

## S. Y. Agnon's German Consecration and the "Miracle" of Hebrew Letters

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*This essay discusses the interplay of German and Hebrew in S. Y. Agnon's later fiction, particularly Ad henah (To This Day; 1952). In this work, Agnon, who had lived in Germany between 1912 and 1924, revisits the German home front during World War I. He uses this setting to reflect upon the modern status of Hebrew—the sacred language of creation—in a world ravaged by war, including the more contemporary 1948 battles. For this meditation on language, creation, and destruction, he draws on the golem tale, which had become a mainstay of German-language literature in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As his "golem," Agnon casts a brain-injured German soldier who has forgotten his name, family, and home. Agnon's rich rewriting of the golem story, a narrative of animation through language, establishes an unholy alliance between Hebrew and German and invites a reconsideration of Gustav Meyrink's occult bestseller, Der Golem, first published in 1915. Through translations of his stories into German in the 1910s, Agnon found himself hailed as the "authentic" chronicler of East European Jewish life, particularly as contrasted with the "inauthentic" Meyrink. Pushing back against this dichotomy and the past cult surrounding his works in German Jewish circles, Agnon's mid-twentieth-century writing reveals the ongoing presence, and even preservation, of German language and culture within modern Hebrew.*

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**B**etween 1912 and 1924, S. Y. Agnon resided in Germany, returning to Palestine only after a fire destroyed his home and library in Bad Homburg.<sup>1</sup> This formative "German" period in Agnon's career and its repercussions for his later writings have, until recently, remained relatively understudied in the vast scholarship on this author. More specifically, while some of the cultural and historical aspects of Agnon's encounter with Germany have received critical

attention, the literary and linguistic dimensions of this encounter need to be further explored.<sup>2</sup> For when, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Agnon returned in his writings to Germany and the events of World War I, as well as to the fate of German Jewry, he was also addressing the ongoing connection between Hebrew and German. The novel *Shirah*, which Agnon began to publish in 1948–49 but never completed in his lifetime, depicts an array of German Jewish immigrants in Palestine, emphasizing their ongoing attachment to the German language and its literature. The plot of *Ad henah* (To This Day), published in 1952, transports the reader to the years 1916–18 in Germany itself. The question of Hebrew's relationship to German plays itself out, in both texts, in the lives of civilians on the home front during periods of warfare. This essay interprets the Hebrew–German negotiations in Agnon's writings, primarily those in *Ad henah*, in the context of his concern with the effects of modern violence and displacement.

Agnon explores in *Ad henah*, and not for the first time, the problem of finding a home or place in language, and in the Hebrew tongue specifically. The narrator's Hebrew takes into its scope, through translation, borrowing, and transliteration, other European languages, predominantly German. These interlinguistic dynamics enable Agnon to link the events of the war years in Germany to the tumultuous period of the late 1940s and early 1950s in Israel, underscoring the enduring presence of Hebrew-within-German and of German-within-Hebrew. Using wordplays that move his readers between languages, Agnon nevertheless privileges Hebrew, its alphabet and root system, and his narrator mentally strays among Hebrew linguistic permutations, not merely among German boarding homes and rented rooms. The figure of the golem and the story of his creation function in *Ad henah* as central emblems of the inseparability of German and Jewish, as well as German and Hebrew, identities and texts. This clay humanoid is animated, in most versions of the story, with the help of the Hebrew alphabet and its combination into various sacred formulas. Agnon casts as his modern golem a wounded soldier who returns from the battlefield mute and unresponsive. This man is ultimately "resurrected" or "animated" not through God's ineffable name in Hebrew but through a German street name. In turn, when the name of this survivor is revealed to be Hans, Agnon plays with the Hebrew spelling of this name as *hanes*, the miracle.

The Hebrew word *golem*, first appearing in Psalm 139:15 and later used in the Talmud and Jewish mystical treatises, entered the German language and its culture through nineteenth- and early twentieth-century folktales and literary adaptations. Most relevant to *Ad henah* is Gustav Meyrink's popular occult novel, *Der Golem*, which became an unprecedented bestseller during World War I. While Agnon's text is replete with allusions to European works and authors, including Voltaire's *Candide*, Nietzsche, and Flaubert, one of its central intertexts, which Agnon obliquely references, is Meyrink's *Der Golem*. The presence of this intertext is not only more covert than the allusions to European classical authors, but it is also more pervasive, making use of a text that was first published when Agnon was living in Germany and that cannot be considered a canonical "masterpiece." Agnon treats *Der Golem* as a product of modern warfare, not unlike the golem-soldier himself, a novel that attained its popular status in part because of the war, because of German society's fascination with this story of creation at a time of massive human loss and devastation. Through the golem story, as mediated by Meyrink's popular novel, Agnon links the issue of past and present warfare with that of language use, of the interplay between German and Hebrew literatures.

To better understand Agnon's literary return to the wartime years in Germany several decades after the fact, I first discuss some of the historical and biographical dimensions of Agnon's career in German letters, via translation, in the period between 1912 and 1924. In the late 1940s, Agnon actively resisted his former position as the East European creation, or "golem," of German Jewry and looked back critically at his earlier encounter with German society and culture. *Ad henah* and its adaptation of *Der Golem* can be read as Agnon's belated ironic response to his own romanticized image in the eyes of German Jews. But this backward gaze was also forward-reaching, for through it Agnon considers the implications of the Hebrew-German encounter for present-day Israel and its Hebrew speakers. With his own reappropriation of the golem theme that became a staple of German culture, particularly during World War I, Agnon indirectly comments on the project of the "resurrection" or "revival" of Hebrew in a war-ridden society. Agnon uses the golem story to suggest that linguistic "resurrection" can only be ironic and incomplete, and that the sacred status of Hebrew as a tongue of (human) creation cannot be ignored en route to full modernization of this language.

## AGNON'S "CONSECRATION" IN GERMAN TRANSLATION

In his 1966 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Agnon enumerates his intellectual models and sources of influence. After mentioning the scriptures, the Mishna and Talmud, as well as Maimonides, he relates that when he began "to combine letters" other than Hebrew, "[he] read every German book that came [his] way and from these [he] certainly drew sustenance for his soul."<sup>3</sup> Dan Laor, Agnon's biographer, writes that as a young man Agnon could be seen walking around his hometown of Buczacz with blue books of Goethe and Schiller sticking out of his pockets.<sup>4</sup> During World War I, Agnon's benefactor and publisher Zalman Schocken provided him with German-language reading materials, including works by Gottfried Keller, Christian Morgenstern, Robert Walser, and Jacob Burckhardt. In his acceptance speech, Agnon does not mention any specific authors or titles in German because, as he explains, the "books of the Jews" are the ones that gave him his foundations, and are therefore the ones responsible for his being honored with the Nobel Prize.<sup>5</sup> He considers only books written in Hebrew letters as "books of the Jews," ignoring an entire epoch of Jewish writing in German from the Enlightenment onward. Agnon even declares, in a speech delivered in London after he received the Nobel Prize, that when "the whole earth was of one tongue," as told in Genesis 11:1, this "mother of all tongues" was Hebrew, the language in which "God spoke with Adam and Eve, in which the Torah was given and in which God spoke with his servants the prophets."<sup>6</sup> The primacy of the Hebrew language and the sacred texts written in this tongue render all other languages secondary and derivative.

But in comparison to English or French, languages in which Agnon could not freely converse, German was closer to home: not only was Agnon well-read in German literature, but he also spoke and corresponded in the language, albeit not without some Yiddish "interference." As Scholem recalls in his memoir of Agnon's long sojourn in Germany, "obviously we spoke German with him at that time even though Agnon's German was somewhat peculiar, spoken as it was with a Galician accent and the intonation of Hasidic anecdotes."<sup>7</sup> From Mendelssohn's time onward, Jewish speech and writing in German were subject to the accusation of linguistic impurity or of Jewish "mispronunciation," *mauscheln*.<sup>8</sup> While Agnon's Yiddish-inflected German seemed to actualize the threatening specter of this

accusation, it also had a particular appeal for his German Jewish interlocutors precisely because of his “accent” and “intonation.” When writing to Schocken in German, Agnon wove Yiddish idioms into his German (as when, for example, he calls his sister “Vater-Muters Tochter”) and even used Yiddish articles such as the indefinite *a* instead of the German *ein*. Agnon was self-conscious of his “odd” and non-idiomatic use of the language, apologizing to Schocken for writing to him in “German” (quotation marks in the original). He mocks his language and his handwriting—which he calls *Gekritzel*, scribbling.<sup>9</sup>

Agnon’s main creative output from this period appeared in German, both as translations of his works by Max Strauss, Gershom Scholem, and others, and in the form of coedited volumes such as *Das Buch von den polnischen Juden* (The Book of Polish Jews; 1916) and the Passover collection titled *Had gadyah*.<sup>10</sup> Agnon’s work was first introduced into the German Jewish world of letters through the important publication of two short stories in German translation. In 1916, his early stories “Aliyat neshamah” (“The Soul’s Ascension”) and “Meḥolat hamavet” (“Death Dance”)—in German “Aufstieg” and “Totentanz,” respectively—appeared in the volume *Treue*, edited by Leo Herrmann. The volume was published as a Passover gift for Jewish soldiers serving on the German frontlines. This publication secured Agnon an esteemed position among German Jewish readers, owing to Martin Buber’s famous introductory words:

Agnon is consecrated to all matters of Jewish life. . . . This consecration is neither cerebral nor sentimental; it is passionate and firm. Thus is Agnon. . . . His vocation is to become the poet and chronicler of Jewish life; of the life that is dying today and being transformed, but also of the other life, the unknown one that is coming into being. Galician and Palestinian, Hasid and pioneer—in his true heart he carries the essence of both worlds in the balance of his consecration.<sup>11</sup>

This ecstatic introduction won Agnon, as Scholem relates, much recognition among young German Jewish intellectuals, even if it was not always clear to them what Buber meant by the term *Weibe* (consecration, or ordination), the marker of his utmost respect.

In the introduction, Buber treats Agnon as the one who has both the calling and the gift to chronicle Jewish life in all its transformations. Buber had already mediated the translation and publication of "Agunot" in the German Zionist journal *Die Welt* (The World), and Agnon was a frequent guest at his home in Berlin.<sup>12</sup> Agnon, as Buber recognizes, not only linked Galicia and Palestine, religion and Zionism, but also enabled these worlds to meet in a third territory, in the space of Germany and German-language translation. Similarly, in the dedication of the collection *Treue* to German Jewish soldiers, Leo Herrmann suggests that the works of young Hebrew and Yiddish authors could play a major role in the future "salvation" of the Jewish people through their return to Eretz Israel. He encourages the soldiers to remain "true" to their own faith and people, just as they are fighting and sacrificing themselves for the German cause. The qualities of Agnon's early writings—including their folkloric appeal, mystical notes, constant and overt allusions to Jewish scriptures, and their ties to both the East European past and the Zionist enterprise—rendered them particularly suitable for translation into the idiom and ideology of the German Jewish Zionist circles. This mode of reception via translation entailed, nonetheless, an erasure of the more ironic and critical dimensions of Agnon's writing.

Agnon's literary-intellectual adoption into German Jewish society was completed in 1918, with the publication of *Und das Krumme wird gerade*, Strauss's translation of Agnon's 1912 novella *Vehaya ha'akov lemishor* (And the Crooked Shall Be Straight). The reception of this text in the German press furnishes a prime example of the "cult of the *Ostjude*," a phenomenon that, in Steven Aschheim's account, increased in scope and magnitude during World War I.<sup>13</sup> The text was understood as an accurate portrayal of Jewish East European life, with Agnon fulfilling the role of a modern bard who can access and revive ancient Jewish lore and traditions. Instances of irony were mostly lost on Agnon's German readership, mediated as the text was through this mode of cultish, almost overly faithful (also in the religious sense) translation and reception. In the original Hebrew text, by contrast, Agnon self-consciously uses an archaizing style and voice, imitating and incorporating elements of pietist literature as well as nineteenth-century maskilic tales—all told in a lofty Hebrew dabbled with Yiddish idioms. His style in this text only serves to accentuate the incoherence of modern Jewish existence: the world of this narrative is full of inner contradictions,

and its characters' tragic fates cannot be accounted for from within the theological framework the narrator appears to uphold. Agnon's use of acronyms, honorifics, and rhymes is frequently ironic, but, when translated into German, these become part of Jewish "folklore," with all the acronyms carefully spelled out.

Reviewing Strauss's translation for Buber's *Der Jude*, Berthold Viertel writes that Agnon has merged with the past world he describes: "He is fully chronicle, vernacular and Bible, anonymous transmission, lore and epic, and he rises to pathos out of innermost religious authority. Put Buberishly [*Buberisch gesprochen*], he is legitimate; he has the consecration [*Weibe*]." <sup>14</sup> Writing from the battlefield for the *Literarisches Echo*, the Czech Zionist Hugo Bergmann also considers Agnon as one of the few Hebrew writers who, in his chapbook or fable, has remained faithful, "treu," to the spirit and transmission of the *Volk* rather than becoming fully European. <sup>15</sup> In Max Brod's multiple enthusiastic reviews of *Und das Krumme wird gerade*, he compares Agnon with Homer, analyzing the epic qualities and "primordial nationhood" of his narration. Agnon, from this viewpoint, has created in Modern Hebrew a classical, formulaic but fully revived canon: "He has brought Eastern European art under the skies of Jewish antiquity, of humanity." Furthermore, in terms of his understanding of "the secrets of Jewish mysticism," Agnon surpasses an "outsider" like the Austrian writer Gustav Meyrink, Brod writes. "Meyrink employs kabbalistic motifs [in *The Golem*] as soulless decorative-exotic trappings. . . . In Agnon's writing, by contrast, any spell or saying from the *Zohar* is a deep-felt structural element that rises, alive, from the depths of the story." <sup>16</sup>

Steeped in both Talmudic learning and Hasidic lore, Agnon epitomized for Brod, Bergman, Buber, and others the "authentic" *Ostjude* and thereby also the true humanist Jewish writer, as opposed to Meyrink. According to Andrea Weilbacher, "Agnon's stories, in which the plots often unfold in the world of Eastern Judaism, were read by the adherents of the Jewish Renaissance or of cultural Zionism as testimonials of an authentic Jewish way of life." <sup>17</sup> Scholem explicitly describes Agnon's reception in Germany as part of the internal Jewish-Zionist obsession with all things Eastern European: "This, after all, was the time when a kind of veritable cult of the Eastern Jews (*Ostjuden*) reigned among Zionists in Germany. . . . For us . . . every Eastern Jew was a carrier of all the mysteries of Jewish existence, but the young Agnon appeared to us as one of its most perfect

incarnations."<sup>18</sup> It was in the process of translation into German that this image of Agnon was "consecrated" and widely circulated. The specific reworking of Agnon's works into German was part of a larger translational frenzy of Hebrew language texts into German, particularly in the aftermath of World War I, culminating in the famous and controversial Buber–Rosenzweig Bible translation.<sup>19</sup> Such projects were conceived, as Naomi Seidman explains, from the perspective of translation as cultural integration, with Hebrew representing the Jews and German the non-Jews, but they were also part of an internal drive for self-renewal, aimed at drawing German Jewry closer to the Hebrew sources. As such, these translations revealed an inability to clearly demarcate the categories of Hebrew and German or of German and Jew, enhancing the mutual impurity and even "contamination" of these languages and societies.<sup>20</sup> Several decades later, Agnon revisits in *Ad henah* this question of the status of Hebrew–German translation and interpretation. He does so via a Hebrew text that subverts or even undoes the cultural logic underpinning the translations of his own works into German.

### THE NAME OF THE GOLEM

In works that appeared in the early 1950s, Agnon retrospectively resists the image of himself, consecrated through German translation, as a Jewish Homer and the image of his narrators as folk storytellers. In an installment of the novel *Shirah* published by Agnon in 1952–53 (the incomplete novel appeared posthumously in 1971), the author even invokes the term *Weibe* when portraying the figure of a former Reform rabbi who became the Hebrew University's rector: "Although he retained some of the 'Weihe' of the Reform rabbis, which is considered ridiculous in this country, his height, style, and dignity led even the cynics . . . to listen to what he had to say."<sup>21</sup> The *Buberisch* notion of "consecration" is applied here to a German Jew, a Reform rabbi, rather than to an East European Jew such as Agnon. In the context of pre-statehood Palestine, this *Weibe* renders the man an object of potential ridicule, which he nonetheless manages to defuse. Agnon's own consecration in German similarly could not be transported to the new location of Eretz Israel.

*Ad henah* was written in a mode antithetical to the aura of "consecration" that surrounded the young Agnon as a mediator between tradition and modernity. As

a text that revolves around the narrator's wanderings on the modern German home front, *Ad henab* also overturns Agnon's earlier pseudo-epic style and does not hark back, even ironically, to a Jewish past. While composing a semi-autobiographical narrative about an East European Jew sojourning in Germany during World War I, Agnon constructs his narrator through a series of Jewish and non-Jewish doubles, including a severely wounded German soldier, a Russian prisoner of war, and a fellow Galician writer named Yosef Bach. *Ad henab* reclaims, furthermore, the golem story that became a mainstay of German literature in the nineteenth century, but refrains from turning it into a modern Hebrew or Yiddish folktale in the style of Yudl Rosenberg's 1909 *Nifle'ot maharal* (The Wonders of the Maharal). On the contrary, Agnon incorporates numerous elements from Meyrink's *Der Golem*. Derided by the same German Jewish intellectuals who embraced Agnon, *Der Golem* is the "inauthentic" other that Agnon mimics in order to disavow his image as an *Ostjude* and to suggest the ongoing presence of German literature within his Hebrew text. This adaptation recognizes *Ad henab*'s indebtedness to its German source while parodying *Der Golem* in the process.<sup>22</sup>

The first half of *Ad henab*, a highly experimental and digressive text, revolves around the strange existence of a brain-damaged veteran whom the narrator encounters at a convalescence home outside of Leipzig. This man is first described by his caretaker as "a kind of golem man without a brain" who was found in the battlefield, "cast amid a heap of corpses," the only survivor of his battalion.<sup>23</sup> Inspired by an unnamed popular German-language novel concerning the golem legend, the soldier's caretakers call this man, who cannot converse or recall his past, "golem." The soldier further embodies the Yiddish denotation of the word *goylem* as dupe or idiot, a meaning adopted into Hebrew. Because of his lifeless, apathetic demeanor, this survivor fails, as the narrator continuously underscores, to fulfill the role of the famous golem of Prague, who served his rabbi, understanding and obeying his every command. By emphasizing, moreover, that the man cannot remember his "name" or "place," Agnon portrays him as bereft of a soul and doubly godforsaken, for both words in Hebrew are synonymous with God (*ba-she-m*, *ba-makom*).<sup>24</sup> The modern golem, Agnon implies, is not animated through the ineffable name of God, written on parchment and placed in his mouth, as in the Prague legend. He is, instead, a product of warfare, extracted from the

mangled bodies of the dead, and functioning as a scientific, rather than a magical or mystical, curiosity. The name *golem* thus becomes a place-holder for the absent God.

Agnon's narrator provides the following account of how this particular golem earned his moniker:

This was a name people knew all across Germany in those days, because a German author had written a book about the golem, and the publisher advertised it widely in the hope of earning back the money he had wasted on the author. He assembled a group of cripples [*ba'alei mumim*], each shorter than the other, arranged them according to height, and gave them signs to hold that spelled out "golem" in large letters and had them parade through the streets of Leipzig during the annual fair, when the city was crowded with visitors. In this way the name golem became widely known and everyone talked about the golem who was made of clay and by the power of the sacred name of God under his tongue did everything he was ordered to do. "Today," Brigitta said, "I'm sending the professors in Berlin a golem who is not made of clay and does not use the name of God [*shem hameforash*], but his brain is certainly a golem brain. Incapable of thought, he does not even remember his own name." (47)

The narrator does not mention the name of the German author, emphasizing, instead, the role of the publisher (also unnamed) as advertiser. The reader is nonetheless led to infer that Agnon is alluding here to Meyrink, who published his best-selling *Der Golem* in 1915 with Kurt Wolff in Leipzig, receiving a prodigious advance on the book.<sup>25</sup> During his intermittent stays in Leipzig between 1916 and 1918,<sup>26</sup> Agnon was in all likelihood exposed to the publisher's innovative and aggressive advertising campaigns, which contributed to *Der Golem's* massive sales for its time, nearly 200,000 copies in the first decade of its publication.<sup>27</sup> The sensationalist language of Wolff's advertising promised the reader that this "ethical crime thriller" was "the most suspenseful and penetrating work of German literature."<sup>28</sup> The Wolff publishing house even printed a lightweight edition intended, like the collection *Treue*, for distribution to soldiers on the frontlines.

The narrator's own dismissal of the "book on the golem" echoes contemporary reactions of German Jewish intellectuals who accused Meyrink of exoticizing and distorting the golem legend and Jewish mysticism. The novel, wrote Arnold Zweig in 1915, forges a twilight-zone of "sensationalism" and cleverly arranged mysticism, combining Kabbalah and crime, Greek esoteric doctrine, and lust for revenge.<sup>29</sup> Scholem criticized Meyrink's "mishmash" of Indian and Jewish ideas of redemption as well as the commercial appeal of this work, its "sense for the mystical cry of the marketplace." Both Zweig and Scholem are nonetheless gripped by the suspenseful and unique atmosphere of *Der Golem*, which they grant to be well-written.<sup>30</sup> Agnon surprisingly incorporates this same repudiated bestseller into *Ad henah* in a highly pervasive, albeit surreptitious, way. As Yaniv Hagbi shows, *Ad henah* and *Der Golem* share many motifs, ideas, and narrative techniques, not merely character resemblances. But Agnon's adaptation also follows the logic of an exaggerated and, at times, inverted imitation.<sup>31</sup>

Linda Hutcheon defines the intertextual practice of parody as a self-reflexive form of "repetition with ironic critical distance" that hinges on difference rather than similarity. While allowing for continuity, parody is an "imitation characterized by ironic inversion."<sup>32</sup> Agnon's manner of repeating motifs from Meyrink's text performs just such an ironic or critical inversion, one that does not aim merely to ridicule *Der Golem* but rather preserves the earlier text within the fabric of the later one. Thus, in both texts, narrator and golem function as doubles of each other, but for Agnon "golemhood" is a virtually contagious condition so that minor characters exhibit attributes of the legendary golem (for example, the Russian soldier is a captive laborer, and the face of the injured soldier Yosef Bach appears like "burnt earth"). Furthermore, if Meyrink's first-person narrator is a non-Jew living among Jews in the Prague ghetto until it is torn down, Agnon's first-person narrator is a Jew living amidst predominantly Christian Germans while the disastrous end of the war approaches. The former figure lives in the *Hahnpaßgasse*, literally the alley of the rooster's pass, whereas the latter starts out his narrative living in the *Fasanenstrasse*, the street of the pheasants. Meyrink's narrator, a man who has forgotten his past, believes that he is called Athanasius Pernath but discovers that his name and identity were conferred on him without his knowledge when he mistook the hat of a stranger for his own and placed it on his head. Similarly, the soldier in *Ad*

*henab* who has also lost his memory receives the name golem from his caretakers due to their belief that it suits his brainless condition. However, while the false Pernath has his name affixed to his apartment's door, Agnon's narrator refuses to write his name on the door of his new apartment (88).<sup>33</sup>

Another minor detail shared by both narratives further exemplifies the way in which Agnon parodies aspects of the earlier text, altering them to suit the logic of his work.<sup>34</sup> Visiting a cafe, Agnon's narrator notices a single spoon suspended from the ceiling, secured by an iron chain. He is told that the owner had hung it in this way since customers do not return the spoon after stirring their coffee (113). In the pub of Meyrink's Jewish ghetto, similar spoons are hanging from a chain, but the explanation is that once a day local criminals and prostitutes are given free soup, a custom courtesy of a famous lawyer who, after experiencing personal betrayal, decided to support the underworld.<sup>35</sup> The irony of providing free soup but securing the spoons becomes in Agnon's text a doubly ironic distrust that renders all wartime customers potential thieves. Hence, while devoid of *Der Golem's* more salacious plot elements, such as murder and adultery, *Ad henab* nevertheless contains copious minor but unmistakable echoes of the earlier work. It is almost as if *Ad henab* is chained, against the will of the dismissive narrator, to *Der Golem* and is constantly forced to return to its German source, a text that is itself a distorted compilation of mystical sources. This form of critical preservation serves a double narrative function: it deflates the seemingly "elevated" status of Agnon's own prose and underscores the importance of the popular *Der Golem* for our understanding of German wartime society and, by way of implication, of Israeli wartime society.

## THE "MIRACLE" OF HEBREW LETTERS

In writing and publishing, in 1952, a Hebrew text that intensively engages with early twentieth-century German language, culture, and society, Agnon not only resists and rewrites his own image as *Ostjude* but also addresses the question of Hebrew literary creation in times of warfare and nation-building. For Agnon, the novelty of *Der Golem* had as much to do with its immense popularity and circulation as it did with its contents. In the previously mentioned passage concerning how the surviving soldier gained his name because of the "book about the golem," Agnon constructs a

network of grotesque links between the publishing industry, or book market, and the market of flesh—that is, the war that produces both invalids and golems. The group of men parades around the Leipzig fair, attracting attention through their bodily publicity stunt to the very word *golem*, itself a Hebrew–German construct; the same word is applied, in turn, to the wounded soldier whose “brain is a golem brain.” Whereas the writing in Hebrew on the body of the dog Balak in Agnon’s *Temol shilshom* (Only Yesterday)—*kelev meshuga* (mad dog)—renders him an object of fear and scorn, the word *golem*, written in German and publicized via the bodies of the sign-bearing crippled men, turns them into an attraction or a spectacle. They are a grotesque geometric “mass ornament,” to borrow Siegfried Kracauer’s term, one that does not conceal its capitalist underpinnings.<sup>36</sup>

Todd Hasak-Lowy has compared the story of the crazy dog in *Temol shilshom* with the golem legend, claiming that the writing in Hebrew on the dog’s body represents the magical potential of the holy language and the risks involved in its Zionist secularization as an everyday tongue.<sup>37</sup> In *Ad benah*, published seven years later, the same legend becomes an explicit means of situating these potentials and risks in a German-language context. Agnon indicates that translation or adaptation to and from German have played an important role in the project of Hebrew language modernization. If, through the Balak plot, Agnon performs the “return of a repressed magical [or sacred] Hebrew,” then through the soldier plot in *Ad benah*, he enacts the return of a repressed German post-1945 that continues to haunt Hebrew. And in both instances, the rebellion of language, embodied in the dog or golem-soldier, is directed at the narrator/protagonist who plays the role of a twentieth-century Maharal.

In his literary and essayistic writings, Agnon considered Hebrew the holy tongue of creation, and he critiqued artificial attempts to modernize the language without recourse to its scriptural heritage.<sup>38</sup> In his famous story, “*‘Hush hare’aḥ*” (The Sense of Smell), Agnon approaches, according to Naomi Sokoloff and others, “a mystical view of language that imagines Hebrew as existing prior to the creation of the world and capable of creating worlds.”<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the story opens with the assertion that unlike all other tongues that “exist only by agreement,” Hebrew “is the one in which the Torah was given, the one through which the blessed Holy One created His world.”<sup>40</sup> Mystical treatises such as *Sefer Yetsira* (The Book of

Creation) have presented Hebrew and its alphabet as capable of even creating human beings, initially by God through the combination of letters and then, through imitation, by Abraham. In molding a golem of clay Jewish mystics attempted to attain divine knowledge through action, "to know God by the art He uses in order to create man."<sup>41</sup> In his evocation of the golem story, informed by *Sefer Yetsira*, Agnon reminds us of the unique status of Hebrew vis-à-vis forms of human creation and raises the question of Hebrew's ongoing creative role in the modern world and in the context of Zionist nation-building. *Ad henah* allows Agnon to explore these issues at a remove, showing how both German-language literature and German society embraced the golem theme during World War I, leading to monstrous results. The modern golem is no longer a means of knowing God or imitating and celebrating divine creation but, on the contrary, of undoing the world as created by God through language, and bringing the holy tongue to the brink of destruction.

*Ad henah* not only concerns the German infatuation with the golem, however, but also rewrites Meyrink's *Der Golem*, while drawing on earlier versions of the golem story as well. Agnon thereby enacts, in the words of Anne Golomb Hoffman and Alan Mintz, "the attempt and failure to attain the linguistic level of the sacred" even while he upholds "the model of the world-creating language of Torah before him."<sup>42</sup> Agnon himself claimed, when accused of a "lack of modernity," that "he is not completely free of any trace of modernity, and even when he does not want to modernize [*lehitmadren*] modernity revolts and rules him."<sup>43</sup> In this utterance, Agnon plays with the Hebrew root for "modernity" (*mem-daled-resb*), which, when the final two letters are reversed, spells rebellion (*mem-resb-daled*). With Agnon's transformation of the Hebrew signifier for modernity into one for revolt, a golem of modernity emerges that can rebel against its authorial creator, the one who supposedly manipulates letters and animates them on the page, forcing him to enter modern times and not write only in the style of religious and moral books. *Ad henah* is such a rebellious text, an instance of a modern work the structure and progress of which seem to escape its author's control. Arnold Band has even deemed *Ad henah* an unintegrated and "haphazard" text, but these qualities could also be interpreted as Agnon's attempt to create a reading experience that mimics the golem's growth and abrupt ending, effecting a sense of authorial loss of control.<sup>44</sup> The golem story in its

German–Hebrew context thus enabled Agnon to mediate between the creative powers of the holy tongue and its secular literary uses.

As Agnon was well aware, in the different versions of the golem tale the rabbi animates the golem with the help of the Hebrew alphabet—whether through the word for truth, *emet*, or the ineffable name, *hashem hameforash*. Returning to Berlin on the same train as the golem, the narrator of *Ad benab* asks that his suitcases be carried back to the boarding house. He is told to write his address down and, taking out a piece of paper, he writes “the name of the boarding house and the name of the street and the house number.” When another soldier, appointed to carry the narrator’s luggage, reads the address back to him, “the same witless man whom everyone used to consider as lacking willpower, suddenly jumps up and takes [the narrator’s] belongings from the soldier’s hands, stuttering, ‘me, me, me’” (50).

The secret formula that animates the injured “golem,” bringing him back to a limited kind of responsiveness, is, ironically, a series of German place names and a number. Already in the opening sentence of *Ad benab*, the reader discovers that the narrator first resided, prior to his train journey, at the Trotzmiller’s boarding house in the *Fasanenstrasse* of Berlin. The name of the street and boarding house are not repeated, however, in the later train station scene, so that they are ironically endowed with the valence of the unutterable names of God. Agnon himself, in a German-language letter written from Leipzig in 1917 to a young woman, complained about his living conditions and asked her to find out whether the room of one “Frau Dr. Brysch” in the boarding house of “Frl. Körber” might be available in Berlin, since he would then swiftly return to the *Fasanenstrasse* (“so komm ich telegrafisch nach der Fasanenstr. zurück”).<sup>45</sup> Translated into Hebrew as *rehov hapasyonim* (the street of the pheasants), the street name evokes the passion or *pasyon* of Christ, but it has a further Jewish significance in *Ad benab* (5). When the narrator approaches the boarding house following the incident at the train station, he takes note of the tall “temple of the enlightened that was built of gilded tiles made by the Kaiser Wilhelm Royal Tile Works” (53). Agnon alludes here to the massive and costly synagogue constructed by the Reform Jewish community of Berlin on the *Fasanenstrasse*, in West Berlin. Kaiser Wilhelm II had indeed contributed tiles for one of the synagogue’s halls from his factory in Kadinen, Poland, and he also sent his representative to the inauguration of the synagogue in

1912. The German Jewish writer Kurt Tucholsky satirically nicknamed this place of worship "the patriotic synagogue."<sup>46</sup> The name of the street thus conjures up the name of the House of God, which has been secularized by the presence in proxy of another king, the German Kaiser. For Agnon, as for Tucholsky before him, the synagogue does not represent the freedom and integration of German Jews, but rather their ongoing subjugation on German soil, where they are denied access to positions of power and are enlisted as cannon fodder.

Written on a piece of paper in a manner that deliberately echoes the legendary animation of the golem through a parchment placed in his mouth, the boarding house address does *not* constitute a name of God or a combination of Hebrew letters; rather, it evokes and conflates the Passion of Christ and the nationalized synagogue of Reform German Jewry. Through this overdetermined street name, which has different meanings in Hebrew translation and in the German original, the "true" German son returns to his family, leaving the narrator, who had formerly resided in his room, homeless. Instead of attaining power over his creation, the narrator experiences this animation as a form of rebellion; the assertion of the German soldier's identity constitutes here an act of violent revolt. The "magic words" of the street name and boarding house cause the soldier to take hold of the narrator's suitcases, his only possessions, so that it becomes impossible to "pry the bags loose from him, as he [hangs] on to them for dear life while threatening to lower them on the head of whoever trie[s] to tak[e] them away."<sup>47</sup> The Hebrew text has the golem-soldier literally threatening to "beat up" those who would take away the bags, evoking thereby the violence of the rebellious golem who suddenly asserts his destructive power.

Taking the Jewish man's belongings and his place in the house (and perhaps in society at large), the German golem represents the modern appropriation of Jewish resources, even cultural ones such as the golem tradition itself, just when the Jewish "savior" has secured this man's return to his family and home. If the brain-injured German soldier can come home, Jewish soldiers fighting for the German cause—represented in *Ad henah* through Yosef Bach, a war hero who has lost both parents and grandparents—are uprooted from their home towns (in Poland) because of the war and its ensuing pogroms. All the more alienated is the Galician Jew in Germany, against whom the golem-soldier revolts as he usurps his place in the Berlin boarding house. This narrator becomes a kind of dupe, another *golem*, so that the soldier's

supposed miraculous revival, as a result of the Maharalic act of writing the address, renders the narrator a *persona non grata*, an emblematic wandering Jew. In this manner, Agnon implicitly criticizes, by alluding to the *Fasanenstrasse* synagogue, Reform Jewry for its blind “faith” or trust in the German language and its culture as well as for its belief in its own religious–cultural powers.

Agnon, who himself made active efforts to avoid fighting in World War I, writes from the viewpoint of those displaced by the war and of those who lost their loved ones.<sup>48</sup> In a postcard to Schocken in 1917, he reported that he has “one foot in Leipzig and the other foot on the way to Berlin,” signing off as “S. Y. Czaczkes, the eternal wanderer.”<sup>49</sup> He composed *Ad henab*, previously titled *Biyomot hamilhamah* [In the Days of the War], at least in part during the battles of 1948, while he was living in Tiberias, as his own home in Talpiyot (Jerusalem) had been severely damaged in the fighting between Arab and Jewish forces.<sup>50</sup> *Ad henab* needs to be read in view of the war that was raging around Agnon and his own 1948 wanderings, and not only in the context of World War I. Agnon was first forced to move to Rehavia, a neighborhood in west Jerusalem, where he resided in a small boarding house owned by a German psychiatrist whose son was fighting in the war. Agnon lived in the room of the drafted son, just like his narrator at the outset of *Ad henab*, and shared it with him when the soldier returned home for vacations.<sup>51</sup> In Tiberias, where Agnon sought respite for five months from the harsh Jerusalem winter and the war conditions, his hosts, the Me’iri family, had lost a son to this war. Finally, and most famously, Agnon also resided during 1949 in the home of Fania and Gershom Scholem, whose acquaintance he had made during his early years in Germany.

The German owner of the boarding house in *Ad henab* lost her husband in the previous “war of years” (*milhemet shanim*), and her son is missing in action at the outset of the text. With her story, as elsewhere in the text, Agnon reminds us of a previous war or calamity. He indicates that his own narrative concerns the ongoing chain of modern wars, including the battles of 1948, which recalled for him the events of World War I. Agnon seems to be asking here whether or not a Jew who knows how to live frugally (literally “to contract himself”) can find in Israel a “place to live,” *bayit dira*, in both the physical and the spiritual sense (5). The ending of *Ad henab* is ambiguous in this respect, for the narrator returns to Palestine and builds himself a home of stone, constructing additional rooms intended to

house the books of Dr. Levi, whose library in the German town of Grimma has been threatened with either destruction or dispersion ever since the death of Dr. Levi and the illness of his widow. In the very last pages of *Ad benah*, not only does the widow miraculously revive herself, like the golem-soldier, and regain "control over her limbs," emerging from her cocoon of bandages and hospital confinement, but she also announces her plan to immigrate to "Eretz Israel." To solve the widow's "quandary" about transporting and managing her husband's book collection, the narrator builds the library in his home and claims that he has "earned" a home in Palestine not because of himself but because of these books that need a place to be stored (130–31).<sup>52</sup> It remains unclear, nonetheless, what the exact content of these books is and in what languages they are written, Hebrew, Yiddish, and/or German.

By concluding with another tale of "miraculous" resurrection, Agnon suggests that, like the widow, the Hebrew tongue itself was never truly ill or "living-dead." Its presumed revival is a mock-revival performed by the "doctors" or intellectuals, language revivers who have only harmed it through their so-called "treatment." *Ad benah* ends, however, with the image of the narrator "stroll[ing] through the empty rooms that soon will contain [the books]." The arrival of this Jewish library from Germany could potentially bridge past and present, the events of World War I and the Zionist endeavor, but the postponement of such a resolution renders the ending ironic. Agnon concludes his aborted novel with a quotation from the ancient liturgical poem (*piyut*) *Nishmat kol-hay* (The Soul of Every Living Being). It conveys thanks for God's benevolence "to this day" (*ad benah*) and pleads for God's guidance and mercy in the future. The godforsaken reality of technological warfare depicted throughout *Ad benah* stands in contrast to this restored sense of faith, and the reader is urged to ponder further the irony of the miraculous events that have restored the narrator's faith in God, such as his return to Palestine and the resurrection of Dr. Levi's widow. But Agnon's use of the prayer also raises the question of the possible connection between the different temporalities and locations of his text. Publishing *Ad benah* only a few years after Israel attained its own independence through violent warfare, Agnon asks the reader to make a comparison, in full knowledge also of the events of World War II, between German and Israeli wartime societies and their dispersed populations, whether Jewish, Arab, or Christian.

Hence, considering the circumstances of *Ad benah's* composition, the golem and widow plots not only provide a critique of pre-World War II German Jewish society and a self-accounting of Agnon's role as an *Ostjude*, but also a meditation on the effects of modern warfare in both the German- and Hebrew-speaking contexts. As already noted, on returning to his family home, the "golem man" regains his given name: Hans. In Hebrew, the word Hans (הַנְּס), without vocalization, could be read as *hanes*, meaning "the miracle." The narrator uses the term *nes* in the same scene when, on his arrival at the boarding house, he finds the doors wide open despite the late hour. Soon enough he realizes the cause for this strange occurrence: the family is celebrating the return of Hans. But the miracle is not merely the "paradoxical" return of the "golem man" from "captivity," as Hillel Weiss contends, but also the mock miracle of his return to some form of human sociability, to his name and place.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, the transformation from golem to Hans marks a transition from a Hebrew term (*golem*) adapted into German language and literature to a German proper name, albeit one that echoes the Hebrew word for miracle. Furthermore, the man's nickname, Hänschen or "הַנְּסִיכֵן," evokes through its spelling the Hebrew term *hamiskhen*, the pitiful one (54).

As the golem turns into a man, Hans, his name simultaneously attains both positive and negative Hebrew connotations. What constitutes a mock "miracle" for one man is another man's disaster, as we have seen, and the narrator's inadvertent assumption of the role of a Maharal renders him vulnerable to the violence of the "miracle" of interlingual resurrection. Hence, the presence of a German name within the Hebrew alphabet temporalizes the holy tongue in which the Torah was given. The "miracle" of Hans's return to his home and identity can be read as comparable to the "miracle" of Hebrew's own return to its "native" land and its use as an everyday spoken language. In both cases, however, the resurrection is incomplete and its outcomes are uncertain: Hans does not become a cured "new" man even after his resumption of his previous life, and the status of modern Hebrew and its relationship to the linguistic and scriptural past of the language are a subject of much contestation. In this rewriting of the golem legend, Agnon has not altogether relinquished, however, his belief in the magic of human creation and animation through language, for Hans still conveys the Hebrew "miracle," *hanes*. Such creation is nonetheless presented in *Ad benah* as an interlingual, intercultural project in which languages

and identities contaminate each other and the created human or text rebels and overpowers its creator.

## THE PRESERVATION OF GERMAN

Meyrink's *Der Golem* was one of the "decadent," non-Jewish books burned by the Nazis and their followers in May 1933. A copy of the novel has been incorporated into an installation at the new wing of Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial museum in Jerusalem, where it sits conspicuously on top of a pile of banned books. The afterlife of *Der Golem* as material remnant and literary intertext suggests that the need to preserve this work extends beyond Agnon's own relationship toward a contemporaneous non-Jewish author, Meyrink. In *Ad benah*, Agnon has the Jewish bibliographer Dr. Mittel spell out the implications of Jewish cultural preservation through an exaggerated parable. Mittel, the narrator relates, is a Polish Jew, Hasidic in origin, even while his name has several meanings in German ("means," "medium," "average"). After earning a doctoral degree in Germany and settling in Leipzig, he married into a German Jewish family and published incisive bibliographic studies. This character (whose biography recalls that of Agnon's on several points) is ceaselessly, almost compulsively, telling stories and parables relating to the war and to the fate of Jews in war-ravaged Europe.

At the end of the narrator's first visit with him, Mittel claims that if he were a writer of stories, he would "write about future events, beginning with the end." Mittel's comment about "future events" invites the reader to consider the ways in which the story Mittel is about to tell could have come to fruition. In the ensuing tale, Germany has been conquered and its enemies have split the country among them (as indeed took place after World War II). The Germans are left with a small piece of land. In their destitution, they turn their libraries into homes and burn their books and art objects for fuel. They thus consume, in an act of cultural cannibalism, all the books composed by their own "sages and poets." But from time to time, Mittel continues, "the intellectual soul awakens and they remember past days" and their previous possession of books of wisdom and poetry, now completely obliterated. To retrieve some of their books, they therefore send messengers to places like America, where German Jews reside who have preserved the tongue of

the land from which they fled. As Mittel tells the narrator, the Jewish people are peculiarly intent on linguistic and literary preservation—not merely of their own heritage but also of the lands where they once lived (19–20).

In *Shirah*, a novel set after the Nazi ascension to power, the protagonist Manfred Herbst observes that because of the influx of German Jewish immigrants “Jerusalem has become a metropolis for German books . . . [and] you’re more likely to find a rare German book in Jerusalem than in Germany.”<sup>54</sup> Similarly, *Ad henab* itself may be read as a postwar archive of sorts created in exile from Germany. It is a text that incorporates traces of the German language and its literature, specifically of a book, *Der Golem*, burned by the Germans themselves. Rather than preserving masterworks of poetry or philosophy, however, *Ad henab* incorporates an occult detective novel that was first criticized by Jewish intellectuals and later burned by Nazi sympathizers. On yet another level, just as the Jewish immigrants in Mittel’s parable conserve the German tongue “in their mouths,” so we discover that the characters of *Ad henab* (and likewise Manfred Herbst in *Shirah*) speak German even while Hebrew stands in for this language.<sup>55</sup>

For instance, riding the train back to Berlin, the narrator sits across from the golem-soldier. As he daydreams, the narrator exchanges his German travel companion with the Russian prisoner of war whom he had previously encountered on his journey. Embarking on a long monologue about German–Russian wartime relations and the disputes between Galician Jews and German Jews in Leipzig, the narrator catches himself in mid-speech: “[The prisoner] must certainly wonder how one can say so many things in the German tongue, for since the day he was taken prisoner, the Germans have not conversed with him very much” (49). This sentence is, of course, written in Hebrew, more specifically in Agnon’s idiosyncratic Hebrew that has its own identifiable syntactic music. Agnon makes his readers aware that the narrator, himself a Galician Jew, converses in his non-native German, and that his speech is represented in Hebrew. This self-reflexive moment takes place just as the narrator imagines that his fellow passenger is another non-native speaker of German, a Russian prisoner of war. Whereas this young prisoner craves dialogue, the German soldier does not speak or otherwise respond when spoken to. Talking to him as though he were a Russian prisoner of war, the narrator’s conflation of the different

warring sides, of friend and foe, becomes a linguistic conflation as well, as Hebrew writing comes to stand in for German speech.

This meta-discursive moment highlights what is at stake for Agnon in his negotiations of the relationship between Hebrew and German. Rather than treat the two languages as incompatible or oppositional, Agnon not only overlays them but also uses German to further defamiliarize his Hebrew. Similarly, at an earlier point, when the narrator presents the brain-damaged soldier with a goose liver, asking him how he would like to cook it, he uses a Hebrew idiom, "ye'erav leḥa, ye'vusam leḥa, as we Hebrews say in Hebrew," followed by the rhetorical question, "and you Germans, how do you say this in German?" (37). We are reminded here, too, that although the text is written in Hebrew, the narrator does not communicate with his interlocutors in this tongue. Moreover, while claiming that "to each tongue its own idioms," the Hebrew expression the narrator uses is more lofty and musical than the German, *schmeckts*. To complicate matters even further, the narrator identifies himself as one of the "Hebrews" in contrast to the "Germans," but we also know that he is an Eastern European immigrant, a native Yiddish speaker. Because he does not seem to comprehend language at all, the nonresponsive soldier could be addressed in any tongue, rendering the narrator's utterances concerning the man's gustatory sense all the more ridiculous.

It is no coincidence that such Hebrew–German linguistic intersections occur precisely as the narrator encounters the injured soldier. The modern production of a golem-like figure through technological warfare, rather than by mystical or magical linguistic means, challenges the Jewish belief in the powers of language, particularly of the Hebrew tongue and its alphabet. Furthermore, the use of Hebrew to represent German speech suggests not only the ghostly presence of one language within the other but also the impurity of writing, even when composed in Hebrew. *Ad henah* moves its contemporary readers, especially via the golem plot, to reconsider the status of Hebrew in a war-ridden society (Germany, but also present-day Israel) and to ask whether it can or cannot maintain its privileged position as a positive, animating force. Mittel's parable, in other words, applies not only to the German people but also to the Jews themselves, for they, too, as Agnon has witnessed, may become engaged in national conflicts leading to recurrent wars

and strife. In Mittel's pessimistic words, "They repeat and make a second war and a third until they become exhausted and fall and do not rise" (20).

In conclusion, three types of German–Hebrew operations can be traced in Agnon's writing: the early project of translation from Hebrew into German, the work of adaptation or appropriation by Agnon from German back into Hebrew, and the magical transmutation of one language into another through the Hebrew spelling that enacts its own kinds of spells. In *Ad benah*, the German language, through its re-presentation in Hebrew, is always a shadowy, implicit presence, just as *Der Golem* is the literary *Doppelgänger* of Agnon's Hebrew text. If "the power of language is enclosed in the name [of God]," as Scholem has famously claimed, Agnon posits naming as a kind of grotesque miracle that may be performed from within a bilingual, Hebrew–German framework.<sup>56</sup> The German public's wartime fascination with, and appropriation of, the Jewish magic of human creation gave later rise to a work of counter-appropriation in which Agnon created his own version of the golem story. Alluding to Meyrink's *Der Golem* without naming it, Agnon brings the "miracles" of modern Hebrew literature and of the newfound State of Israel into question. He treats Hebrew not as the pure language of Jewish creation but as the tongue of intercultural and interlinguistic negotiation and conservation. Agnon's ironic vision of a nation-home, emblemized by the empty Hebrew library awaiting books from Germany, indicates that the alliances and tensions between Hebrew and its counterpart, German, have yet to unfold in future works of literature, philosophy, and even popular culture.

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## NOTES

- 1 Agnon had arrived in Berlin together with Arthur Ruppin in hope of securing an assistantship with the writer Mikhah Yosef Berdyczewski. After this attempt had come to naught, he found employment as a Hebrew tutor and editor for the Jewish press, only later to gain the patronage of Schocken.
- 2 See Dan Miron, *Harofé hamedumeh: 'iyunim basiporet hayehudit baklasit* (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hame'uḥad, 1995); Hillel Barzel, *Bein Agnon leKafka: meḥkar mashvev*

(Ramat-Gan: Bar Oryan, 1972). Most recently, the volume *Agnon and Germany* explores Agnon's sojourn in Germany and his relationship to German society and culture. See Hans-Jürgen Becker and Hillel Weiss, eds., *Agnon and Germany: The Presence of the German World in the Writings of S.Y. Agnon* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2010).

- 3 S. Y. Agnon, *Me'atsmi el 'atsmi* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2000).
- 4 Dan Laor, *Haye Agnon: biografyah* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1998), 23.
- 5 Agnon, *Me'atsmi el 'atsmi*, 87.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 89.
- 7 Gershom Scholem, *Judaica 2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), 124.
- 8 Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 162.
- 9 S. Y. Agnon Archive (via the Zalman Schocken archive) at the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem. I am grateful to Rafa'el Weiser for his knowledgeable and patient assistance.
- 10 During World War I, Agnon mainly revised stories he had written in Palestine. For instance, the story "Tishrei" became "Giv'at haḥol" ("The Hill of Sand") and "Hanidah" ("The Banished One") was completed and later published in 1919. In July 1917, "Agadat hasofer" (The Legend of the Torah Scribe) was translated by Max Strauss and published in Buber's *Der Jude* as "Die Erzählung vom Torahschreiber."
- 11 Translation adapted from Dan Laor, "Agnon and Buber: The Story of a Friendship, or: The Rise and Fall of the 'Corpus Hasidicum,'" in *Martin Buber: A Contemporary Perspective*, ed. Paul R. Mendes-Flohr (Syracuse and Jerusalem: Syracuse University Press, The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2002), 53–54. Leo Herrmann, ed. *Treue: Eine jüdische Sammelchrift* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1916), 59.
- 12 Laor, *Haye Agnon*, 93.
- 13 Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 184.
- 14 Viertel designates Agnon's "little book" as a form of "living Judaism in both the physical and spiritual sense of the word; a Judaism that has found itself again, as if it had never lost itself." Berthold Viertel, "Und das Krumme wird gerade," *Der Jude* 6 (1918): 294–96, 296.

- 15 Hugo Bergmann, “Und das Krumme wird gerade,” *Das literarische Echo*, October 15, 1918.
- 16 Max Brod, “Zwei jüdische Bücher,” *Die neue Rundschau* 2 (1918): 1362–67, 1366.
- 17 Andrea Weilbacher, “Agnon’s Reception in the German Press Before and After World War II,” in *Agnon and Germany: The Presence of the German World in the Writings of S. Y. Agnon*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Becker and Hillel Weiss (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2010), 178.
- 18 Gershom Scholem, “Agnon in Germany: Recollections,” in *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis*, ed. Werner J. Dannhauser (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 119.
- 19 See Abigail E. Gillman, “Between Religion and Culture: Mendelssohn, Buber, Rosenzweig and the Enterprise of Biblical Translation,” in *Biblical Translation in Context*, ed. Frederick W. Knobloch (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2002); Seidman, 153–98.
- 20 “Put otherwise, the German Jew is both ‘Hebrew’ (as a Jew) *and* ‘German.’ In this deconstruction of Jewish identity, the category of a pure or organic German language or people prior to or outside of any ‘contamination’ by Jews or Jewishness also collapses.” Seidman, 159.
- 21 S. Y. Agnon, *Shirah*, trans. Zeva Shapiro (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 103.
- 22 Meyrink, an aesthetic secessionist, exerted his strong influence on writers such as Brod and Franz Kafka, so that Brod’s unfavorable comparison of Meyrink with Agnon is a revisionist one. Meyrink, an Austrian-born satirist, also shared with Agnon an interest in ethnic and nationalist tensions, which he sought to expose in his writings. See Scott Spector, *Prague Territories: National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka’s Fin de Siècle* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 14, 18, 176–77; Cathy Gelbin, *The Golem Returns: From German Romantic Literature to Global Jewish Culture, 1808–2008* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 99.
- 23 S. Y. Agnon, “Ad henah,” in *Ad henah* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1998), 12, 44. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses in the text. When necessary, I have provided my own translations.
- 24 At one point, the narrator uses the term *makom* in both of its senses, and perhaps also in the sense of death, the final resting place: “I must live here and seek a room for myself until the Place [i.e., God] returns me to my place.” *Ibid.*, 70.

- 25 Instead of the usual royalties, Meyrink demanded a 10,000 Goldmark advance. Kurt Wolff, *Autoren, Bücher, Abenteuer: Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen eines Verlegers* (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 2004), 19.
- 26 Agnon writes that "during the Great War [he lived] in Leipzig. [He] wrote about some of what happened to [him] there in his book *Ad benah*." Agnon, *Me'atsmi el 'atsmi*, 265.
- 27 In a postcard addressed to Buber, dated March 1918, Agnon invites him to visit Leipzig and even stay with him. He writes that his apartment is located near the publishing houses and printing presses: "One step away—Kurt Wolff; a second step—Insel; a third step—Brandstetter." The National Library of Israel, Buber Archive, 65.9.
- 28 Kurt Wolff, "Der Golem," *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel*, June 12, 1915, 7632.
- 29 Arnold Zweig, "Der Golem," *Die Schaubühne* 10 (1915): 224–28, 225.
- 30 Ibid.; Gershom Scholem, "Die Vorstellung vom Golem in ihren tellurischen und magischen Beziehungen," in *Zur Kabbala und ihrer Symbolik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 209.
- 31 Yaniv Hagbi, *Language, Absence, Play: Judaism and Superstructuralism in the Poetics of S. Y. Agnon* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 52–60.
- 32 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985), xii, 6.
- 33 Gustav Meyrink, *Der Golem* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1991), 27.
- 34 Hagbi first noted this detail common to both texts: "Agnon, whether consciously or not, refers his reader to *The Golem* by using the strange tied-spoon image." Hagbi, 60.
- 35 Meyrink, 67–71.
- 36 Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 75.
- 37 Hasak-Lowy points out two main similarities between the golem story and the Balak narrative: Yitshak Kummer writes on the body of the dog, just as the word *emet* (truth) is written on the golem, and, secondly, by the end of the novel the rabid dog qua golem runs amok and kills his own so-called creator, Yitshak, by biting into his flesh. Todd Hasak-Lowy, "A Mad Dog's Attack on Secularized Hebrew: Rethinking Agnon's *Temol shilshom*," *Prooftexts* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 167–98, 185.
- 38 Aaron Bar-Adon, *Shai Agnon uteḥiyat halashon ha'ivrit* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1977), 94–100, 191–95; Naomi Sokoloff, "The Sense of Smell," in *Reading Hebrew*

- Literature: Critical Discussions of Six Modern Texts*, ed. Alan Mintz (Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 2003).
- 39 Sokoloff, “The Sense of Smell,” 111.
- 40 S. Y. Agnon, “The Sense of Smell,” in Mintz, ed., *Reading Hebrew Literature*, 102.
- 41 Moshe Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions and the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), xxvii.
- 42 Alan Mintz and Anne Golomb Hoffman, eds., *A Book That Was Lost and Other Stories by S. Y. Agnon* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 81.
- 43 Agnon, *Me’atsmi el ‘atsmi*, 43.
- 44 Arnold J. Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare: A Study in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 347, 352–53.
- 45 The letter is dated February, 1917. S. Y. Agnon archive (ARC 4 1270), NLI.
- 46 As Kurt Tucholsky wrote in the *Vorwärts* (August 22, 1912): “On Monday a new synagogue will be consecrated in the presence of a representative of the Kaiser. The dome is decorated with Kadinen glazed tiles from the factory of Wilhelm II.” Kurt Tucholsky, “Die patriotische Synagoge,” in *Gesamtausgabe: Texte 1907–1913*, ed. Bärbel Boldt, Dirk Grathoff, and Michael Hepp (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1997), 81.
- 47 Agnon, *To This Day*, 74–75.
- 48 Although he never took an active part in warfare, whether in Germany or Israel, Agnon did not consider himself a pacifist. Writing in 1964 for the newspaper *Ma’ariv*, Agnon states that “[he] does not like the army . . . and does not have a sense for things that can be done with technology”; at the same time, “while fooling around with the army is not a good idea, fooling around with pacifism is even a worse idea.” Agnon, *Me’atsmi el ‘atsmi*, 424–25.
- 49 The letter is dated April 24, 1917. S. Y. Agnon Archive (ARC 4 1270), NLI.
- 50 Laor, *Haye Agnon: biografyah*, 400–401, 414, 416.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 399–400.
- 52 Agnon, *To This Day*, 174–75.
- 53 Hillel Weiss, “Ad henah kemavo lasho’ah,” *Bikoret ufarshanut: ktav-‘et bein teḥumi leḥeker sifrut vetarbut* 35–36 (2001/2002): 111–46, 124.
- 54 Agnon, *Shirah*, 135.

- 55 In the second book of *Shirah*, the narrator relates that Manfred Herbst speaks German "to his wife and most of his friends" and he even "[thinks] in German" while the reader encounters his speech and thought only through the narrator's Hebrew. Herbst's German-Hebrew ambivalence is central to *Shirah*: "Herbst was caught in between two tongues . . . the Hebrew wouldn't come; the German fled." Ibid., 209.
- 56 According to the Kabbalistic theory of language, God is present through his name in the Hebrew language itself so that "Hebrew words . . . are full to bursting with meaning." Stéphane Mosès, *The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 169.