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I am deeply grateful to Hugh McLean, Berkeley Slavist and brilliant wordsmith and literary scholar, who was willing to render the story into English, as well as produce sensitive notes to aid the modern reader. I am grateful to Mr. Conor Daly of Dublin, who stepped in to edit the translation and complete Hugh's effort. I am also grateful to William Craft Brumfield, mentor, friend, and colleague, the author of the preface here. I want to acknowledge the reader of this project, Alice Nakhimovsky; Maxim D. Shrayer, editor of the book series Jews of Russian and Eastern Europe, and Alessandra Anzani, editorial director, both at Academic Studies Press, with all their staff; as well as the staff at Indiana University Press, which has permitted me to use my 2020 article that appeared in *Prooftexts*. I also want to acknowledge help finding photographs of Levanda from Lyudmila Sholokhova and Zachary Rothbart.

I want to acknowledge the generous help that I received for this and other projects from my Doktorvater Dr. Hugh McLean and his wife Katherine (Kitty), who were close friends and whom I miss deeply. I also want to recognize the University of California, Berkeley, where I first fell upon Russian Jewish literature and started off on a path that still unfolds before me in my seventh decade of life.

On the Translation

Very few of Levanda's works have ever been made available in any language other than Russian (with the exception of Maxim Shrayer's translations) and I do not have any significant explanation for having chosen this story for translation except that it's a charming slice of life that gives a rich portrait of Jewish intellectuals in Russia at the end of Nicholas I's reign.

On the Translator

Hugh McLean (1925-2017) was professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of California, Berkeley. He was a polymath and brilliant linguist and literary scholar. For additional info, see the article about his career: http://slavic.berkeley.edu/people/hugh-mclean/

On the Translation Editor

Mr. Conor Daly teaches in the Department of Russian and Slavonic Studies at Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland. He got his PhD from UC Berkeley in 1994. His translations have been published widely.

On the Scholar and Book Editor

Professor Brian Horowitz is the author of six books, including *Vladimir Jabotinsky's Russian Years* (2020), *The Russian-Jewish Tradition* (2017), *Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment in Late-Tsarist Russia* (2009), *Empire Jews* (2009), and *Russian Idea—Jewish Presence* (2013). He has won numerous scholarly awards and grants. He received his PhD from UC Berkeley in 1993. He holds the Sizeler Family Chair and is a professor of Jewish Studies at Tulane University in New Orleans.

On the Writer of Our Preface

Professor William Brumfield is a Sizeler Professor in Jewish Studies and German and Slavic Studies at Tulane University. He is the leading specialist on Russian architecture worldwide. He studied with Hugh McLean, receiving his PhD from UC Berkeley in 1973.

—Brian Horowitz

Preface

William Craft Brumfield

It is a pleasure to write the preface for this book by, and about, Lev Levanda—the most important Jewish writer in the Russian language between 1860 and 1887, the author of novels and editorials about the fate and future of Russia's multimillion-strong Jewish population. I would like to mention important details that illuminate the book's genesis and goals. But first, let me say a few words in praise of Brian Horowitz, the editor of this volume and my colleague at Tulane University.

Horowitz did his doctoral work at the University of California, Berkeley, and I can say without exaggeration that he developed the previously nonexistent field of Russian Jewish culture. When Brian was at Berkeley in the 1980s, there was little recognition of Russian Jewish literature as a legitimate field. Russian scholarship in the field had ended in the late 1930s, when the Communist authorities prevented scholars from publishing on, and gaining academic promotion through, Jewish subjects. Archives remained shut, and there were no relevant courses or institutions in Russia. The brilliant émigré generation of the interwar period had passed away, and the study of Russian Jewish literature was relegated primarily to religious seminaries. Professional writers knew the work of Isaac Babel and little else. In short, Russian Jewish culture was not a promising subject for a budding scholar.

Fortunately, Horowitz realized that the generational break and the absence of recent scholarship offered a chance to right a historical injustice and rejoin Russian Jewry to Jewish history. Trained as a Slavist, he understood that Russian Jewish culture was sui generis, profoundly enriched in the nineteenth century by the Golden Age of Russian literature (Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov). Horowitz deserves great credit for his discoveries, which underly numerous articles and books such as *Empire Jews*, *Jewish Philanthropy and Education in Late-Tsarist Russia*, *Russian Idea—Jewish Presence*, and *The Russian Jewish Tradition*. These publications represent the development of an entire field of study. For example, the book before us emerged from Horowitz's plan to compile translations of Russian Jewish stories for a large volume that would lead to extensive translations of Levanda's work. Although that idea did not materialize,

it led to the translation of the present story with an incisive introduction that brings Levanda to an English-speaking audience.

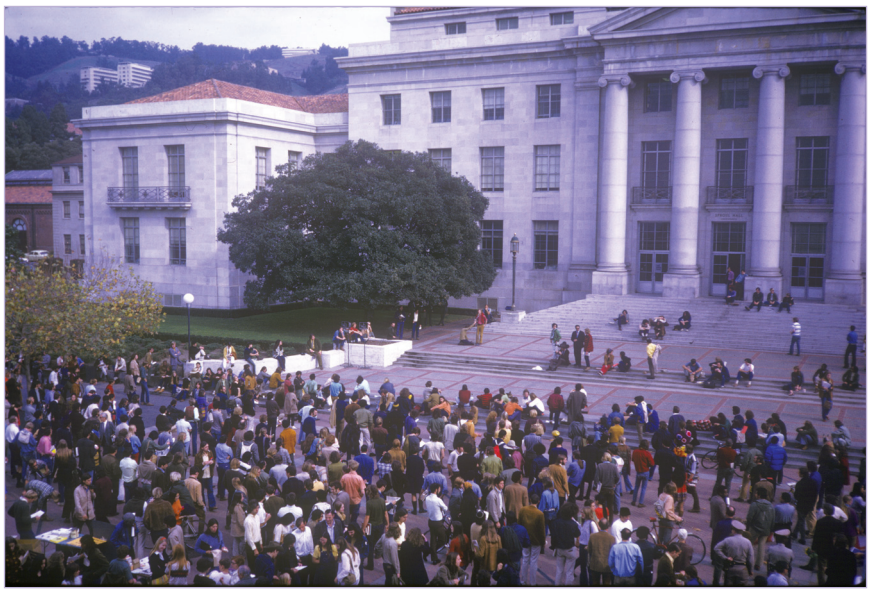
In 1995, Shimon Markish, a leading scholar of Russian Jewish literature, wrote an essay entitled "Is It Worthwhile to Reread Lev Levanda?" This question remains. Levanda dealt with existential problems facing Russia's Jewish population: modernization, economic dislocation, violence, and, especially, russification—the idea that Jews needed to integrate into Russian society, learn the language, and appreciate and contribute to its culture, as Levanda had done through his writing. Before the pogroms of the early 1880s, Levanda had shown positive aspects of russification. His literary characters were types who embodied the goals of contented Jewish citizens of Russia: the young intellectual, kind-hearted parents, budding musicians, and generous entrepreneurs. He also warned against the sacrifice of ideals for the sake of money. Levanda was seen to embody this ideal synthesis and he advocated for it: he was a Jew who was fully Jewish and fully Russian, a person capable of discussing Talmud and Pushkin. To some extent, this ideal remains to the present.

In the early 1990s Horowitz asked Hugh McLean to translate "An Amateur Performance." McLean willingly accepted the offer, thus making his own contribution to Russian Jewish culture. Anyone who had the privilege of being a graduate student in the Slavic Department at Berkeley during the last third of the twentieth century and the beginning of this one can remember the pleasure of Hugh McLean's company. I, for one, enrolled in or audited every course he offered during those hyperactive years of the quarter system in the late 1960s. It wasn't simply that he was an outstanding teacher. Everyone in the Slavic Department was superb, at least in my experience. McLean entered a finely honed system for pedagogy and research, and he made it his own, amplifying the work of his distinguished colleagues.

I should emphasize the easy rapport that McLean and his fellow Slavicists had with the History Department (also in dear Dwinelle Hall), whose Russian specialists did so much to define the field in this country. And there was his role as a dissertation adviser—supportive, tactful, not interfering when there was no need. Hugh and his colleagues provided the aspiring scholar with intellectual space at a time when egos were fragile and self-doubt plentiful.

All of the above could be repeated by many who encountered McLean during graduate studies. But for me, the defining moment occurred in the departmental office one afternoon in the spring of 1970. I was checking my mailbox when Hugh came up, tapped me on the shoulder, and asked if I was interested in going to Russia in the summer. He explained that the summer institute

William Brumfield at Dwinelle Plaza, June 1966. In background: Wheeler Hall and Campanile. Photograph courtesy of William Brumfield Collections.



Sproul Plaza meeting, fall 1967. In background: Sproul Hall. Photograph: William Brumfield. Courtesy of William Brumfield Collections.

of the IREX US-USSR Exchange of Language Teachers at Moscow State University was under-enrolled, and there might be a place for me, although, I was not yet an accredited teacher of Russian—only a graduate student with limited classroom experience. In those years US scholars at every level traveled to Russia through negotiated study programs; and gaining admittance to the IREX program, sponsored by the International Exchange and Research Board, was a defining moment, a breakthrough in my still tentative career.

Whatever the logic of my inclusion, those first summer months in the Soviet Union expanded my vision of Russia in a most literal way, and I have never forgotten Hugh's essential role. His thoughtfulness and ability to discern the "le moment décisif" were transformative. No one could have foreseen it, yet that first summer—my first experience photographing in Russia—laid the foundation for all that I was subsequently to do as a photographer and a historian of Russian architecture.[1]

In his later years, Hugh followed the frequent publications in my "Discovering Russia" series and often wrote to me with comments. He was among those who most clearly understood the significance of my photographic project, and I was gratified that he could see some of the results. Was he aware of his propulsive role? I doubt that it occurred to him; those of his standing have little need to claim credit for others. Might there have been alternative scenarios? There usually are, but for me, it will always be McLean's call.

New Orleans, July 2021

1 For more on that pivotal period, see "Faded Glory in Full Color: Russia's Architectural History: Interview with William Craft Brumfield," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 17, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 379–404.

Introduction

Brian Horowitz

Lev Levanda (1835-88) is still barely known in the English-speaking world. His famous novel from 1873 *Seething Times* (*Goriachee vremia*) has still not been published in its entirety, although a section has appeared in Maxim Shrayer's wonderful translation in *Polin* (2007) and in his anthology of Russian Jewish literature (1915).[1] Thanks to Levanda's major role in different areas of Jewish culture and politics in nineteenth-century Russia, scholarship in English on him is well represented (see Wikipedia, "Lev Levanda").[2] In this essay, I hope to relate the drama of his life as it unfolded in the context of Russian Jewish history, as well as discuss *An Amateur Performance*, the novella published in English here for the first time.[3]

Levanda devoted his life to the Russification of Russia's Jews. By Russification he understood the use of Russian language and integration of Jews into Russian society, its economy, and culture. To a degree, Russification succeeded; by the century's end, many Jews spoke Russian and were involved in Russian life and culture. However, the Jewish response, the government's behavior, and the attitudes of the Russian people did not cohere with Levanda's ideals. Beginning

1 Maxim D. Shrayer, "A Selection from Part 1 of Lev Levanda's Seething Times," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 20 (2007): 459-472; also in M. Shrayer, ed., *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature: Two Centuries of Dual Identity in Prose and Poetry* (London: Routledge, 2015), 39-56.

2 Among the best known works on Levanda are Gabriella Safran, "Lev Osipovich Levanda," in *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2 vols., ed., Gershon Hundert (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Zsusza Hetény, *In a Maelstrom: The History of Russian-Jewish Prose* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008); John Klier, "Jew as Russifier: Lev Levanda's *Hot Times*," *Jewish Culture and History* 4, no. 1 (2001): 31-52; Maxim Shrayer. "Gaining a Voice, 1840-1881: Lev Levanda," in Shrayer, *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian*, 39-56; ChaeRan Freeze, "The Politics of Love in Lev Levanda's Turbulent Times" in *Gender and Jewish History*, ed. M. Kaplan & D. D. Moore (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1911), 187-202.

3 *An Amateur Performance* appeared in Russian as *Liubitel'skii spektakl' (vospominaniia shkol'nika piatidesiati godov)* in *Russkii Evrei*, from issue 11, March 24, 1882 to issue 23, June 9, 1882

as a passionate fighter for Jewish integration, he finished in a sanatorium near St. Petersburg, having lost his mind. Little in Russia's contemporary history had gone according to his expectations; his overblown hopes had dissipated like deflated balloons. His life trajectory appeared not as progress, but as its antithesis. Instead of the victory of enlightenment, he succumbed to the forces of intolerance, chauvinism, and antisemitism.

However, Russification ultimately won out and Levanda's goal was achieved, although the struggle was not easy. Decades before such famous Jewish writers as Osip Mandelshtam and Isaac Babel rose to prominence, there were Jews who lived in Russia and wrote in Russian. What sounds perfectly natural—to live in Russia and write in Russian—was, in fact, quite uncommon. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Jews spoke Yiddish, and educated clergy (rabbis) and community leaders wrote mainly in Hebrew or Yiddish. Knowledge of Russian was often a profession—a member of the community was tasked with recording in Russian the births and deaths of Jews (keeping the official metric book). Thus, the Russian language was not widely used by Jewish subjects of the empire.

In fact, Russian language was not a required subject. Jews lived among non-Russians in the country's western regions, and so communication occurred in Ukrainian, Polish, Lithuanian, or Latvian. Sometimes non-Jews learned a bit of Yiddish.

By the 1840s, incentives appeared for Jews to acquire proficiency in Russian. Two processes began at once: Jews began entering the liquor trade, and the government pursued a program to teach Russian to a few Jewish children. Tsar Nicholas I created special schools for Jews and two state-sponsored rabbinical seminaries in Vilna and Zhitomir.[4] Gradually, opportunities in government service, commerce, and banking appeared for Jews who knew Russian. A bit earlier, the government reorganized the liquor trade, granting monopolies to large producers. A Jew, Gavriel Gintsburg, paid to obtain a liquor franchise, and he hired other Jews to help. Ultimately, around five thousand people were employed. Here Jews needed knowledge of Russian to successfully carry out the business.[5]

Learning Russian wasn't easy. There wasn't a textbook, nor was there a literature in Russian for Jews. It wasn't until 1860 that *Rassvet*, the first Jewish

4 Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825-1855* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983).

5 Brian Horowitz, *Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment in Late-Tsarist Russia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 17-28.

newspaper in Russian, was given permission to open. One of the founders (and featured writers) was Lev Levanda, whose novella *An Amateur Performance (Reminiscences of a Student in the 1850s)* portrays the first generation of Jews enrolled in the Russian government's Vilna Rabbinical Seminary. Like many of Levanda's works, it depicts a Jewish (male) consciousness at a specific historical moment, the early 1850s, when Tsar Nicholas I wanted to modernize the country. He did so with techniques borrowed from Western Europe—establishing Jewish schools, dissolving the Kahal and communal structures, hiring Jews in the government—but in Russia, such reforms had an oppressive dimension, causing pain, not relief.

Levanda does not give a history lesson. He offers a personal story within a specific context. His first-person narrator recounts the life of a young man, a high school age Jewish student—Levanda himself or a character based on him—who agrees to write a play for an end-of-year event. His comrades, aware that such initiatives are forbidden in Russian schools, try to keep it secret. However, the school officials find out. The young man is exposed.

The plot follows the narrator's relations with the school inspector, the teachers, and the students, as well as his education and the art of writing itself. In a sense, the story resembles Joyce's famous *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. To be sure, the bildungsroman (novel of education), as told from the youth's perspective, was widely popular during the nineteenth century.

The author poses an ideological question (one he often returned to in his work): Where should a Russian Jew orient himself, culturally speaking, between Polish and Russian culture? Polish is the superior culture, and until recently, Vilna— the locus of the story, and Levanda's home—orbited around Poland. But by the middle of the nineteenth century, politics, power, and the Jewish future had arrived in the Russian state, despite its antidemocratic structure and suppression of individual creativity. The novella treats the problem of Russia's heavy-handed government for a modern Jew seeking a forge a bond with Russian culture.

Although largely forgotten (except by scholars of Russian Jewish culture and history), Levanda was the leading proponent of the Russification of Russia's Jews. Since the majority of the world's Jews lived in the Russian Empire (over four million in 1882, when the story appeared), we need to recover his role to understand properly the history of Jews in Russia. Who was Lev Levanda?

Levanda was born in Minsk in 1835 to a poor Jewish family. He attended an elementary school run by David Aaronovich Lur'e, a Maskil (enlightener) who

believed that Jews needed to rely on themselves (as opposed to the government) to foster secular education among their own. He established a Talmud Torah (elementary school for poor families) that gave children access to basic skills and access to further education.

In 1846, Levanda transferred to the newly established (1844) government Rabbinical Seminary in Vilna. The name shouldn't confuse one; it was not a Yeshiva or traditional religious institution. The seminary was modeled on German schools that aimed to produce modern rabbis and community leaders who could read and write in German and possessed Jewish as well as secular knowledge. The Russian government created two such schools, one in Vilna, Lithuania, and one in Zhitomir, in Ukraine. However, the government was serious about changing the rabbinate and sought to replace the so-called "spiritual rabbi" with this new-fangled "state" rabbi by insisting that communities pay the latter's salary. Since most communities preferred to retain the original rabbi, they were obligated to pay two rabbis (the dual rabbinate). The "state" rabbi was an expense that few communities relished.[6]

Admittedly, most graduates of the rabbinical seminaries did not work as rabbis; instead, they found state employment as book censors, advisers, and teachers in the growing number of state Jewish elementary schools. Often, graduates went on to medical school or legal studies; a degree from a Russian university or trade school gave Jews the right to live in Russia's capital cities (outside the Pale of Settlement), where they enjoyed financial advantages and escaped the problems that Jews faced in the Pale of Settlement.[7] Another growing industry was in journalism. Levanda chose a writer's career.

Although the story published here appeared in 1882, during the "Spring Storms," the pogroms of 1881–82, we need to go back to the 1860s to discover Levanda's origins as a writer. In doing so, we can understand the context for this story and his fiction overall.

Levanda in the 1860s: Radical Maskil (Intellectual)

In 1860, the tsarist government gave Osip Rabinovich, a well-known Jewish writer, permission to publish the first Jewish newspaper in the Russian language. Although he already had permission to publish in Hebrew or Yiddish, Rabinovich

6 On the dual rabbinate, see ibid., 128-130.

7 Genrik Sliozberg, *Baron G. O. Gintsburg: Ego zhizn' i deiatel'nost'* (Paris: n.p., 1933).

had waited. He wanted a Russian-language audience, the better to bring the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) to government officials and the business elite, and thus promote tolerance toward Jews and Jewish integration into Russian society.[8] Although Rabinovich lived and published his paper in Odessa, he envisioned a newspaper that dealt with questions affecting Jews throughout the country, especially the vast majority that lived in the Pale of Settlement. Contributors to *Rassvet,* who wanted to change Jewish society, wrestled with how much to criticize traditional Jewish life. One was encouraged to point out flaws, but not undermine its legitimacy.

The Haskalah in Russia had several unique dimensions. In the Pale of Settlement, Jews were a large minority, comprising around 3.5 million Jews and making up 30-50 percent of the urban population. While Western Europeans were gradually gaining equal rights, Jews in the Russian Empire were still subject to onerous rulings and policies. Jewish integration was minimal; the Russian government discriminated against its Jewish population. Furthermore, the Ukrainians, Belorussians, Lithuanians, Latvians, and Poles who lived among Jews were not eager to accept Jews as equals (as minorities, they were also objects of discrimination). Generally speaking, the conditions of a secular civic society did not exist. In Russia, officially recognized corporate bodies like merchants, Jews, and Muslims still existed, although they were partially hidden by modern identities approximating, but not exactly consonant with, Western notions of citizenship.

However, Maskilim (leaders of the Haskalah) were characteristically radical in their ambitions. They called for immediate and full integration, Russification, increased economic productivity and religious reform. Simultaneously, their hostility toward the rabbinate, community leadership, and the structure of the Jewish community was deep and abiding. In the early period (1820-70), Maskilim expressed nearly unlimited love for the Russian government and imagined a utopian future—the unity of Jews and Russians.

Levanda helped establish the newspapers *Rassvet* and its sequel *Sion*, which was published in Odessa from 1860 to 1862. Levanda especially used the genre of feuilleton because it permitted him to discuss issues that mattered to him in a lively and personal way.

8 See Vasily Schedrin, *Jewish Souls, Bureaucratic Minds: Jewish Bureaucracy and Policymaking in Late Imperial Russia, 1850-1917* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016).

The first issue of *Rassvet* ran on May 27, 1860. There appeared, along with a note from the editor promising loyalty to truth above all else, a feuilleton by Levanda titled "Several Words on the Jews of Russia's Western Province." Levanda presented what might have been the sharpest criticism of Jewish life ever printed. Visiting Igumen, a small town in Belarus, Levanda found nothing to praise; everything is bad; the Jews are immoral, rotten, diseased. "Oh my God, what poverty!" he exclaims. "What material and moral degradation!"[9]

Levanda expresses a dislike of gender roles in traditional Jewish society. It angers him that women, never men, work in shops, and fight with one another over prices, thus undercutting their collective well-being. He opposes men's absence from economically productive professions. Instead of earning money for their children, they sit in study houses, hunched over the Talmud.[10] There the Jew gets some consolation and "forgets that his hut is not heated, that his children went to sleep without dinner, do not have breakfast today, that his wife is unable to bring relief to her mouth burnt from fever, that the landlord threatens to throw his family into the street every day, and the communal authorities have taken his last pillow for lack of payment."[11]

Extreme poverty irritates Levanda. He releases his bile:

> One has to see for oneself, one has to enter a crowded, half-dilapidated hut, which always houses no less than three families, which compete among themselves for the prize of poverty. One has to see how the half-naked children of all three families crowd around the unheated oven and fight over a piece of animal skin, which each child wants to wrap around himself to warm his body, freezing from the cold. One has to be there when the father of one family arrives at the door with a loaf of bread and his children jump off the oven with shouts of joy, singing and clapping their hands together. The children of the other families, whose fathers have not brought food, turn away their eyes so as not to see their comrades' happiness, which was not to be theirs.[12]

Levanda presents the Jewish family as shameful proof of moral degradation. Their way of life produces a litany of problems: "disorder, unsanitary conditions,

9 Lev Levanda, "Neskol'ko slov o evreiakh zapadnogo kraia. Pis'ma v redaktsiiu (Iz goroda Igumena, Minsk[oi] guber[nii]," *Rassvet*, May 27, 1860, 7.

10 Such gender distinctions were typical of Russian Maskilim.

11 Levanda, "Neskol'ko slov o evreiakh," 9.

12 Ibid., 8.

illnesses, poverty and the bad education of local Jewish children; you will not find in another people in any country so many hunchbacks, stooped, crippled and ugly people as I have seen among the local Jews."[13] Although his subject is religious Jews, his intended reader is someone like himself, a Maskil, who can finally face the truth openly and boldly. If you're like me, he seems to say, you will be revolted by Jewish life in Russia.

One can imagine his readers' reactions, and indeed, the response came quickly. In issue seven, Rabinovich published a letter from a group of Jews from Igumen, Zhelezograd, and elsewhere in the Minsk Province.[14] They recalled their joy upon hearing that a Jewish newspaper had been conceived and would soon be published. They recalled that Levanda had once defended Jews in a Russian journal from a false accusation.[15] They wondered if Levanda had written the article quickly, without giving proper thought to what he was saying. Then came the axe. The letter's author (writing on behalf of the group) unleashed his fury, complaining that one could expect such hostility from an antisemite, but from a Jew—what a bizarre novelty! Moreover, if a "learned" Jew made such claims, they were likely to gain credence among non-Jews. "Decide for yourselves, my dear sirs, is there room in your journal for accusations such as those lodged in that article? And if those of our people who have turned toward enlightenment attribute to us 'a moral and material fall, illicit trading and manipulations, cheating in weights and measurements, disorder in our homes, illnesses, the bad education of children, parasitism,' and if we add disgraceful poverty, with what then is left for our enemies to reproach us?"[16] The author ended by noting that Levanda has talent. Better it should serve knowledge and truth (nauka i istina).

For these readers. Levanda had gone too far. Many subscribers cancelled. They were not only offended, they were shocked by *Rassvet*. Unfamiliar with Jewish newspapers, they did not know how Maskilim express themselves. In fact, Levanda was not very different from other Maskilim, like the Hebrew writer Abraham Kovner, or the Russians Vissarion Belinsky and Nikolai Chernyshevsky. When *Rassvet* closed after only a year due in part to a lack of subscribers, Rabinovich regretted the loss of engagement with readers: "we openly

13 Ibid., 9.

14 "Vozrozhenie na stat'iu L. L. Iz Igumena, Zhelezograda i prochikh Minskikh podpischikov Rassveta," *Rassvet*, July 29, 1860, 154-156.

15 Ibid., 154.

16 Ibid.

interacted with a mass of people who in one or another way resembled us, sharing the same ambitions, harboring the same hopes."[17] One can presume that *Rassvet* had a diverse readership; some supported the radical Haskalah, while others did not.

When Levanda wrote another tough article, on elections for a rabbi in Minsk, he may have reconsidered the role of Russian Jewish journalist.[18] Prompted by the readers' letter (and *Rassvet*'s shaky financial condition), he considered balancing criticism with admiration for Jewish tradition. Perhaps this would appeal more to readers who were sensitive to criticism. Indeed, Osip Rabinovich promoted this approach.

In issue 22 of *Rassvet*, in an article entitled, "The Jewish Colony of Morgunovka," Levanda displayed a change of approach. Here he gushed with praise for Jewish life in the agricultural settlement. If everything in Minsk Province was bad, now everything in the Kherson Province in Ukraine was good. "You only need to visit the Jewish colony of Morgunovka," he wrote, "to be convinced how unfair is the accusation that our people are incapable of useful farm work. Jewish colonists here are seriously engaged in cultivating wheat for bread."[19] Levanda turned from attacker to defender. He rejected the accusation that Jews cannot make good farmers. Jews can excel at all kinds of productive labor, just as anyone else, he argued.

As if to distinguish the nefarious city Jew from the superior country Jew, Levanda underscored the virtue of modesty. He asks Morgunov, the colony's founder, why he hasn't yet received the title Distinguished Citizen. Morgunov explains that he requested the honor, he didn't lobby for it, and therefore he didn't get it.[20] Levanda has his own opinion. "The services of the founder are tremendous in this aspect. He showed himself to be an entirely meritorious person who loves his people not only in speech, but in action too, who fully understands the obligation of a true son of his fatherland."[21] Although only 250 individuals work in the colony, someday it might serve as a model for all of Russian Jewry.

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17 Osip Rabinovich, "Vnutrennie izvestiia: Odessa," *Rassvet*, May 19, 1861, 827.

18 Lev Levanda, "Vybory ravvina v Minske," *Rassvet*, July 1, 1860, 87-91.

19 Lev Levanda, "Evreiskaia Koloniia Morgunovka, Khersonskoi gubernii, Bobrynetskogo uezda," *Rassvet*, October 2, 1860, 352-354.

20 Ibid., 354.

21 Ibid.

One would think Levanda's article satisfied the editor. Indeed, Rabinovich expressed his approval in a comment at the article's end. Since Levanda and Rabinovich knew each other well and could correspond privately, the commendation likely had another purpose. Rabinovich wanted readers to know that they wouldn't encounter more hostile criticism and thus should not cancel their subscriptions. "We extend our gratitude to the author for the pleasure that we got from his article," he wrote. "We are sure that all of *Rassvet*'s readers will share this pleasure. We would like to get further details about this amazing colony, the means and tools that the founder has used in order to entice city Jews to practice agriculture and learn this difficult skill; [we would like] further details about the quantity of land allotted to them, and the charges that are levied in this context, etc."[22]

Levanda pondered his experiences in an article "Awakening (Letter to the Editor)," which appeared in *Sion*'s first issue (July 4, 1861). Describing his struggle to find the right tone in *Rassvet,* he mused, "So if anyone were to ask me now 'what is the easiest thing in the world and what is the hardest?' instead of giving the classic answer I would answer as follows: 'The easiest thing–by which I mean the least burdensome or lightest thing–is eiderdown and the hardest thing is to be an employee or staff writer in any Jewish current affairs journal.'"[23] He complained that the smallest criticism is treated by the Jewish community as a full-scale attack. He poured out his sufferings—being accused of atheism, and worse. Why bother offering a positive picture, mentioning that they have a Talmud Torah school, a poor house, and a clinic? In fact, things are not really so wonderful. In fact, more and more people are awakening, seeing the truth, seeking change:

> It happened: suddenly someone awoke, rubbed his eyes and jumped up from the iron bed in the direction of the doors and windows to breath in the fresh air and relieve his chest; but alas! The doors and windows were sealed closed, no way out; suffocate with everyone else in the dark, crowded, stuffy and smoky hut. To go for a walk, the sleepless person makes a stir and whistles to one or another friend, but none answers. That means it is not yet time to awaken. He spits, the wretched, and then returns to sleep, detached from it all, until the awakening of every-one.[24]

22 Ibid.

23 Lev Levanda, "Probuzhdenie (Pis'mo v redaktsiiu)," *Sion*, July 4, 1861, 24.

24 Ibid., 26.

Levanda seems to be alluding to the enlightened individual who sees the coming new reality, but can't make change alone. He must wait until everyone awakens, however long that may take.

Although Levanda realized what readers wanted from him, he preferred the role of muckraker and radical critic. But as he noted, the world was changing. He was proud that more Jews "proclaimed themselves to be a tribe that does not live only by ancient ideas, but sympathizes with everything that 'deserves the sympathy of a person and citizen' and are unwilling to move backwards from the spirit of the age."[25]

Rassvet was essential, Levanda exclaims. It represented a new reality; it *was* the new reality. He continues:

> A year has passed since we have ceased to be voiceless block because we acquired language and publicly spoke out; we received a newspaper, by means of which we communicated to all who wanted to hear how we felt, what pleased us, what we cannot help but regret, and what awakened in our heart intense sympathy, and what we pass by with barely a murmur, entering far into the old school of suffering in which our people have a great deal of experience.[26]

Levanda posits a before-and-after; reality changed after *Rassvet* appeared, and it will never be the same.

Levanda's experience with *Rassvet* would be central to his whole career, and reflects many themes in the history of Jewish journalism in nineteenth-century Russia. They include internecine struggles within the Jewish community, conflicts among Maskilim, attitudes toward the Russian government, and government indifference. In Levanda, however, we see that the Haskalah was not only, or even mainly, a political program, but also served as a means of communication, a behavioral style, even an inner conscience. In this way, Levanda represents the total Maskil, an individual in search of self and a member of a group bent on sparking a social revolution among Jews.

Why Levanda swooned over *Rassvet* is an excellent question. As he frames it, Jews in Russia were fighting a war between ignorance and light, the old and the new. He acknowledged that he and his allies were armed; they had newspapers, their preferred weapon of engagement. The newspaper certainly offered

25 Ibid., 25.

26 Ibid.

a means of spreading the message to the masses, and it served as a power base to a new kind of elite, a Jewish intelligentsia coming into its own and challenging the Shtadlonim and rabbis for political power. Unlike their opponents, the Maskilim embraced openness to the non-Jewish world, and vied for power on those grounds. A new relationship between writers and the people developed out of this appeal to change. In fact, the democratic feature was essential, and the two-way relationship between writer and reader was actually effective. Levanda shaped his audience, and it shaped him.

It often happened that the Maskil, ideologically speaking, outpaced the community; sometimes, the two lost one another. This problem would plague Levanda throughout his career. He became less a representative of Russian Jewry and more a Cassandra figure who told an unpleasant truth ahead of its time.

Levanda in the 1870s: Proponent of Russification

The 1870s was a key decade for Levanda. It started with hope and ended with disappointment. Although reform in Russia fizzled after the suppression of the Polish Uprising of 1863, Levanda clung to his belief that Jews could find a positive role in the empire. During the early years of the reign of Alexander II, many Jews were convinced that the government would extend full equality to its Jewish population; something like the universal liberation of the serfs in 1861. In fact, events harbingered good tidings. In 1863, the government allowed some Jews the opportunity to live outside the Pale of Settlement in Russia proper, including Moscow and St. Petersburg. In 1865, Alexander II's government passed legislation to modernize army service. Previously Jewish recruits served twenty-five years, terms that began at age eighteen. Under Nicholas I, the government had enlisted children, "cantonists," for army service. Most, if not all, endured a cruel fate. Although the new reform required universal enlistment, terms of service were radically shortened; the average term was five years. Furthermore, shorter terms were made conditional on educational achievement in certain Russian schools. Finally, the government had implemented an incentive for Jewish Russification.

In 1867, the government finished its last reform for Jews, this one for the benefit of handicraft workers. It had been suggested that Jews had useful skills but couldn't make them available in other parts of Russia owing to their confinement in the Pale of Settlement (the fifteen provinces in the western region designated for Jewish habitation). This new legislation would allow qualified artisans to live in Russia proper and thus bring their skills to places that needed them.