

BUILDING A CITY: WRITINGS
ON AGNON'S BUCZACZ
IN MEMORY OF ALAN MINTZ

Edited by Sheila E. Jelen, Jeffrey Saks,
and Wendy Zierler

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Description: Bloomington, Indiana : Indiana University Press, [2023] | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: "The fiction of Nobel Laureate Shmuel Yosef Agnon is the foundation of the array of scholarly essays as seen through the career of Alan Mintz, visionary scholar and professor of Jewish literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Singer introduced Agnon's posthumously published *Ir Umeloah* (A City in Its Fullness)-a series of linked stories set in the 17th century and focused on Agnon's hometown, Buczacz, a town in what is currently western Ukraine-to an English reading audience, and argued that Agnon's unique treatment of Buczacz in *A City in its Fullness*, navigating the sometimes tenuous boundary of the modernist and the mythical, was a full-throated, self-conscious literary response to the Holocaust. This collection of essay is an extension of a memorial dedicated to Singer's memory (who died suddenly in 2017) which combines selections of Alan's work from the beginning, middle and end of his career, with autobiographical tributes from older and younger scholars alike. The scholarly essays dealing with Agnon and Buczacz is an effort to remember the career of Alan Mintz and his contribution to the world of Jewish studies and within the world of Jewish communal life"-- Provided by publisher.

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himself many biographical details, and most importantly, by having his narrator, as he does in the second sermon, control both the mimetic and the diegetic levels of the story. If he is both performing the sermon and anatomizing the sermon, if he is both inside the institution being represented, and outside of it, representing it, it is harder to distinguish Agnon the author from the authorial narrator presented in his novel. Like the daughter of a rabbi returning to her hometown throughout Dvora Baron's literary corpus and serving as a homodiegetic narrator, so too does Agnon's narrator serve as a tricky alter-ego designed to maximize the auto-ethnographic premise of the work at hand.³⁵ Posing as the author himself, Agnon's narrator emphasizes more than just the "realism" of the novel. His seemingly autobiographical presence in the novel, and his isolation within the culture he thought he would be revisiting on familiar terms, emphasizes the gap between the actual and the expected, between that which is observable in life and that, which can be depicted in a literary text.

Agnon's *A Guest for the Night* gives us a glimpse of the kinds of changes, imposed from without, and evolving from within, experienced by Jewish communities throughout Galicia, particularly during the interwar period. Commensurate with the massive physical, communal and economic destruction wreaked on the Jews of Galicia during the First World War, the culture of Jewish scholarship, of ritual observance, and of local familial networks was in serious decline. Agnon's presentation of sermons in *A Guest for the Night*, alongside his thematization of the narrator's attempts to recuperate the old *beit hamidrash*, does not pave the way for a general articulation of the cultural changes undergone by the Jewish communities of Galicia since his departure from there about two decades earlier. Rather, Agnon creates an intertextual salvage poetic both through allusions to traditional Jewish texts and through a presentation of textual institutions. In so doing, he engages in a subtle narratological negotiation in which he has his alter-ego, the narrator of the text, pose as a kind of native informant, or a participant observer, not only lamenting the loss of textual institutions, but intervening in that loss and salvaging what he can.

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35. Dvora Baron, *Parshiyot* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1968).