



Yosef Haim Brenner: A Life (Stanford Studies in Jewish History and C)

Anita Shapira

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Based on previously unexploited primary sources, this is the first comprehensive biography of Yosef Haim Brenner, one of the pioneers of Modern Hebrew literature. Born in 1881 to a poor Jewish family in Russia, Brenner published his first story, "A Loaf of Bread," in 1900. After being drafted into the Russian army, he deserted to England and later immigrated to Palestine where he became an eminent writer, critic and cultural icon of the Jewish and Zionist cultural milieu. His life was tragically ended in the violent 1921 Jaffa riots.

In a nutshell, Brenner's life story encompasses the generation that made "the great leap" from Imperial Russia's Pale of Settlement to the metropolitan centers of modernity, and from traditional Jewish beliefs and way of life to secularism and existentialism. In his writing he experimented with language and form, but always attempting to portray life realistically. A highly acerbic critic of Jewish society, Brenner was relentless in portraying the vices of both Jewish public life and individual Jews. Most of his contemporaries not only accepted his critique, but admired him for his forthrightness and took it as evidence of his honesty and veracity.

Renowned author and historian Anita Shapira's new biography illuminates Brenner's life and times, and his relationships with leading cultural leaders such as Nobel laureate S.Y. Agnon, Hayim Nahman Bialik, Israel's National Poet, and many others. Undermining the accepted myths about his life and his death, his depression, his relations with writers, women, and men—including the question of his homoeroticism—this new biography examines Brenner's life in all its complexity and contradiction.

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