
Romanticization and Criticism in Agnon's *Poland Stories* *Polish Jewry as an Archetype of a Jewish Community in the Exile*

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THE CULTURAL ATMOSPHERE OF BUCZACZ

From the time he had begun publishing regularly in the Jewish periodicals in Galicia, Shmuel Yosef Agnon (Czaczkes, 1887–1970) had written in both the Jewish languages, Yiddish and Hebrew.¹ His first poem to be published, 'Rabi yoysef dela reyna' ('Rabbi Joseph de la Reina'), appeared in the Yiddish-language weekly *Yudishes vokhenblat* in Stanisławów (now Ivano-Frankivsk) in the summer of 1903, when Agnon was not yet 16 years old. In 1908 he decided to say goodbye for good to his mother tongue, Yiddish, for he was travelling to the land of Israel, and this language of *galut*, the Exile, he now associated with *hutsah la'arets* ('lands abroad'), as he called them. But the cultural atmosphere in which the author lived and breathed during these formative years included also a very intensive contact with the European literature being produced at the dawn of the twentieth century, literature that Agnon was beginning to read, or perhaps more precisely to 'swallow'. As his biographer Dan Laor stated, he began with earlier works, like Friedrich Schiller's *Die Räuber*, and continued with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Gerhart Hauptmann, the Scandinavians Henrik Ibsen and Knut Hamsun, and others.² This list can be expanded in parallel with the publicity given to new books by the newspapers of his native shtetl of Buczacz and its surroundings, often with Agnon's participation. Thus, for example, in the Stanisławów Hebrew-language monthly journal *Hayarden*, issue 4 of 1906, the Berlin publisher Marquardt announced the publication of new books in German by the authors Hans Ostwald, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and Georg Brandes.³

¹ See the collection of Agnon's Yiddish works: Sh. Y. Agnon, *Yidische verk* (Jerusalem, 1977).

² D. Laor, *Hayey agnon* (Tel Aviv, 1998), 22–3.

³ D. Pur, *Ha'ilui mistanislav: avraham lebensart* (Tel Aviv, 2001), 247.

From the memoirs of another native of Galicia, the geographer and historian Abraham Jacob Brawer (1884–1975), we learn about the cultural atmosphere then prevailing in Buczacz. Brawer himself was educated in a Polish gymnasium and was thus influenced by Polish culture, while Agnon and his friends were strongly bound to the world of the *beit midrash* (talmudic study hall) and at the same time also lived in a milieu of German culture. According to Brawer, neither of the groups had any connections with the culture of the Ukrainian majority of eastern Galicia.⁴

A memoir of Agnon's last evening in Galicia has been preserved. In the book *Butshatsh* the Hebrew writer Asher Barash (1889–1952) tells about the appearance of 'the lad from Buczacz' in the home of the literary figure Eliezer Meir Lifshitz (1879–1946) at the end of April 1908:

You went over to the coat, the coat of the small town fellow, hanging on the peg in the entrance, felt around, and brought to the table a bunch of sheets of paper, large and small, facing every which way, and placed them before you. You sifted through them in bewilderment, selected some, and put them down, before beginning to read to us one thing after another: a story and a poem, and again a story and a poem, mostly in Yiddish, which is easy to read aloud.⁵

There is no doubt that Agnon's published and unpublished Yiddish works, as well as his European literary experience, found their way into the Hebrew versions of stories he wrote later. In order to understand the transformation of the Polish (Galician) Czaczkes into the land of Israel Agnon, I examined his *Poland Stories* (*Sipurei polin*),⁶ which were formed into a unified corpus over several decades and periods in the writer's creative life, beginning in 1906. The early versions of some of the stories are variously in Yiddish, Hebrew, and even German.

Agnon devoted the vast bulk of this work to the subject of Polish Jewry, but only sixteen short stories were eventually brought together under that heading. Each and every story in this collection underwent a painstaking process of reworking, typical of the writer, that provides us with a rare opportunity to get a closer look at the Agnonian treatment of certain narratives with a particular common denominator. From first glance it is patently clear that the common denominator of our stories is undoubtedly their folkloristic and legendary foundation, although the well-known Jewish and Polish traditions take on a distinctly apologetic and romantic cast under Agnon's hand and detach themselves from their historical roots. In other words, a historical tradition deep-rooted in concrete history turns into an allegory that is connected in neither time nor space to the original tradition.

In order to examine this process of detachment, closely connected to the author's identity, I shall use a comparison of the various versions of four stories from the

⁴ A. Y. Brawer, 'Rashi agnon ve'erets ne'urav', in Sh. Tanai and D. Sadan (eds.), *Me'asef ledivrei sifrut, bikoret vehagut* (Tel Aviv, 1954), 237–8.

⁵ A. Barash, 'Igeret le'agnon', in Y. Cohen (ed.), *Sefer butshatsh: matsevet zikaron likehilah kedoshah* (Tel Aviv, 1956), 34–5.

Poland Stories cycle. An analysis of the versions allows us to glimpse into the writer's laboratory in order to examine the precision tools which Agnon uses. The stories which provide us with this edifying example are 'Antiquities' ('Kedumot'), 'Rain' ('Geshem'), and 'More Than Watchmen for the Morning' ('Mishomerim laboker'), where Agnon actually starts his 'chronicles' historically and chronologically, and 'The Heart and the Eyes' ('Halev ve-ha'eynayim'), which was the last story appended to the corpus in 1953.

ANTIQUITIES (KEDUMOT)

In the stories 'Antiquities', 'Rain', and 'More Than Watchmen for the Morning' the writer unfolds the tale of the arrival of Ashkenazi Jews in Poland and their settling there. According to Agnon, the Jews' arrival there was not accidental, but rather the choice of Poland for the relocation of the Jews was made through divine revelation. This view does not contradict the well-known traditions;⁷ however, the manner in which these traditions are presented is distinctly altered.

The story 'Antiquities' has five versions. The first of these, entitled 'Erste Kunde', appeared in German translation, from Hebrew by Max Mayer, in the collection *Das Buch von den polnischen Juden* in 1916.⁸ The second, under the name 'Polin', which is apparently very close to the preliminary original version in Hebrew (which has not been preserved), but with a number of emendations, was published in the journal *Hatekufah* in 1920,⁹ while the third—already under its final title 'Kedumot'—appeared in a book entitled *Polin sipurei agadot* in 1925.¹⁰ The final two, almost identical to each other, were included in two collections of all of Agnon's stories in 1931 and 1953.¹¹ In my comparative analysis I did not refer to the 1925 version, because of its similarity to the 1920 version.

As the subtitle for the story, Agnon took a quotation from the lamentation of Rabbi Moses Hacoheh, the president of the rabbinical court of Metz: 'Gentle, ancient Poland, devoted to Torah and law from the day that Efraim separated from Judah'¹² (1916 and 1920 versions). This lamentation could serve Agnon in his day as a source of inspiration for writing a story, but when he added the story to the *Kol sipurav* collection in 1931, he separated the lamentation from the story and turned it into an epigraph to the entire *Poland Stories* collection. In addition, he omitted the name of Moses Hacoheh, a rabbi and scholar of Kremenets (today in Ukraine) who

⁶ *Kol sipurav shel shemuel yosef agnon*, ii: *Elu ve'elu* (Jerusalem, 1953), 349–402.

⁷ For these traditions, see H. Bar-Itzhak, *Jewish Poland: Legends of Origin. Ethnopoetics and Legendary Chronicles* (Detroit, 2001).

⁸ S. J. Agnon, 'Erste Kunde', in *Das Buch von den polnischen Juden*, ed. S. J. Agnon and A. Eliasberg (Berlin, 1916), 3–5. ⁹ Sh. Y. Agnon, 'Polin, agadot mini kedem', *Hatekufah*, 5 (1920), 23–4.

¹⁰ Sh. Y. Agnon, 'Kedumot', in *Polin sipurei agadot shel sh. y. agnon* (Tel Aviv, 1925), 9.

¹¹ Sh. Y. Agnon, 'Kedumot', in *Kol sipurav shel shemuel yosef agnon*, iii: *Me'az une'atah* (Berlin, 1931), 164–6; Sh. Y. Agnon, 'Kedumot', in *Kol sipurav shel shemuel yosef agnon* (1953), ii. 353.

¹² See Moses Cohen Niroh, *Bakashah* (Metz, 1764), 3a.

was exiled from Poland in the wake of the Khmelnytsky pogroms.¹³ This important detail had given a certain orientation in time and place to the story and therefore it is reasonable to conjecture that, in omitting the name, Agnon wishes to deepen the perspective, to intensify the effect of the legend, and to extend the history of Polish Jewry far beyond this historical testament—back until ‘the day that Efraim separated from Judah’ in both senses: in other words, beyond the plot of this story, which apparently takes place at the end of the ninth century, following the pogroms carried out against the Jews by the German Saxons. This significant change carried with it additional changes in time and place which were made systematically, thereby transforming this concrete tradition into an archetypal allegory. Thus, in the 1916 German version we find ‘Our forefathers came to Poland from Frankreiche, from the land of the Franks’, that is, the empire of Charlemagne. In the 1920 version this detail is still mentioned, but in another connection—‘And it came to pass when they travelled from [the land of] the Franks’—which reverberates there in the expression ‘galut aḥar galut’ (‘exile after exile’), but the weaker echo is deleted, together with the land of the Franks, from the later versions. The possible explanation according to Agnon: it was not as a result of the wandering from exile to exile that our fathers arrived in Poland, but rather as a result of a divine revelation: ‘A note fell from heaven’ in which it was written ‘Go to Polanya!’ (1920 version).

The name ‘Polanya’, which was the more accepted by the Jews of Palestine in the 1920s, was changed in the 1931 version to ‘Polin’. This name was more appropriate for the traditional explanation that is already cited in the first Hebrew version: ‘For that is why it was called Polin. Thus said Israel when they came to the land: “Po lin” [‘lodge here’], for here shall we lodge until we merit to go up to the land of Israel’ (1920 version). Even though the name ‘Polanya’ (Poland is mentioned in this very form in the aforementioned lamentation of Rabbi Moses Hacohen which Agnon was familiar with) can be interpreted in the sacred sense, as in the expression *po lan yah* (‘here did God lodge’), Agnon did not initially intend to use this sacral interpretation, which made the divine presence dwell on the soil of Poland, and therefore in later versions he corrected himself, wishing to prevent an ‘incorrect’ reading.

Was the Jewish connotation attached to the name ‘Polin’ arbitrary or was it always present? In answering this question, Agnon refers the reader to precise geographical details: ‘And they found in the country a forest growing up with trees, and engraved on every tree was one of the tractates of the Talmud. Behold, here was the forest of Kawęczyn, which is near Lublin’ (1920 version). Here, in the east of the country, ‘our forefathers of old dwelt’ (ibid.). In the 1916 German version Agnon presents the ‘fact’ of the Jews’ early presence in Poland with some degree of reservation: ‘There are those who believe that the country’s name also came from a sacred source: the language of the Jews.’ This reservation disappears in later

¹³ On Moses Cohen (Katz), see P. Kattsen-Elin-Boigen [Katzenellinbogen], *Yesh manhilin* (Jerusalem, 1986), 29–30.

versions and in effect is transformed into the exact opposite: the 'few believers' are first replaced by 'those who seek records', who found an explanation for the name of the country: 'Because Israel said, "Lodge here [*po lin*]", or in other words, "Here shall we lodge until we go up to the land of Israel"' (1920 version). Agnon continues to polish the text, and in the 1931 version this call self-addressed to Israel is presented not as interpretation but as a direct appeal to God made by Keneset Yisra'el, a body with intensified authority: 'Keneset Yisra'el said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Lord of the universe, if the time has not yet come for me to be redeemed—lodge here with us during this night of exile until you bring us up to the land of Israel.'" The meaning of the name 'Polin' changes: Israel will not lodge there alone; they also want God to stay with them until the hour of redemption arrives.

Arie Weinman notes that Agnon interprets

the meaning of the Jewish community in Poland in accordance with the concept of the exile of the divine presence that refers in the talmudic source also to the exile both in Egypt and in Babylon: R. Shimon Bar Yohai said: 'See how beloved are the Jewish people to the Holy One, blessed be He. Whenever they went into exile, the divine presence went with them . . . when they were exile in Egypt, the presence was with them . . . when they were in exile in Babylon, the divine presence was with them' (BT *Megilah 29a*).¹⁴

It appears, however, that this assertion, which suggests itself upon a first reading of the story, is rebutted by a closer analysis. Indeed, in Agnon's updated interpretation of the name 'Polin', the Jews ask God to be with them, but that does not in any way mean that God did indeed accede to their request (as the name *po lan yah*—'here dwelt God'—states in absolute confidence). Agnon's preliminary reservation in the 1916 German version returns in the 1931 version more forcefully.

Is it in this period, after Agnon's second immigration to the land of Israel in 1924, that the shift takes place in his attitude towards Polish Jewry, from the apologetics that characterizes *Poland Stories* in its first stage to a more critical consideration by the mature writer?

In the first versions of 'Antiquities' the Ashkenazi exiles become aware of the existence of an early Jewish community in Poland when they find the talmudic tractates engraved on the trees 'when they travelled from [the land of] the Franks' ('benosam mifranken'; 1920 version). In the next version they learn about this already 'when being in the land' ('biheyotam ba'arets'; 1931 version). This means: yet another sign, and another reason for them to settle specifically in Poland, which then becomes a search for excuses that will justify their staying in Poland.

The change in the spelling of the name of the forest from 'Kavtshin' (קוטשין; 1920) to 'Kabtsin' (קבצין; 1931) is rather significant. It would seem that, in the beginning, Agnon tried to transliterate the name of the forest from its 1916 German form 'Kawczyn'.¹⁵ However, when he comes to rework the text, he finds

¹⁴ A. Weinman, *Agadah ve'omanut: iyunim biyetsirat agnon* (Jerusalem, 1982), 74.

¹⁵ The Polish spelling is Kawęczyn. See F. Sulimierski, B. Chlebowski, and W. Walewski (eds.), *Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego i innych krajów słowiańskich*, iii (Warsaw, 1882), 914–16.

another use for this name. It is used as sharp, though veiled, irony towards the dubious and beggarly (קבצני, *kabtsani*) ‘finding’ which the Jews, who are seeking a justification for remaining in Poland, use as an unchallenged foundation for the mythological tale of Keneset Yisra’el’s appeal to God to stay with them.

In the first land of Israel version of 1925 Agnon changes the name of this story from ‘Polin’ to ‘Kedumot’ and thus upsets his chronotope. If we are already talking about ancient or early times, then to what period shall we assign the statement made by Keneset Yisra’el: ‘*po lin*’? Are we talking about the refugees of Ashkenaz or perhaps about a prehistorical Jewish community in Poland? Did the Jews come to Poland with the clear understanding that it was the unique destination of the ‘divine presence in exile’? Information about this is provided in another story, ‘Rain’, which was first published in German translation, in the same collection as ‘Antiquities’.

RAIN (GESHEM)

This story, too, appeared in five versions, of which the first Hebrew one was published in the periodical *Ha’olam* in 1924.¹⁶ The previous German version, ‘Regen’,¹⁷ provides historical information about the arrival of a distinguished delegation of Jews to one of the rulers of Poland, Prince Leszek: ‘In the year 4653 [893] Jewish representatives came from the land of the Franks: they were Rabbi Jecheskiah Sephardi, Rabbi Akiba Estremadura, Rabbi Emanuel of Askalon the mathematician, Rabbi Levi Bachri the rhetorician, and Rabbi Netanael of Barcelona’ (the spelling of the names is as in the original). The delegation arrived in the city where Prince Leszek lived, Gnesen (Gniezno) in western Poland, and asked the prince to grant asylum to the Jews of Germany. It was the rhetorician Rabbi Levi Bachri (according to the nineteenth-century Polish historian Joachim Lelewel, he was from the Indian city of Bacher, i.e. Barh), the head of the delegation, who addressed Leszek and persuaded him to accede to the Jews’ request. In its ‘historical’ background the German version is faithful to the chronicle by Menahem Nahum Litinsky.¹⁸

Litinsky also mentions other theories about the roots of the Polish Jews, from Spain, Bohemia, Hungary, Khazaria, and Kievan Russia.¹⁹ The last two places

¹⁶ Sh. Y. Agnon, ‘Geshem’, *Ha’olam*, 12 (1924), 5.

¹⁷ S. J. Agnon, ‘Regen’, in *Das Buch von den polnischen Juden*, ed. Agnon and Eliasberg, 5–8. There is no mention here of its translator.

¹⁸ M. N. Litinsky, *Korot podoliya vekadmoniyot hayehudim sham* (Odessa, 1895), 18–19. On this book and Agnon’s dealing with the story, see Bar-Itzhak, *Jewish Poland*, 66–88. On the Jewish delegation to Prince Leszek, see W. M. Dessauer, *Phylacterium; oder, Arganton und Philo im Schoofse der wahren Glückseeligkeit* (Berlin, 1801), 25–7; J. Lelewel, *Polska wiekow srednich, czyli Joachima Lelewela w dziejach narodowych polskich postrzezenia*, ii (Poznań, 1856), 417–18. See also S. Gąsiorowski, ‘Familiarization with the Polish Diaspora: Selected Legends of the Mediaeval Jews’, *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia*, 8 (2010), 50–1.

¹⁹ Litinsky, *Korot podoliya vekadmoniyot hayehudim sham*, 17.

found their way into the 1916 version. When the delegation returned to Germany, they told their friends that they had also seen Jews in Poland: 'There are also children of Israel there, who had come from Kiev and the land of the Khazars.' It seems, however, that the Kiev/Khazar reference, which is not remote in time from the arrival of the rabbinic delegation in Gnesen, does not satisfy Agnon in all the following Hebrew versions. He aspires to a perspective that is deeper both in time and in its relation to the new land of exile. The delegation returned to their fellow Jews, 'And they recounted all that had befallen them. And they said, "We have seen the land, and, behold, it is good"', which recalls the book of Judges, where it is written: 'And they said, Arise, that we may go up against them: for we have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good' (Judges 18: 9). In the Hebrew versions the reference to the Khazars disappears. Likewise the Jewish delegation disappears, as do the city of Gnesen and also the reference to their language: 'From there, they brought with them the language of their country, the language of the Germans' (1916 version). Concrete facts are replaced by typological facts. Prince Leszek of the dynasty of Piast, king of Poland, becomes the king of Poland himself.

'Rain' is based on a legend that it was specifically in the land of Poland that the wondrous ability of the Jews to bring rain through their prayers was actualized. This legend is mentioned by Rabbi Joseph Shalom, the president of the rabbinical court of Bisenz (Bzenec in the Czech Republic) in *Yad avi shalom*, a quotation from which is cited as the epigraph to 'Rain' in its first, 1916 German, version.²⁰ It seems that Agnon did not come across this book directly, but copied Litinsky's citation, almost word for word, from another source, *Divrei hayamim lemalkhei rusya* by Joseph Eliezer Epstein.²¹ Later, in the Hebrew versions, Agnon replaced the epigraph with another one, which was taken directly from *Tseror hamor* by Rabbi Abraham Saba of Castile (this medieval commentary on the Torah is mentioned by Rabbi Joseph Shalom in passing only). That very same ability of the Jews to bring rain which is the condition for their settling in Poland is associated by Agnon with the practice of the Polish farmers of sowing their fields close upon Shemini Atseret, which is the season when the Jews recite prayers for rain. The Jews kept their part of the deal: 'And Israel dwelt securely, a blessing in the midst of the land' (all versions), according to what was written in the book of Leviticus: 'and you shall dwell in your land safely' (Leviticus 26: 5), and in Isaiah: 'On that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and Assyria, and a blessing in the midst of the land' (Isaiah 19: 24). And again, Agnon: 'And they shall serve the God of their fathers and He shall give the rain of the land in its season, and the land shall give its produce' (all versions), as it is written in Leviticus: 'Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield its increase' (Leviticus 26: 4). The many direct

²⁰ See Joseph Shalom ben David, *Yad avi shalom* (Offenbach, 1720), 46b (weekly Torah portion 'Emor').

²¹ Litinsky, *Korot podoliya vekadmoniyot hayehudim sham*, 19; J. E. Epstein, *Divrei hayamim lemalkhei rusya* (Vilna, 1872), 189.

quotations from the Scriptures, which ostensibly are meant to reflect the Jews' attempt to sanctify their new space, actually expose them to acerbic criticism. Initially the criticism seems to be social in nature: 'While they sowed their fields, Israel stood submissively before their Father in heaven, with an empty belly' (1916 version). However, in the Hebrew versions, this social dimension disappears and the criticism is directed at the religious devotion of the Polish Jews in exile, who behave as though they were in the promised land: 'For they put their faith in God that He would grant their request and send rain upon the earth' (1924 version). It is for this reason that Agnon's initial reliance on the words of the author of *Yad avi shalom* about the promise made by the Jews who came to Poland to bring rain with their prayers (1916 version) disappears in the Hebrew versions. As I have said above, Agnon gives an authentic quotation from *Tseror hamor* where this ability is mentioned—not necessarily in reference to Poland, but rather 'And this was the splendour of our strength when the nations received us because we were known to have the ability to bring rain in its season.'²² This citation prepares the ground for presenting the Jews as clinging to the exile through the mercies of those 'nations' and refusing to acknowledge their pitiful and precarious situation.

MORE THAN WATCHMEN FOR THE MORNING ('MISHOMERIM LABOKER ')

Let us return to the early Jews who may have lived in Poland before the exodus from Ashkenaz. Agnon offers another look at the beginning of Jewish settlement in Poland, in the story 'More Than Watchmen for the Morning'. This story was first published in 1924 as one unit together with the previous story 'Rain'.²³ Three other versions were published, in 1925, 1931, and 1953 respectively.²⁴ Agnon bases his story here on a well-known Polish legend that tells of the Jew Abraham Prochownik from the city of Kruszwica, where Prince Popiel lived. After the death of their king, the leaders of the city decided to crown as their king the first person who entered their city in the morning. The position fell to Abraham Prochownik, but he asked for three days before he gave them his final answer. The Poles, unable to wait, burst into his house demanding an answer. Abraham then pointed to the leader of the band of intruders, Piast Kołodziej, and suggested that he be crowned king. And indeed, that same Piast did become king.²⁵

Already with the first words of the story—'In those days there was no king in Poland' (all versions)—the author compares Poland to the land of Israel during the period of the Judges. The verse 'In those days there was no king in Israel' appears

²² See Abraham ben Jacob Saba, *Sefer tseror hamor*, iii (Warsaw, 1879), 32 (weekly Torah portion 'Behukotai').

²³ Sh. Y. Agnon, 'Mishomerim laboker', *Ha'olam*, 12 (1924), 4–5.

²⁴ The edition that I refer to below is Sh. Y. Agnon, 'Mishomerim laboker', in *Kol sipurav shel shemuel yosef agnon* (1931), iii, 166–7.

²⁵ For more about Abraham Prochownik, see Bar-Itzhak, *Jewish Poland*, 89–103.

in the book of Judges three times: Judges 17: 6; 18: 1; 21: 25. And the story continues in this vein: 'Then all the elders of Poland gathered themselves together and came to Kruszwica to crown a king.' The ancient Polish capital of Kruszwica in the story takes the place of Ramah, where the prophet Samuel lived: 'Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together and came to Samuel to Ramah' (1 Samuel 8: 4).

Agnon does not mention the legendary Jew Abraham by his nickname Prochownik but simply calls him at the start, in the first version, Abraham son of the village ('avraham ben hakefar'; 1924) and later Abraham the villager ('avraham hakefari'; 1931), thus creating the association with the original Abraham, Abraham the Hebrew ('avraham/avram ha'ivri'; Genesis 14: 13), turning his hero into an archetype. The hero's new (1931) appellation joins a lexical chain that creates a sense of antiquity and sends the reader far beyond the concrete time of the story. In contrast to the other stories that have been discussed above, there are no material differences between the various versions of 'More Than Watchmen for the Morning', and we can understand Agnon's performance only in comparison with the popular legend. In fact, one should reflect on only one important point: in the later versions, Agnon adds an epigraph which is a quotation from the Song of Songs (3: 3): 'The watchmen that go about the city found me, to whom I said, Have you seen him whom my soul loves?' It seems that Agnon wished to clarify somewhat the title of the story; therefore the epigraph and the title are connected through the image of the watchmen. The watchmen of the Song of Songs meet a young woman who is seeking her beloved, or in other words, as the generally accepted *midrash* interprets this, it is the people of Israel seeking God whom they love with an eternal love. The title of the story is a fragment of a verse from Psalms (130: 6): 'My soul waits for the Lord more than they who watch for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.' In other words, the people of Israel long for God more than the night watchmen long to finish their watch with the break of dawn. In Agnon's story itself watchmen are positioned at the corners of the city to wait for the first person to appear at dawn at the city gates, for it is he who will be declared king. The inclusion of the epigraph also adds greater depth, as Haya Bar-Itzhak very appropriately points out: the meeting with the watchmen might lead to violence, as is implied in the Song of Songs: 'The watchmen who went about the city found me; they struck me, they wounded me' (Song of Songs 5: 7).²⁶

According to the legend, Abraham Prochownik was invited by the Polish rulers as a merchant. In Agnon's version, Abraham the villager's business in Kruszwica is to 'recite the morning prayers with the Hebrews'. The community of 'Hebrews' has already been in Kruszwica for some time. It lives according to its own rules, including, among others, its own time. Thus, the entire episode of crowning Abraham as king, which spans several days, did not interfere with his being able to get to the morning prayers, which was the reason that he was hurrying to

²⁶ Ibid. 107.

Kruszwica at the beginning of the story: 'And it came to pass when he arrived and they were reciting the morning prayers, standing in fear and reciting in awe the proverbial hymn "Adon olam": "Sovereign of the universe who reigned before any living form was created".' Abraham is not tempted to seize the throne of Popiel in Kruszwica and become king of Poland, because it is, after all, just a temporary lodging place.

THE HEART AND THE EYES (HALEV VEHA EINAYIM)

The story 'The Heart and the Eyes', which was first published in 1943, entered the *Poland Stories* collection only in the final edition of all of Agnon's stories in 1953.²⁷ Yet despite this, King Kazimierz the Great and his Jewish lover Esterke pre-occupied Agnon much earlier. As far back as 1916 a kind of reportage named 'Estherkas Haus' ('Esterke's House') was included in the German collection of stories, with historical material about the daughter of the Jewish tailor Esterke who became the wife of King Kazimierz of Poland.²⁸ In contrast to the four other Agnon stories in the collection, the report is unsigned, but a painstaking comparison makes it possible to determine with certainty, as Chone Shmeruk and others have done, that this historical report was written by Agnon.²⁹ Twenty-seven years after it was published in German in 1916, in the middle of the Holocaust of east European Jewry, Agnon saw fit to rework it into a story and even to insert it into the series of *Poland Stories* which seemingly had already taken its final form in 1931. This fact is interesting in itself and certainly justifies checking what material from the report actually went into the story, what remained unused, what was added, and the order of composition. In addition, I should mention that, despite the fact that the 1916 German version mentions as its source the Prague astronomer and chronicler David Gans's book *Tsemah david* (which dates the story to 1370),³⁰ one of the sources of inspiration for 'Estherkas Haus' was the Yiddish play by Sholem Asch *Meshiekh's tsaytn* ('Messianic Times'), where the legend of Esterke is mentioned. The play appears in the bibliography of the German edition.³¹

In 'The Heart and the Eyes', at the very beginning of the story, Agnon shatters the atmosphere of harmony felt in 'Estherkas Haus'—by his mention of Kazimierz's three other wives and their hatred of Esterke. Despite the *mezuzah* which 'guarded over Esterke's doors, through which the king shall come to Esther',

²⁷ Sh. Y. Agnon, 'Halev veba' einayim', *Ha'arets*, 29 Sept. 1943, p. 5; also in *Kol sipurav shel shemuel yosef agnon* (1953), ii. 360–1.

²⁸ 'Estherkas Haus', in *Das Buch von den polnischen Juden*, ed. Agnon and Eliasberg, 15–18. I am grateful to Professor Hillel Weiss from Bar-Ilan University, who brought it to my attention.

²⁹ C. Shmeruk, *The Esterke Story in Yiddish and Polish Literature: A Case Study in the Mutual Relations of Two Cultural Traditions* (Jerusalem, 1985), 63. See also Bar-Itzhak, *Jewish Poland*, 123.

³⁰ See D. Gans, *Sefer tsemah david* (Warsaw, 1878), 145.

³¹ *Das Buch von den polnischen Juden*, ed. Agnon and Eliasberg, 263. See Sh. Asch, *Meshiekh's tsaytn: a tragedy in 3 akten* (Vilna, 1906).

the text goes on to recount that 'she lived life with her husband the king until she died. In her love of her husband the king she died.' There is no parallel to this sentence in the report. There also are no parallels to epithets such as 'her house of pleasures', and others. Agnon's reworking of this story highlights the sin of the love between Esterke and King Kazimierz, which in the report is portrayed only towards the end as amoral, in the style of woman's traditional literature, for Jewish girls who are dreaming of a Gentile prince.

According to the report, Esterke does not find her way to the Garden of Eden because she has no eyes. The author of the report notes here: 'However, we believe that this was only a figure of speech, and that it refers to the verse in the Scriptures: "Seek not after your own heart and your own eyes"' (Numbers 15: 39). In the Hebrew version, the verse does not condemn Esterke but rather grants her rest, albeit only temporary. The statement that was made by 'her brethren, her own people' creates an eternal cycle with neither beginning nor end, because Esterke is condemned 'to return at night and to search for the heart and eyes which she had sought after'. Agnon also deletes the source of the story, the chronicles by Rabbi David Gans of Prague. Again Agnon forgoes the concrete date in order to create a typological allegory. The story changes direction, particularly as part of the conceptual framework of the entire body of *Poland Stories*. Esterke's 'own people' not only alleviate her suffering but also remind themselves each time, 'Seek not after your own heart and your own eyes.' The verse again arouses the issue of the exile in Poland as seen by Agnon, which began, according to the story 'Rain', as the generous offer of Leszek, king of Poland: 'And this is what the king answered us: "Behold, my land is before you, dwell in the part that you deem best."' It would seem that under the influence of the Holocaust, Agnon re-examined Esterke's act and, through it, exposed not only the barbarity of the Gentiles, but more specifically the sin committed by Israel in their attempt to 'take over' Poland and to 'join in marriage' with the foreign soil as though it were the land of Israel.

In setting out to describe the mythological events in *Poland Stories*, Agnon creates a stratagem, as Nitza Ben-Dov put it, 'walking on the thin line that separates legend from history',³² a certain archetypal construct. This pattern is used, borrowing a term from Mircea Eliade, to *sacramentalize* the stories, that is to bestow upon their heroes, events, space, and time a religious meaning.³³ As a result the land of Poland becomes laden with Jewish history. Nonetheless, Poland's status in this context is not unequivocal. For in building his sacred space, Agnon uses biblical 'building materials' and this creates a parallel with the Holy Land. This parallel can act in two directions: both as romanticization and apologetics as well as irony and criticism. Thus, in effect, one can characterize the direction of move-

³² N. Ben-Dov, *Ahavot lo me'usharot: tiskul eroti, omanut umavet biyetsirat agnon* (Tel Aviv, 1997), 349.

³³ See M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. W. R. Trask (New York, 1961), 170.

ment which becomes clear from a comparison of the versions of the corpus *Poland Stories*: from an initial romanticization to his ultimate scathing criticism. As a result Polish Jewry becomes the possessor of a glorious history that seeks in the chronicles of its existence excuses and justifications for its continued stay in exile. This radical transformation is effected through precision instruments. In his systematic venture from concrete to archetypal, from historical to legendary, from factual to allegorical, from the recent past to the ancient past, Agnon creates a deeper perspective: Polish Jewry as an archetype of every Jewish community which is in exile, with all of the problems attendant on that condition.