



Dr. Nurit Pagi

The University Of Haifa

Pagi.nurit_at_gmail.com

From Ideological to Poetic Change

Ethics, Politics and Poetics in the Literary Works of Max Brod

This work deals with the connection between Philosophy and Literature, and with the influence ideological change has on linguistic and poetical expressions.

The work will focus on the literary works of the Prague born Jewish writer Max Brod (1884-1968). Brod experienced 4 major ideological changes in his life, and writing novels was an important mean to express these changes. In this respect, analyzing his works may shed light on the process of which an ideological change alters a poetic expression, not only from the narrative, but from the structural and linguistic point of view as well.

Brod was the first of the “Prague circle” authors, to be considered a well known and respected writer by the German literary circles at the beginning of the 20th century. His writing was regarded as avant-garde, and some critics saw him as the prophet of German Expressionism, even as the forerunner of Dadaism. In 1909 Brod became an enthusiastic Zionist and in 1939 he escaped from Prague to Palestine. Even though he continued to write in German and published his works for 20 years in Post-war Germany, his appeal drastically faded. Some blame Kafka’s growing fame, some say his writing became old-fashioned for the post-war generation. Whatever the reason, the result was that his contribution and importance to German Literature were completely ignored.

From the age of 16, Brod was a fanatic follower of Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer was a pessimist and a fatalist, and believed that a man is driven by uncontrolled passions. These passions cause suffering because of man’s inability to fulfill them. The only

available solution to escape suffering is, according to Schopenhauer, either by becoming a monk or by practicing art. As a result, indifferentism to the world, because nothing matters, was the basic philosophical idea that stood behind Brod's first publications: *Tod den Toten!* (1906), *Experimente* (1907) and *Schloß Nornepygge* (1908).

A first ideological change in Brod's view can be seen in his 1909 novel - *Ein tschechisches Dienstmädchen*. The novel describes how a young indifferent man from Vienna, sent by his father to work in an office in Prague, falls in love with a local Czech girl who works as a servant in his hotel. Through the love affair he discovers the world and becomes politically aware to the national conflict that surrounds him.

The novel aroused a big scandal, because at the time there was a ferocious fight between the German minority, who saw themselves as part of Great Germany, and the Czech majority, who thrived for Czech independence. Both sides couldn't accept the idea of a love affair between a German and a Czech girl, especially when the girl is from lower class. Surprisingly, not only the Germans and the Czechs saw themselves insulted by the story, the nationalistic Jews suddenly became an angry part of the debate as well, identifying the alienated and indifferent hero as someone with Jewish traits. An article by the Jewish literary critic Leo Herman concluded ironically that "the young author believes national problems can be solved in bed". The angry Brod met Herman for a discussion, in which he suddenly realized for the first time that he himself was Jewish. "I've learned the simplest things about the national Jewish movement and I've become ripe for the talks that started immediately after with Hugo Bergman on the endless subject: the Jewish nation, the Jewish faith, the Jewish religion".

Now Brod believed that an artist's duty should be political and not merely artistic. He should influence the reality by making it moral. From Individualism he turned to collectivism, from pessimism to optimism, from indifference to zealous political activity.

From this point on Brod attacked two common believes: Christianity – which holds the world as inevitably bad and sees the next world as the real destiny of man, thus promoting political indifference, and Paganism - which accept the world as it is without wanting to change it, thus giving up moral values. Brod said there's a "third way", the way of Judaism, which recognizes both this world and the next, both the material and the spiritual world.

The shock after the 1st world war turned Brod into a more skeptical man and lead into a second ideological change. Now Brod established his philosophy on two contrasting believes: "The good man is God's helper in this world" and "the good man, whatever he does, will always remain worthless, a sinful man who needs God's salvation." Brod

creates a new theory of “noble misfortune”, which represent the misfortune a man can’t do nothing against, such as the existence of death, and “ignoble misfortune” which represent all the misfortunes created by man, such as war and famine, which are man’s duty is to fight against.