were a small and disparate group which did not have much influence. Because of this it makes sense that in Bialik's novella there is

no absolute identity, for there is no one to enforce it. The rabbis, the traditional figures of authority in the Jewish community, are mostly lazy, inept, and even drunk and are just as degenerate as the rest of the Jews, and Noah's fall back into his parents' identity seems to be a result of convenience and lack of any real guidance. In the Diasporic world of the Jews, then, it is necessary to look for sources for an identity outside of the community.

6. Conclusion

In the 1880s and 1890s, Japanese nationalism was beginning to take form officially under the Meiji Government, while ideas of Zionism were beginning to emerge mainly in Europe. In each society, clear definitions of what nationalism and national identity meant were still not clear, and writers in both literatures were forming their own ideas of what these meant under the influence of these new developments. What is a national identity? How does it shape people's views of themselves and others? And how should this be expressed in literature? With Ōgai and Bialik, dealing with such questions yielded answers that had many distinct similarities and differences. This becomes apparent when looking at their novellas *Maihime* and *Me'akhorei Hagader*. The analysis of these works show that nationalism indeed had a great impact on the literature of the time. Both Ōgai and Bialik seem to conceive the world in terms of distinct nations, with each having its own identity, and that the expression of such an identity is a necessary function of literature. However, the way in which these identities were interpreted by the two authors and how they believed they should be defined was different, reflecting the political and social conditions in which the authors were placed. The existence of a strong national Japanese government informed the way Ōgai conceived of how Japanese identity should be defined, while the lack of national authority and the perceived degeneracy of the Jewish diasporic community informed Bialik's conception of these matters. Hence, in this case, while nationalism seems to have effect on the themes and forms of literature, since its influence is mediated through political and social reality, the way its influences are expressed differs according to these conditions.

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Notes

[1] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 3-4.

[2] For examples, see: Corse, Sarah M. *Nationalism and Literature: The Politics of Culture in Canada and the United States.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Trumpener, Katie. *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. Wright, Julia M. Blake. *Nationalism, and the Politics of Alienation*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004. Shirane, Haruo, and Tomi Suzuki, eds. *Inventing the Classics: Modernity, National Identity, and Japanese Literature*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.

[3] References to the text will be indicated in the following way. MJ: Mori Ōgai. *Ōgai: kindai shōsetsu shū [Ōgai: Modern Novels Collection]*. Vol. 1. Tokyo: Iwanami Shōten, 2013. ME: Mori Ōgai. "The Dancing Girl (Maihime)." Translated by Richard Bowring. In *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature. Vol. 1, From Restoration to Occupation, 1868-1945*. Edited by J. Thomas Rimer and Van C. Gessel, 10-25. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005. BH: Bialik, Haim Nachman. *Sipurim [Stories]*. Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1952. BE: Bialik, Haim Nachman. *Random Harvest & Other Novellas*. Translated by David Patterson and Ezra Spicehandler. New Milford, CT; London: The Toby Press, 2005.

[4] Anderson, 6.

[5] Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 13.

[6] *Ibid*, 9.

[7] Umut Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 208.

[8] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 14.

[9] *Ibid*.

[10] Julia M. Wright, "Literature and Nationalism," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, vol. 6, The Nineteenth Century, c. 1830-1914*, ed. M. A. R. Habib (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 108.

[11] *Ibid*, 109.

[12] David Lloyd, *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1987), 19.

[13] J. Thomas Rimer, *Mori Ōgai* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1975), 114.

[14] *Ibid*.

[15] Many scholars argue that the story was inspired by the author's own personal affairs, and while there is evidence that Mori had an affair with a German girl while in Europe, how much of it directly influenced the story is unclear. For more see: Bowring, *Mori Ōgai and the Modernization of Japanese Culture*, 47-55.

[16] Tomiko Yoda, "First-Person Narration and Citizen-Subject: The Modernity of Ōgai's 'The Dancing Girl'," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 65, no. 2 (2006): 277.

[17] Masao Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence: The Modern Japanese Novel* (Berkeley; Los Angeles;

London: University of California Press, 1974), xi.

[18] *Ibid*, 40.

[19] Christopher Hill, "Mori Ōgai's Resentful Narrator: Trauma and the National Subject in 'The Dancing Girl'," *Positions* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 380.

[20] Berlin in particular and Germany at large were seen as the epoch of culture and learning among the Meiji elite, and consequently the location in itself determines Ōta's life as cosmopolitan to the Meiji understanding. See: Hill, 382.

[21] MJ, 58: *Waga haha wa ware wo ikitaru jisho to nasantoshi, waga kanchō was yo wo ikitaru jōrei to nasan to yashiken*.

[22] Japanese: *mi wa kono kōboku-taru ōshū-daitō no hito no umi ni hōmuraren-ka to omou nen, shintō wo tsuite okoreri*. MJ, 86. ME, 23.

[23] Japanese: *awarenaru kyōjo no tainai ni nokoshishi ko*. MJ, 90. ME, 25.

[24] Japanese: *waga nōri ni itten no kare wo nikumu kokoro konnichi mademo nokoreri keri*. *Ibid*.

[25] Josh Hutchinson and David Aberbach, "The Artist as Nation-Builder: William Butler Yeats and Chaim Nachman Bialik," *Nations and Nationalism* 5, no. 4 (1999): 504.

[26] Though he himself disliked these titles, as throughout his life he believed himself to be an inferior and talentless writer. Still, in the public's mind he was so highly esteemed that the headline of the Hebrew newspaper *Davar* upon his death in 1934 read: "Israel is Orphaned: Hayyim Nahman Bialik is Gone" (*Nityatem Yisrael : Chaim Nahman Bialik 'Eynenu*). Avner Holtzman, *Chaim Nahman Bialik: HaShirim [H.N. Bialik: Poems]* (Or Yehuda: Dvir Publishing House, 2004), 490.

[27] Hutchinson and Aberbach, 503. Bialik was especially critical of Herzl, and wrote satirical poems about him and his followers.

[28] Ziva Shamir, "'*Me'akhorei Hagader' 'Olam Hafukh: Khaim Nakhman Bialik Ve'omanut Haparadoks* ['Behind the Fence' an Upside World: Haim Nachman Bialik and the Art of the Paradox]", *Moznaim* 9 (10), 1985: 19.

[29] On the theme of minorities in Jewish literature see: Cohen, Doron B. "Minorities in Modern Hebrew Literature: A Survey." *Jewish Literature: Textual Studies* 1 (2014): 89-127.

[30] Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Cultural Zionism's Image of the Educated Jew: Reflections on Creating a Secular Jewish Culture," *Modern Judaism* 18 (1998): 227.

[31] Hebrew: *se'arim veziburim shel korot, krashim, nesarim, klunsa'ot, shkhifim wushe'ar peshutey keley 'ez*. BH, 75. BE, 125-6.

[32] Hebrew: *zazim veolim misham miney yerakot wudsha'im vena'azuzim*. BH, 64. BE, 116.

[33] Shamir, 20.

[34] Hebrew: *yesh vayesh! hakol yesh!* BH, 77. BE, 127.

[35] BH, 78. BE, 128.

[36] BH, 87. BE, 136.

[37] "The trees presented him with two ripe apples … 'Take them, they're yours'. Noah stretched out his hand but couldn't reach them … he could not reach them." BH, 118. BE, 163.

[38] BH, 118. BE, 164.

[39] Hebrew: *'ein 'atem yod'im 'et nefash ha'adam miparbar ha'ezim*. *Ibid*.

[40] Masao Miyoshi calls Maihime "juvenilia", though still points out the immense impact it had on the Meiji readers. Miyoshi, 38.