

3. Concluding Study

Between Ethics and Aesthetics: "Ha-Malbush" and "Paths of Righteousness"

The synthetic-dialectical terms of mythopoesis enable us to discuss a literary work as a separate unity - an ethical-harmonic relationship between different entities assuming a status of living personality in the time of reading. That is why mythopoeic terms are effective tools for solving complicated methodological problems associated with the study of literary works based on different cultural elements. However, the main problem, which can be solved by means of mythopoeic methodology, is the relationship between ethics and aesthetics in literature. In this chapter, we will examine two stories by Agnon in terms of this relationship. We will thus attain two goals: a) to present a mythopoesis study as a method explaining ethical-aesthetical problems in a literary work; b) to examine textual mechanisms forming the relationship between ethics and aesthetics in the present works.

The first story, "Ha-Malbush" ("The Attire"), taken from the collection *Ad Hena*, tells us about a tailor assigned to make an attire for a noble dignitary of the cloth he received to that end. The tailor cannot complete the work; not only does he not present the attire on time, but also spoils it by mistake when it was almost ready. In the long run, the tailor loses the attire in the river and drowns himself.

The story begins with a sentence in which we can easily find a foreshadowing of mythopoesis: "A tailor was engaged in making an attire at the sunset."²⁴ The second sentence deals with qualities of this cloth that was "the choice of the choicest,"²⁵ as opposed to the tailor who is presented in the third sentence as "an old man whose eyes did not serve him properly and whose hands were weak."²⁶ Therefore, there immediately arises a problem: the quality of the cloth is clear, but what will be the quality of the attire if this cloth is in the hands of this tailor? This problem is based on the assumption according to which a personality is incorporated in the product of his activity, and thus more vague becomes a border between the subject and object of the craft, i.e. the border between the tailor and the attire. In the first sentences, the story of personality begins. This personality necessitates an ethical attitude even when it is a literary character. In conjunction with that, this personality is placed in the center of aesthetical texture. In the pre-

24 Shmuel Yosef Agnon, "Ha-Malbush," *Ad Hena* (Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv: Schocken Books, 1998), p. 238.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

sent story, formation of the aesthetical texture of the attire is combined with formation of the aesthetical texture of the story. The attire is the story itself, i.e. the tailor's history. As such, it constitutes an object of both ethical and aesthetical attitude. In the course of the first paragraph, a transition is made from the aesthetical dimension of the cloth to the ethical dimension of the attire. The latter is made of the beautiful cloth but is interwoven into complex ethics of the relationship between the tailor and dignitary. Moreover, the beauty of the cloth is presented as dependent on ethics, or, to be more precise, on the high rank of the dignitary. The beauty of the cloth is opposed to the tailor's ethical failure: his incapability to focus his efforts on something valuable indeed and on something that makes him a tailor - on making of the attire. "Throughout the daytime, as the sun was shining, the tailor was preoccupied with the business he deemed important. After the sunset, when it was the time to take the attire to its owner, he saw there was no need in that business."²⁷ Already in the first paragraph, the status of the attire is thus re-codified: instead of being an object of aesthetic admiration, the attire is presented as an object of social-ethical attitude. The reason of the tailor's failure is made seen as well: his eyes and hands do not serve him any longer. The tailor appears to be an artist whose sensual awareness failed because of the malfunction of his eyes and hands - an artist's main tools intended to visualize the world and to cognize it (the eyes) and to create (the eyes and hands). Here lies the tailor's aesthetical failure. This failure is presented as the reason for the ethical one.

In the second paragraph, the tailor saw that the attire lacks something. This lack is of aesthetical nature but it immediately receives an ethical meaning in the tailor's life. The lack is certainly aesthetical, but the attire cannot be itself because of it. The aesthetical formation of the attire is revealed as the formation of its selfness. Its phenomenology, i.e. the story of its becoming itself, is unfolded here. The question arises: is this becoming of the attire an object of ethical or aesthetical judgment? Both types of the judgment are inseparable in this story. It is mentioned in the text that buttons are attached to the attire, i.e. from the functional standpoint, it is ready. It is also mentioned that the attire is adorned with proper decorations, i.e. decorations are finished. Something, however, is still missing. Although one cannot know in the beginning of the text what exactly is missing, it is clear that it is none but an ontological difference, a deficit of being that creates a distance between the empirical state of a thing at the given historical moment and its ideal purpose. When this purpose is realized in the empirical history, the attire will become itself. This event of realization is none but a miracle. A thing's becoming itself is none but mythopoesis. The miracle of the attire

27 Ibid.

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is thus an event in which ethics and aesthetics intersect in two plains - historical and transcendental. The ideal-ethical purpose of the attire is to establish ethical-normative relationship between people (the tailor, the dignitary, and his servants). The ideal-aesthetical purpose of the attire is to be beautiful, to cause a certain type of contemplation, sensual awareness and admiration. The ethical-historical realization of the attire occurs when the dignitary likes it. At the same time, this realization is also aesthetical-historical. It is to infer that the ethical function of the attire is identical to the aesthetical one in the attire's historical realization. This identity is described as a miracle in terms of mythopoesis.

In the mean time, however, the attire is not yet ready. The tailor is struck with awe because of the impending meeting with the dignitary. He is becoming afraid as the sun is going down. To suppress his fear and despair, he drinks vodka and falls asleep. "He is sitting as if sunk into his mother's womb, and there is neither yesterday nor tomorrow."²⁸ This sleep is marginal like the evening itself: between day and night, reality and dreaming, memory and forgetfulness. This sleep in its mythopoeic detail (archetype of the Big Mother according to Jung; Oedipus complex according to Freud; the myth of eternal return according to Eliade; the theme of swallowing as described in the Book of Iona according to thematology) reflects only one thing: an attempt to escape from the historical responsibility that is both ethical and aesthetical at the same time. This attempt, however, failed.

The responsibility and commitment are thus objectified in an aesthetical object. When the attempt to evade the responsibility fails, the tailor tries to correct. In this context, the concept of correction is codified in two plains - ethical and aesthetical. To complete the attire in terms of aesthetics means to abide by the commitment and to correct the attire as an object of ethical attitude. To correct means to bring nearer the miracle of transcendental purpose realizations in the empirical history. The allegorical interpretation, according to which the story of the attire reflects the relationship between man and God, can be represented as a particular reductionist case of a mythopoeic-aesthetical-ethical interpretation. The meaning of correction according to Kabbala is one of the forms of a more general sense of this term obtained at the intersection of three codes: ethical, aesthetical and mythopoeic (personalistic-miraculous).

The dignitary's servants' breaking into the tailor's house is accompanied by two phenomena associated with two senses: hearing and vision. These servants are characterized by their voices in the first place. These voices frighten the tailor and mark the moment of truth. "Their voices made the candle tremble and go

28 Ibid., p. 239.

off, and the tailor was plunged into darkness."²⁹ The voices mark here the dominant sense and represent power, while the vision is not functioning. Already in the beginning of the story, it was mentioned that the tailor's eyes did not serve him. The power breaks into his house using its voice and puts off his candle. The struggle of the senses is inseparable here from the struggle of forces, i.e. the aesthetical experience (represented in senses) is inseparable from the ethical one. As the main result of this struggle, the needle is "stitching the air," i.e. the connection between the tailor and the attire weakens, he is incapable of correcting anything on it.

On the face of it, the beauty of the attire is not a subject of the given passage. But the course of events brings about a loss of the tailor's capability to correct, impossibility to turn the attire into itself, make it beautiful and suitable for the dignitary. At the same time, the tailor is not himself anymore because he is "stitching the air." The struggle of the senses is the last and desperate battle for ethical-aesthetical realization of the attire. The ethical-aesthetical becoming of the attire in this passage is not a subject, nor is it information contained in the expression; it is a code governing this expression. (Here we can observe a case of re-codification.) What is described by means of this code is one of the events in the tailor's personality history - his severance from the object of his skill, an obstacle in the process of creation and correction. The creation of the attire is presented as relationship between the attire and the tailor. This relationship is woven already in the beginning of the story.

The dignitary's servants' voices complete what began with the sunset: impeding correction and creation. From this standpoint, arrival of the dignitary's servants is included in the natural daily cycle. The struggle of the senses (hearing - vision) is associated with the struggle of light and darkness ending in failure to correct / create, i.e. in the return to chaos. This chaos is presented with the use of aesthetical means, such as darkness, putting out of the candle, servants clamorously breaking into the house and "stitching of the air." At the same time, these means are ethical states, because relationship between different textual subjects is revealed in them. Candle, voices, darkness, needle and attire are all subjects just as the tailor and the dignitary's servants are. In the literary reality, at the time of reading, the sensual cognition and the mental one are not separated. Therefore, at the time of reading, everything in text is an object of both aesthetical and ethical judgment. Everything is a subject being a party in the framework of the ethical relationship. This subject receives a status of personality. The process of receiving of personality status is called in the present book personation. Reading is thus composed of personation events. The succession of these events is none

29 Ibid.

but mythopoesis. The candle that fell victim to violence of the voices is revealed as a personality. The myth created at the outcome of this revelation constitutes that very type of experience or thinking / cognition in which ethical and aesthetic judgments are identical.

At this stage, the main measure of the value of the attire is the extent to which it befits the dignitary's honor: "The attire is not the one that would befit the dignitary's honor."³⁰ The dignitary's honor is also mentioned in a different context: the dignitary's servants "barely allowed him [the tailor] to put on an overcoat, for appearing before a dignitary while wearing one's working clothes would not befit his honor."³¹ Not only the clothes of the dignitary, but also those of the tailor are evaluated according to the honor of the dignitary. These definitions do not specify what exactly in any attire should make it suitable for the dignitary. However, it is clear that this suitability incorporates the ethical-cultural function of the attire. Clothes signify here not only a cultural-civilizational context, but also a system of behavioral interpersonal norms, i.e. ethics. From this standpoint, to be means to correspond to other components of the system. At the same time, the correspondence defines not only the external value of the attire but also, even more important, the internal one. The attire is not beautiful indeed, its essence, as well as appearance, is imperfect, i.e. not authentic. Conception of the beautiful as ethical and aesthetical perfection is incorporated here in terms of honor.

At the next stage of the plot development, the tailor is found in the dignitary's house. This house is referred to as "spacious high and fine,"³² and the narrator marvels that in such a house, there is "a stifling and cramped"³³ nook where the tailor is left to wait for the dignitary. The house is thus described so as to show its imperfection: its beauty ("fine") is not perfect, there is an ugly spot in it. This "black spot"³⁴ signifies the internal flaw at the very core of the beauty. The dignitary's house is flawed similarly to the imperfect attire. But as opposed to the attire, the imperfection of which is only temporary and unstable and strives to be corrected, the flaw of the dignitary's house is its inherent part, its internal structural principle. Reasons for the "black spot" and its meaning in the context of the given story will certainly be clarified subsequently, but already here an interesting phenomenon may be pointed out: there is no contradiction between the height, spaciousness and beauty of the house and the stifling and cramped nook

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., p.240.

33 Ibid.

34 That is the very famous "black spot" from Nikolai Gogol's story "May Night," ch. 6 (collection *Evenings on the Farm near Dikanka*).

in it. If so, why is the narrator surprised? Apparently, the reason is that expectation of the correspondence between exterior and interior of the house was not realized.

The disappointment obviously harms the world model that is perceived as correct. According to this model, mutual reflection of the internal and external signifies the world order. The dignitary's house harms the correct world model, and this harm is perceived to the same extent as the harm to the beauty and good taste.

Besides this formal reason, there is an essential one. The house is a spatial structure that defines limits of the living space. The mentioned surprise is an expression of the tailor's fear of contraction of the living space, i.e. fear of death. In the present fragment (the description of the house), there appears a model of the world that is incorrect, with the "black spot" in two planes: in this world, the perfection of beauty and the fullness of life are flawed. This model of the world is constructed by means of re-codification of aesthetical information: the architectural description of the dignitary's house is re-codified as an ethical-ideological judgment about the world. When the tailor, sitting in that stifling nook, decides to examine the attire and to fill in the lack, we interpret that as a decision concerning not only the attire, but also the dignitary's house and the entire world. But this decision is not realized, because the tailor lacks his tools (needle and thread) to correct the world: "He had time to correct, but was incapable of doing so."³⁵ Not only the expectation of the correct and beautiful world collapsed; so did also the expectation of man's capability to fill in the lack, to complete the creation of the beautiful and to restore order. The description of the tailor in the discussed sentence completes the ethical-aesthetical move that began in the previous one. Ethical-ideological information (correction of the world) is codified here by means of the description of the tailor's professional activity. This activity in turn is re-codified by means of implicit aesthetical code - impossibility to complete the creation of the attire.

A question arises: what activates this re-codification? It is clear that it is associated with the narrator's point of view in the description of the dignitary's house on the one hand and with the tailor's point of view in the sentence "He had time to correct, but was incapable of doing so." In the first sentence, the architectural vision is translated into the *Weltanschauung* by means of the principle of correspondence between the external and internal. *If personality is an object of the discussion*, then the problem of relationship between the external and internal pertains both to aesthetics and ethics. In this case, relationship between the external and internal is that between the external historical life of a person and

35 "Ha-Malbush," p. 240.

ideal purpose. In the second sentence, the problem consists in relationship between the tailor's ideal purpose (to create beauty and correct the world while making the attire) and its realization under the given historical circumstances (i.e. while he is sitting in the stifling nook in the dignitary's house). This problem is ethical; at the same time, becoming of the tailor's personality towards its purpose realization in history is none but mythopoesis. Ethical and aesthetical planes of relationship between the external and internal are thus united in personality; this unity is brought about by mythopoesis.

Possibility of allegorical interpretation of the story is formed in the last paragraph of the first chapter. God (the dignitary) hands the man (the tailor) a valuable cloth - a pure soul. The man's purpose is to "sew" his own life of the material he was given. The man's purpose is to dedicate his life to his attire, i.e. to shape his soul and to impart it with perfection and beauty ("done and complete and beautiful"). In the end of his days, the man is standing before his Creator holding this attire - a result of filling of his position, a creation that is a fruit of man's soul realization in the historical life. We can easily see that this allegorical interpretation is a particular case of mythopoeic interpretation. The mentioned creation is none but a man's personality miracle; the process of this creation is none but mythopoesis. The final product of this process is none but a myth, and that is actually the attire.

The attire as an allegorical representation of a myth is one of the possible mythopoeic interpretations. In this interpretation, we are particularly interested in relationship between ethics and aesthetics. The attire is being brought into existence as unity of these two spheres in allegorization of the attire as a myth and independently of the meaning of the attire as a piece of clothing having both ethical and aesthetical functions. Any item could have played the role of the attire, for example a portrait or a bundle, but these both functions would still be identical due to the role of myth this item plays in the text. In the present text, allegorization object unites ethics and aesthetics on the level of both denotation (the attire as a piece of clothing) and connotation (the attire as a myth).

In the second chapter, there appears another character - the tailor's wife. She is presented in the context of cooking. The desire for food detracts the tailor from the attire. She is a "woman of valor", a characteristic that points to a capability to successfully complete what she began. The tailor marks the contrast between himself and his if referring to this capability. It should be pointed out that in this case, too, an aesthetical characteristic (food, taste, smell) is revealed as an ethical one defining the tailor's wife as a woman of valor. In order to clarify this term in the sense of relationship between ethics and aesthetics, let us turn to its source in the Bible - Proverbs 31, 10-31: "Who can find a virtuous woman?" The beginning and ending of this part look as an emphasis of the superiority of

ethics over aesthetics: "Her price is far above rubies," "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised." In the middle of the part, however, we can find terms in which there is no contradiction between these two categories, but their unity. This unity is incorporated by means of making of a garment or textile and by means of this garment itself: "She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff;" "[...] All her household are clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple;" "She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honour are her clothing [...]" Making of garment (heb. "levush") is mentioned here three times, more than the rest of deeds performed by the woman of valor, apparently, because this particular activity is considered as a major test of the woman's valor. As we can see in the last quotation, the garment unites the following values: commercial, social-domestic and aesthetical. The latter is incorporated in the word "splendor" ("hadar"). This word, apparently, was found to be appropriate to describe the woman of valor (as opposed to the words "beauty", "loveliness"), because it incorporates two aspects: beauty and honor. This incorporation is reflected in expressions like "[...] The beauty [heb. *hadar*] of old men is the gray head" (Proverbs 20, 29), "[...] The glorious majesty [...]" (Psalms 145, 12). To sum up, we have to repeat that appearance of the female character - the tailor's wife - is shaped as re-codification of ethics and aesthetics by referring to the text of the prayer.

Let us return to Agnon's text. In the present chapter, the tailor cannot decide what occupation to turn to: to continue with the attire or to start the meal. As the word "cooking" ("b.sh.u.l.") is a combination of the letters comprising the word "garment" ("l.b.u.sh."), the food is a combination of ethical and aesthetical components of the attire. The tailor himself emphasizes the aesthetical aspect of the food, when he wants to take part in the meal in order to enjoy the taste despite the fact he is not hungry. The attire and the food are identical in reference to the process of their creation, but different in reference to aesthetical pleasure they give. Different aesthetical theories of clothing are usually based on the bond between the external and internal, i.e. between a form of garment and an object modeled by it - the world, cultural patterns of behavior, ideology, faith, human character, creed and emotions. Even if there is a bond between the external and internal in the food, too, this bond is much less defined and marked than that in a garment. We can, therefore, understand the tailor's escape from the attire to the meal as an escape from aesthetics firmly tied with ethics to aesthetics that is largely free from the ethical bond (it should be stressed that we are not discussing the culture of meal - customs and rites associated with the way food is consumed; beyond doubt, the culture of meal unites ethics and aesthetics no less

than the culture of clothing; but, as in the case of the attire, we are not discussing here rites of dressing up, nor fashion shows but the pleasure derived from a garment itself; in the case of cooking we mean the actual pleasure from the taste of food).

In the present text, the food, too, is placed in the center of ethical attitude. The conversation between the tailor and his wife on subjects of meal exposes, on the face of it, the former's immoral nature. His strange relationship with the wife can be explained by peculiarity of his aesthetical activity. The text builds, as it were, an analogy: a man incapable of creating an aesthetically perfect thing is also incapable of ethically perfect behavior. But this explanation is but partial and simplistic. We can see that a "meal conversation" between the tailor and his wife is a rite and play. The tailor's wife is nonchalant about her husband's rudeness. While the tailor unsuccessfully pretends to display power and control the situation, his wife is the one who truly controls herself and what is going on in the house. In the description of the tailor's thoughts before the meal, there is a hint that the "meal conversation" is none but a show. This hint consists in the tailor's suspicion that his wife is "putting on shows [lit. comedies]."³⁶ Ironically, it turns out that it is the tailor who is putting on shows indeed. His wife perceives it correspondingly. The fact that her husband, despite all the complaints, quickly ate up two platefuls of food having taken a real pleasure in it, does not surprise the woman; it neither angers nor gladdens her. Such shows are obviously staged on and on in their lives; there is a rite, and the woman has already learned rules of the game. We can thus infer that in the passage with the "meal conversation," relationship between ethics and aesthetics is more complex than we might have assumed. The tailor's behavior reflects a certain type of ethics, a set of norms that govern relations between the two persons thus enabling their existence in society.

At the present stage, we can supply two remarks. (a) In his article "Aktualität des Schönen," Hans Georg Gadamer points to the game as one of the three elements of art (the other two are symbol and holiday). Gadamer was not the first to see it: thinkers, such as Wittgenstein and Huizinga attributed a central role to the play in all the domains of culture. By virtue of the fact that the "meal conversation" has a character of play, it assumes an aesthetical status inseparable from the ethical one. (b) We are dealing here with the ancient Greek conception according to which the world is presented as a theatre, person as an actor, and ethics as a play.³⁷ The concept of play underlies the Greek solution of the problem of rela-

tionship between man's destiny and his free choice: the cosmic play is written, and the dramatis personae is decided upon in advance by the God, but man plays his role while freely using his creative powers and his moral judgment. Therefore, the dramatic art is conceived by the Greeks as a play of cosmic powers indeed. This conception arises from the mythological spiritual world of the ancient Greeks based on the identity between body and image.³⁸ In this world, ethics and aesthetics are inseparable. We can thus sum up by saying that the discussed "meal conversation" is built as mutual re-codification of ethics and aesthetics, its mechanism being a *play*. This mechanism is based on the mythical thinking and, in particular, on conception of man as an actor and of ethics as a play having an aesthetical quality (the Greek concept of harmony unites ethics and aesthetics: a ball game, for example, is a harmony of movements leading to the best result; the same type of harmony makes possible also the existence of a piece of art and of the entire cosmos with person in its center as its model).³⁹

Following the events associated with the "meal conversation", the word "beautiful" appears twice pointing to the ethical aspect, in particular - to the tailor's failure in terms of worshipping God (the negative-ironic use of the term "beautiful" is not accidental, of course): "What a predicament! (lit. what a beautiful beginning!) I went to bed without dovening, and got up from my meal without knowing whether I pronounce the blessing or not,"⁴⁰ "his prayer did not succeed" (lit. "did not work out beautifully").⁴¹ This example is a relatively simple case of ethical-aesthetical re-codification that is made possible because in Hebrew, the term "beautiful" can refer to both the external beauty and goodness. In the two mentioned examples, the "beautiful" appears in the sense of "good," "correct," "in order," "as it was expected." These descriptions are aesthetical; they are identical in their meaning to the aesthetical descriptions referring to the house or attire. In the passage under discussion, that very description refers to ethics or, to be more precise, to the most representative case of its - God's worship. The incorrect God's worship is not beautiful, just as the incomplete attire. Another piece of evidence for that is found in the next sentence where the concept of correction refers to the prayer: "What I did not set right in the morning prayer, I will in the afternoon prayer."⁴²

The concept "beautiful" is also found later on in the second chapter, in the conversation between the tailor and his friend in the tavern. This conversation

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., pp. 11-55.

40 "Ha-Malbush," p. 244.

41 Ibid., p. 245.

42 Ibid., p. 246.

36 "Ha-Malbush," p.243.

37 See: Aleksey Losev, *Istorija antichnoy estetiki*, book 2 (Moscow: "Iskusstvo," 1994) 503-510.

focuses on the quality of a drink. The tailor asks his friend: "What do you think about the drink?" and receives the following answer: "In any case, the choice is for you to make. What you consider fit (lit. beautiful) is good for me."⁴³ The meaning of the "beautiful" here is "good," "fit", and, at the same time, "tasty," "excellent," and "of good quality." These two aspects are incorporated in the concept "correct" that appears in the next sentence in an entirely different context: "The tailor was contemplating: He said the choice is mine to make. If it were so, I would be now sitting at home and fixing the attire."⁴⁴ Accidentally, the drink is associated with the attire, as well as the beauty of the former is associated with the beauty of the latter. The tailor, as it were, would like to say that if he were to define what beauty is, he would choose the perfectly beautiful and useful attire.

All the previous descriptions have incorporated the pleasure taken in the beautiful and the pleasure taken in the useful. Beside these, in the landscape description, we can find an example of, as it were, "pure" aesthetical pleasure: "It was fine today."⁴⁵ Perhaps, a typology of the beautiful is created here: "fine" means pure aesthetical pleasure mainly associated with natural phenomena, while the "beautiful" - aesthetical-ethical judgement mainly associated with man-made products. But this typology is obviously not precise and does not hold for the entire story. As it was seen above, the dignitary's house was described as "fine." The description of the "fine day" is not given in detail, either, so we cannot possibly understand its meaning: "fine" may be interpreted as "pleasant," "not causing suffering," i.e. Agnon refers here to a fine weather. If so, the meaning of the "fine" here is likely to resemble that of the "fine" used in the description of the dignitary's house: uniform, incorporating the agreement between the external and internal, i.e. between weather and man's needs. If so, there is no difference between the concepts "beautiful" and "fine": the drink is "beautiful," and the day is "fine" *if they meet man's needs*. Therefore, we do not have here a typology of the beautiful but a conception according to which, there is no need nor possibility to separate the aesthetical pleasure caused by an object and the use of this object for practical ends. Moreover, completeness of the object in terms of its usefulness is a prerequisite for the completeness of the aesthetical pleasure taken in it. At the same time, since relationship between usefulness and beauty remains somewhat blurred in the story, the aesthetical pleasure retains certain autonomy. Below is another example of inseparability of the aesthetical from the ethical: the meal the tailor's wife prepared for him next day is defined as "fatty

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

and good."⁴⁶ The description of the drink as "beautiful" is not different from the description of the meal as "good." We can thus point to a non-differentiated use of these concepts; this use shapes an integral, aesthetical-ethical conception.

To sum up, let us say that the present story creates a cosmological-aesthetical conception: life is a beautiful attire that man makes of the divine cloth; he fulfills his transcendental purpose by creating a perfect, beautiful and "correct" life. This is not just allegory: the cosmic beauty is incorporated indeed in the beauty of man's creations. The attire is not allegoric: in the course of its creation man fulfills himself. Creating of something is identical to creating of his life itself. This identity is none but mythopoesis that is revealed as a mechanism of mutual re-codification of ethics and aesthetics. Unity of aesthetics and ethics is revealed as unity of life and creation.

"Paths of Righteousness, or The Vinegar Maker"

In the short story "Paths of Righteousness" taken from the collection *Poland. Fairy Tales* not only a character or symbol is connected with mechanisms of ethical-aesthetical re-codification, but also the process of narration, vectors of ideology and plot are drawn and directed by means of this re-codification.

Let us start with a short discussion about a group of concepts that appear on the first pages of the story: "miracle," "joy," "pilgrimage" (heb. "alyah"), "fine prayer."⁴⁷ These concepts are intended to point to a happy turning point in the life of the poor old man who was destined to lose his family and end his miserable days in poverty and despair, doing his loathsome job of making vinegar. Everything changes when he makes up his mind to save some money to make his pilgrimage to the Land of Israel:

From then on he labored with joy. Lo and behold, [lit. look, what a miracle] he would say to himself, up to now I disliked my trade and now I find it hard to give it up; the same utensils and the same vinegar, and before I know it the day is done. At midnight he would get up from his bed, take his can, and dance about with it until it was time for morning prayers. The more he was occupied with his calculations of how many scratches there were on the can and how much money he had put in the charity box, so his prayers suffered, becoming somewhat erratic. And so said he, "O God, it is plain for You to see that

46 Ibid., p. 249.

47 Shmuel Yosef Agnon, "Paths of Righteousness, or The Vinegar Maker," *A Book That Was Lost and Other Stories* by S. Y. Agnon, trans. Amiel Gurt, ed. Alan Mintz and Anne Golomb Hoffman (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), p. 192.

all the calculations I make are only so that I may go up to Your land. Take me there and there I will say to You a fine prayer."⁴⁸

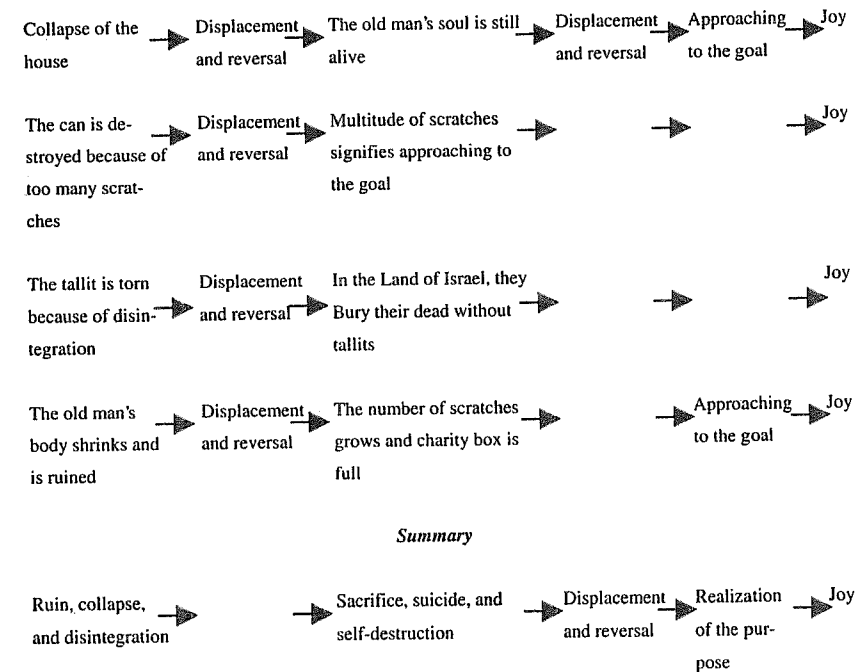
These lines return us to the beginning of the present book, to the discussion of the concept of miracle in the story *In the Heart of the Seas*. On the one hand, in "Paths of Righteousness," too, miracle means imparting meaning to life, but on the other hand, the concept of miracle here only marks the future development of the plot and points to man's revelation of his ideal purpose. At this stage, realization of this purpose is nothing more than a foreshadowing. But already at this stage, miracle is a source of joy and will to live. This joy is immediately incorporated in two phenomena of ethical-aesthetical re-codification: dancing with the can and the "fine prayer." The main character appears as an ardent enthusiast who becomes dizzy while being wrapped up in the holy passion until he nearly lapses into heresy.

What is the nature of dancing with the can? It expresses the joy of a man, who once again found the meaning of life, as well as the joy of a Jew as his pilgrimage to the Land of Israel is nearing. At the same time, the dance itself is an aesthetical form incorporating a close relationship between the dancers. While dancing with the can, the old man is connected with the tangible form of the process of drawing nearer to the Land of Israel: the old man keeps an account of his savings by scratches he makes on the can. Since this process is the way to the old man's personality miracle, the can is an icon of the old man's mythopoesis. If so, there is an element of worship in the dance in which the old man is connected to his myth. We will learn later on, what this myth is, but we can already draw the first conclusion: in the dance with the can, the ethical-religious expression is re-codified as an aesthetical-ritual one by means of the old man's myth-creating.

Since the idea of pilgrimage made the old man dizzy and excited with joy, "his prayers suffered, becoming somewhat erratic."⁴⁹ Like the hero of "Ha-Malbush," the old man impairs his present prayer because of his thoughts and calculations and hopes to make amends in the future. The can is, as it were, a reflection of the future; scratches on it signify steps leading up to the correction; we should also point to the fact that the word "can" (k.i.t.o.n.) is an anagram for the word "correction" (t.i.k.u.n.). The correction is to take place in the Land of Israel by means of the "fine prayer." The old man contrasts his impaired incorrect and erratic prayer, the prayer of the Diaspora, of the midpoint, with the correct and "fine" one of the Land of Israel, the one associated with the realization of his purpose. This contrast that may hurt the old man himself is incorporated in

the concepts of ethical-aesthetical re-codification: the explicit concept of "fine prayer" and the implicit ones - "correction," "perfection," and "correspondence" (of the prayer to its ideal form).

If we follow the development of the old man's history and of metonymic spatial forms he is connected with, we will discern the firm consistency from the beginning of the story to its end. This consistency is presented in the following chart:



We thus should draw the following conclusion: realization of the hero's personality purpose is presented as self-sacrifice, suicide and is followed by death and burial. The old man's myth is that of going up to Israel as self-sacrifice and suicide. The hero's personality mythopoesis is being formed as mutual ethical-aesthetical re-codification: (1) the decision of ethical-religious character to go up to Israel makes the old man take pleasure in it and arouses pride and joy in him, i.e. this decision turns into an aesthetical object; (2) aesthetical (sensual) objects, which have a form, such as house, body, tallit and can, lose their form and begin to indicate realization of ethical-religious purpose, only.

48 Ibid., p. 193.

49 Ibid.

Let us go over to the last issue of the present story - the miraculous salvation of the hero from the jail by Jesus and their flying to the Land of Israel, in the course of which, the live and smiling figure of Jesus is turning into a cold stone: "On their first flight that man stopped smiling. On their second flight the old man's fingers turned cold. On their third flight he felt that he was embracing cold stone."⁵⁰ We can assume that the old man's purpose is realized by divesting Jesus' figure of its personality qualities. This move is but the final stage of the process described in the chart. Everything that serves as a tool for the old man's purpose realization is destroyed and deprived of its authentic meaning: can, tallit, charity box and... Jesus' figure. Jesus' figure is divested in three stages - three flights. In the first flight, when his smile disappears, the figure is divested of its interesting complexity and mystery that the smile imparts to it. In the second flight, the figure is divested of its human meaning, and in the third flight, it becomes simply lifeless turning into the cold stone. This three-stage process is not only desacralization, but also depersonation.

We have thus arrived at the final conclusion: the hero's purpose realization, his personality miracle comes at the expense of depersonation - depriving things of their personalistic qualities. This process is going on as ethical-aesthetical re-codification. To sum up, if the old man's myth is that of self-destruction, his mythopoesis is fulfilled as depersonation processes of the world around him, while these processes function as ethical-aesthetical re-codification.

Part VI: Conclusion. What is Mythopoesia?

*What was there to come?
What abuses, what tortures did I expect?
Do not know. But I was absolutely sure
that the time of cruel miracles has not yet passed.*

Stanislaw Lem, *Solaris*

Theoretical-Methodological Aspects

In this book, we have made an attempt to develop a new approach in myth criticism. From Plato to Roland Barthes, the mainstream of myth criticism was to treat myth in literature as an auxiliary tool serving poetics, aesthetics, didactics, rhetoric, etc. Myths in literature were studied mostly in terms of their use (utilitarian approach).

New myth criticism, the germs of which could be discerned in the course of development of conventional myth criticism, has radically changed the direction of the study of the role myth plays in literature. It treats poetics, rhetoric, etc. as auxiliary measures serving the purpose of creating a new myth - i.e., mythopoesis.

Alternative myth criticism is based on the following theoretical principles:

- 1) Myth is defined as a miraculous history of a personality given in words;
- 2) Myth preserves its authentic form only while it is being created;
- 3) Study of myth in literature can be authentic only when it deals with myth creation; in any other case, it has nothing to do with myth itself, but only with its various uses;
- 4) Myth creation in literature is a process that is realized at the actual time of reading a literary text, in the mind of the reader when it encounters the text;
- 5) Myth creation - mythopoesis - is one of the fundamental mechanisms of meaning making in a literary text;
- 6) The dialogic-ethical "I-Other" relation constitutes the fundamental mechanism of mythopoesis.
- 7) Mythopoesis is the very medium of inter-cultural and ethical-aesthetical relationship in literature.

Alternative myth criticism distinguishes not only between the use of myth and the creation of myth, but also between myth itself and mythopoesis. It regards myth as a finished product, always belonging to the past, to the given existence. Myth is a product of mythopoesis, which is a creative process of renova-

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 197.