of this story, he never does. He is distracted by the telegram calling him home, but even the distraction leads to futility for he never does get home. The reader is left with the suspended feeling he has at the end of some of the previous "Sefer hama'asim" stories which are actually statements of an ongoing process without end.

"Baderekh" ("On the Road"), 1944

Aside from its intrinsic interest as a story, "Baderekh" deserves special attention if only because Agnon chose to include it among the stories of "Sefer hama'asim": the connection between this story and the others of the cycle is slight.[1] Here the narrator is only an observer, not the introspective actor-observer relating a past spiritual crisis. The markedly different narrative technique and tone lead one to the conclusion that the inclusion of this story in the cycle is in itself significant. We can only speculate upon his reasons. Perhaps it was the structure, that is, straightforward realism at the beginning and end, but surrealism in the middle, which suggested inclusion; perhaps it was the mysterious evocation of Judaism in medieval Germany, an attempt to re-create a lost mode of religious existence related to problems of repentance and identity.

The narrative situation is common in European literature: a traveler stumbles into a hidden valley where an ancient way of life is still practiced virtually unaffected by contemporary society. The description is usually an oblique commentary on contemporary society, often by tacit comparison. In "Baderekh," the narrator tells of a trip by train which was interrupted when the train "strayed among the mountains and did not find its way." When the train finally stops, the narrator is left alone and is forced to walk through "strange places and foreign people whose language I do not know and whose customs I do not recognize." It is further distressing that Rosh Hashana is the next evening and he will have to spend the holy days alone, without community prayer.

After sleeping on a bench in the train, he rises at dawn and begins to walk through the isolated mountains ever conscious of the fact that all the Jewish communities in the area have been destroyed and have never been resettled. As night falls, he lies in the cleft of a rock and hopes to sleep, but his legs seem to take him along to a beautiful dreamlike garden. He stumbles and awakes from what he thinks is a dream though he is no longer sure what is dream and what is reality. Above him, walking over the mountains and over the clouds, he beholds Jews dressed in ancient garb walking in couples. They greet him and tell him they are going to the synagogue. Replying in Old German to his astonished queries, they begin

[1] On "Baderekh" see **11, 16.**

to fill in a picture of the life of this ancient community: the area, once densely populated with Jews, is now only sparsely settled with isolated families that meet several times during the year on the major Jewish holidays and on the first day of the month of Sivan in commemoration of the massacre of the Jews of that area.

The narrator accompanies them to a ruined synagogue that still has bloodstains on its charred walls. The curtain in front of the ark is stained black from coagulated blood; the cantor, dressed in black, holds a black prayer book. Because they stand on consecrated soil, they speak half Hebrew, half German. As they wait for the tenth man, a certain Shmuel Levi, to arrive, thereby completing the quorum of ten, a Gentile woman arrives to summon the gravedigger since Shmu'el Levi is dying or is already dead. Thereupon, the narrator, whose name—not coincidentally—is Shmu'el Yosef son of Shalom Mordekhai haLevi, that is, Shmu'el Levi, becomes the tenth man and takes the place of the deceased. He joins them in prayer and decides to stay on with them through Yom Kippur so that they can have a tenth man for their quorum. During this period he learns their customs which he reports in this story. The presence of death and the memory of the massacre is pervasive among the townspeople and dictates their style of living and their rituals which differ at times from those of other communities. Their children have gone to live in the large cities where the parents visit only on exceptional family occasions like weddings. The inscriptions on their graves are in Old German, yet there is much Hebrew in their speech. After Yom Kippur, the narrator parts with his new friends in this strange land and, walking through the mountains, returns to the train which has been repaired in the interim (again the root *tkn*). "I went on the train to the harbor. And from there I went by ship to the place of my destination, to Erets Yisrael."

Agnon's fascination with medieval German Jewry began in 1917 when he spent some time convalescing near Brückenau in Lower Franconia. He subsequently collected an impressive library of books from that area and period which he studied assiduously. There is, therefore, a ring of authenticity in this historical reconstruction. Critics, furthermore, have often noticed a similarity in tone between "Baderekh" and *Ore'aḥ nata lalun* for in both a narrator speaking in the first person tells of his sojourn in a community that is ravaged by war and, in his mind, is on the verge of disintegration and disappearance. In both, the sojourn seems to be a necessary spiritual preparation for the return to Erets Yisrael. In "Baderekh," for instance, it is not coincidental that the train is repaired during the period of the narrator's sojourn in this strange land and is ready to take him back toward Erets Yisrael. The difference in the milieu

and length of the two stories is, of course, crucial, but since the experiences related are so internalized by the psyche of the narrator who, after all, establishes the point of view of both works, the similarity in structure and implication should not go unnoticed.

"Hefker" ("Lawlessness"), 1945

Of all the stories in this cycle, none resembles Kafka's *The Trial* more than "Hefker." Most of the story is given to the narrator's uncontrollable and unconscious self-incrimination. What differentiates between the atmosphere of this story and that of *The Trial* is primarily the opening situation which places the story squarely within the problematics of the Jewish spiritual condition. While the remainder of the story ostensibly has nothing to do with the first, situation-setting paragraph, it is just this paragraph that makes the story what it is and connects it with other stories of this cycle or with Agnon's literary output in general.

"That night I happened to visit a café with Mr. Heilprin where we used to go on days that have no value." Heilprin is descended from one of the most distinguished Jewish families and often tells stories of his ancestors, stressing their wealth rather than their knowledge of the Tora since he has not learned the Tora himself. Even though his pride is based on the wrong assumptions, it is inspiring to hear of the early generations. The time passes rapidly and when the narrator rises to leave, he realizes he has already missed the last bus, a situation similar to that of "ha'Avtobus ha'aḥaron." As he starts to walk home, he wraps a kerchief around his neck because his throat is sore. Turning off the main street, he enters a narrow, twisting alley between two rows of dark houses, but he has no clear idea where it leads. He hears steps behind him and as he muses about the hard times and the many people in need, a heavy hand grabs his kerchief.

The narrator is angered by this sudden act of violence, but does not protest lest his attacker become more violent. And when the attacker scowls and looks about to see if there are witnesses, the narrator misinterprets his intentions: he thinks his attacker is looking for witnesses of a crime with which he (the narrator) is about to be accused and that the accusation is connected with the kerchief. All his thoughts betray a feeling of groundless, unspecified, but very real guilt. When his assailant commands him to follow, he does not resist, but obeys quite docilely, rationalizing the situation as a mistake that will soon be clarified.

He is taken into a stuffy room where the clerk is sleeping in a bed, a menacing moustache and a Secret Police hat framing his face. The clerk talks with the unidentified assailant, but the narrator neither hears