

a profoundly critical, skeptical gesture. Clearly, whether one regards Benjamin as helpless fool or as sane nay-sayer and Jewish Quaker, speaking justice to power, has everything to do with one's own cultural vantage point; late-twentieth-century readings rest equally on the advantage of a secure but vigilant distance from the horrors of genocide and on the destabilizing precincts of a self-critical discourse both safeguarded and constantly challenged by the existence of sovereign Jewish power.

Dissonant against the utopian voices of one fin de siècle but perhaps more in harmony with the dystopic voices of another, the "Jewish Don Quixote" can now receive a new kind of attention, and alternative readings can be seen as alternative cultural strategies. As silly in their uniforms as Moses E. Herzog will be some seventy years later with his father's rusty pistol, Benjamin and Sender become the forerunners of the old/new diasporists who eschew military power, as gullible in their faith as Gimpl the Fool will appear some five decades later, they stand at the head of a line of shlemiels who will reclaim their status as part of a post-martyrological and postheroic reinvention of discarded sensibilities. But viewed against the background of an empowered Jewish community, Benjamin may come closer to his model, namely the Man of La Mancha as dreamer and idealist.

In Israel the literary imagination is now moving from being constitutive of a world that did not yet exist to acting more conventionally as counterpoint to the real. If Benjamin and Sender's induction into the Gentile army meant they were being used as a source of power attached to an alien narrative, and if the czarist army reminds the reader of who it is that wrote the "real" story in this area, then once having "arrived" in Zion—through the agency of their Hebrew readers—the pair could almost be imagined as two conscientious objectors in an Israeli army. In this sense, they move from being objects in a universe in which the only power behind what happens is "other"—whether Russian or divine—to embracing self-disempowerment as a kind of hard-won humility before all claims of power. In such belated readings, Benjamin can relinquish his metonymic status as quintessential Jew-in-Exile, subjugated by both the forces of his own foolishness and the unrestrained power of the Gentiles, and acquire instead a status more compatible with the Western paradigm of the hero as seeker embattled with his own society.

In the Heart of the Seas

S. Y. Agnon and the *Epic of Return*

"In that Empire, the Art of Cartography reached such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied a whole City, and the map of the Empire, a whole Province. In time those Enormous Maps no longer sufficed and the Colleges of Cartographers raised a Map of the Empire that was the size of the Empire and coincided with it exactly. Less Admitted to the Study of Cartography, the Following Generations understood that that expanded Map was Useless, and not without Impiety they relinquished it to the Inclemencies of the Sun and of the Winters. Disintegrated Ruins of the Map remain in the Western deserts, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in the whole Country there endures no other relic of the Geographic Disciplines." Suárez Miranda: *Viajes de varones prudentes*, fourth book, chapter XLV, Lérida, 1658.

Jorge Luis Borges, "Museo"

The pilgrim's uncompleted journey toward the Holy Land is open to infinite sequels, holding the map to scale, preserving the object of desire at an insurmountable distance. But the stony surfaces of early-twentieth-century Palestine, disenchanted by Zionist pioneers with pickaxes, yielded to the "Art of Cartography" and became inhospitable to the stardust that had bewitched Yehuda Halevi and blinded Benjamin the Third. The old maps, tattered by wear and then dusty from disuse, could still glitter with faint traces of the miraculous and the unpossessable. S. Y. Agnon was enough of an alchemist to illuminate those traces and enough of a modernist to mark the gaps. In his Hebrew fictions, he enlists the inherent contradictions between mythic and political forms to reclaim the future in the name of the past.

Nowhere are the contradictions more dramatically demonstrated than in his novella *Bibbau yamim* [In the Heart of the Seas], and nowhere are

they more dramatically reconciled. The pilgrim who appears at port in *Bilvav yamim* is equipped with both a magic handkerchief and a compass to navigate between heavenly promises and earthly geographies. Relying on the narrative of homecoming that loops back to its epic point of origin, his journey to and arrival in the Holy Land enact a metaphysics of return and an aesthetics of the whole. Begun shortly after Agnon's own round-trips between Palestine and Germany were being resolved in favor of settlement in Jerusalem, the story bears the traces of that journey as well. It incorporates the pilgrimage to Zion, as charted in Yehuda Halevi's poetry of yearning for the beloved object, and a utopian resolution of the condition (and the comedy) of exile, as parodied in the prose of S. Y. Abramovitsh.

Satire is utopia in its degraded form. Reading *The Travels of Benjamin the Third* (1878) and *In the Heart of the Seas* (1934) in sequence forms a kind of reconstructive pattern, as Abramovitsh's abortive, circular, satiric pilgrimage reclaims its ideal, linear form in Agnon's novella. The messianic epic of return is rescued here in the narrative's embrace of the materiality of Zion: now become a political destination, it no longer animates the myth of deferral.

The fictions of Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888–1970), Israel's Nobel laureate and most enduring literary presence, spanned much of the twentieth century, and have continued after his death in the posthumous publications overseen by his daughter. *Bilvav yamim*, written in midcareer, is one of those narratives that seems to live in the shallows, displaying a deceptive naïveté. Posing like an innocent fellow traveler beside every misguided pilgrim, it becomes both one of the few articulations of the master narrative of the Zionist century and one of Agnon's few stories self-consciously impervious to his own penetrating irony and skepticism. In enacting the perfect arrival and the perfection of form, it books passage not only for the people but for the verses that were set loose in the universe when the Temple was destroyed and all its elements dispersed.

AUTHORIZATIONS

The narrative opens with the protagonist's appearance before a group of pilgrims from Galicia who are about to depart for the Holy Land.

Just before the first of the Hassidim went up to the Land of Israel, a certain man named Hananiah found his way to their House of Study. His clothes were torn, rags were wound around his legs, and he wore no boots on his

feet; his hair and beard were covered with the dust of the roads, and all his worldly goods were tied up in a little bundle that he carried with him in his kerchief. . . .

It can clearly be seen, said the comrades to Hananiah, that you have walked far.

True indeed, said he to them. It is not a short distance I have come.

Where were you? they asked.

Where was I? he answered. And where was I not?

Whereupon they began to question him on every side, until at last he recounted all his travels.

At first, said Hananiah, I went from my town to another town, and from that town to yet another.²

The substantiality and specificity of the travelers or pilgrims contrast starkly with the protean contours of this newcomer. Continuing throughout to inhabit a geographical and temporal twilight zone, Hananiah bears the trappings of the Jew as eternal wanderer or *geyer*, as impecunious *tzaddik*, or as *mesublah* or emissary. What is otherwise a localized, meticulously recounted journey of limited duration is displaced repeatedly by his untimely exits and entrances. While the group of pilgrims, who are designated within the Hassidic code as *anshei shloimeinu* (our folk), embody the flesh-and-blood dimension of Hassidism, Hananiah represents its status as an ideal construct. The nonspecific, potentially infinite, metaphysical space of his journey and the specific, finite physical space of theirs are represented structurally in the chronology and chronotopes of the narrative. The chapter headings are the signposts of that double itinerary: "Avak derakhim," "Ha-muzmanim," "Yetziah," "Nisayon shel satan," "Yeridah va-'aliyah," "Derekh erez polin u-moldava," "Mayim rabim," "Be-tokh ha-yam," "Razei 'olam," "Stambul," "Sa'ar gadol ba-yam," "Admat kodesh," "Nimtza'im 'omdim bi-yerushalayim," "Shkhenim la-shekhinah" [Dust of the Roads, The Summoned, Departure, Satan's Temptation, Descending and Ascending, Through Poland and Moldavia, Many Waters, In the Sea, Secrets of the Universe, Istanbul, A Great Storm at Sea, The Holy Land, Standing in Jerusalem, The Shekhinah's Neighbors].

The temporal range is equally unstable. Internal references to the "first of the Hassidim" and to Napoleon would place the *fabula* in the eighteenth century,³ but figures from the ancient, largely legendary past and from the author's own life (including himself, Shmuel Yosef, and his wife, Esther) anchor both the tale of miraculous delivery and the prosaic travelogue in an anachronistic, mobile center of consciousness.⁴ For most of the journey, *Bilvav yamim* behaves as what Gérard Genette would call

a "pure case of heterodiegetic autobiography, where the author attributes the narrative of his life to a non-witness biographer and, for safety's sake, to one a few centuries posterior to himself."⁵ But at the very last moment the autobiographical character—who, as one of the travelers, lives a few centuries anterior to the author—merges with the narrator. Suddenly he has stabilized both his own position as scribe and the fluidities of a text that has now congealed as a canonic, fully authorized source: "The sages and rabbis of Jerusalem have long desired that all that befell Hananiah should be put on record in a book, [but this matter was] deferred from day to day and from year to year; until I came and wrote all the adventures of Hananiah in a book which I have called 'In the Heart of the Seas'" (E 126; H 50).

This "homodiegetic" mode, in which the author manifests "himself" at the end as narrator, receptor, and transmitter of the story, is characteristic of many of Agnon's narratives.⁶ Both self-reference and anachronism are typical of Yiddish satire and parody; in the emergent Hebrew literature such embedded strands of autobiographical reference are, additionally, reminiscent of the transition from the reality of *nouvelles* to the realism and license of the "novel" in English and American fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They thus serve to authenticate and adjudicate as well as define the perspective of the world through which the narrator travels. But they also conform to another paradigm: the "received" text, modeled on the transmission of Scriptures, which remains for Agnon the competing prototype of the artistic enterprise, its metaphysical status always threatening to overshadow its mimetic value. The autobiographical voice confers the kind of authority that records of the miraculous in medieval travelogues and in modern Hassidic tales confer on their subjects. The role of the storyteller as eyewitness, a convention of Western pilgrimages and *récits de voyage* from *The Canterbury Tales* through *Tales of the Wayside Inn*, is compounded here by the multiple authorizations of the literary imagination and its conflicted status as exilic privilege and burden. The miracles for which the human author does not claim responsibility—narrated by an undramatized voice—alternate with the deeds attributed to human agency and authorship. By the end of *Bilvav yamim*, this process has resolved into a thick layer of sedimentation that absorbs and domesticates all magical properties. And when the "sages and rabbis of Jerusalem" put their seal on Hananiah's story, they grant a (not entirely tongue-in-cheek) imprimatur to the human act and time of creation.

ANSHEI SHLOMEINU

In addition to Reb Shmuel Yosef the storyteller, other travelers—such as old Reb Alter the "slaughterer and inspector"—are differentiated by name, occupation, and their practical role in facilitating the journey. Others, through bold acts of reification, make valuable contributions to re-deeming the Land of Israel from its metaphorical status. Rabbi Shelomo, a "Cohen" and businessman, had "finally given up the estates of this world and set his heart on going up to the Land of Israel" (that is, not only exchanging a commercial estate for a spiritual one but potentially *grounding* the one in the other). Young Reb Alter the teacher, while studying the Talmudic tractate *Ketubot*, which deals with marriage contracts, had been struck by the thought that "after all the Land of Israel is a marriage contract between Israel and the Holy One, blessed be He; and it is an accepted principle that a man must never be without his marriage contract. Whereupon he felt that as long as he continued to dwell outside the Land he would have no rest" (E 14, 16; H 489).

By literalizing what had been held in trust in a language of suspended signifiers, these travelers participate in the redemption of the land of Israel from its dormant state. Indeed, in its various manifestations this principle of literalization, reification, or realization is the dominant aesthetic of what might be considered the consummate Hebrew novel. All of the characters are individuated just enough within the economy of the folktale to save them from their generic status, rendering them candidates for the fictive imagination and implicitly inviting more conflictual, dialogical readings. But despite its reach, the narrative falls just short of what Robert Alter calls thinking "novelistically."⁷

The women, though even less differentiated both by name and function, and largely identified by affiliation with their husbands, are allowed some agency in deciding their fate and in expressing their ongoing ambivalence about the journey. They privilege domestic space and security above the dangers of the voyage and the elusiveness of its destination: "When day broke and the sea could be seen, the women began crying, O, we are afraid to set out on the sea." (E 55; H 511).

The apposition of wife and home is familiar from *Benjamin the Third*; one can hardly help noticing that in all the travelogues we are considering it is not the women who signify the voyage. "What stories indeed could a woman possibly have to tell?" asks Nancy Huston mischievously in analyzing a basic incongruity between the conventionally nurturing

position of the woman and the narrating position of the novelist. "Did women go on expeditions to the North Pole?"⁸ They are the ones who wait, descendants of Sarah in her *obel* and of Penelope in her *oikos*; if forced to travel, they endure at best—or, by carrying their household gods with them, they actively impede the journey. The wives in Agnon's narrative make up their collective mind to return to Buczacz and are divorced from their husbands. Immediately, however, they recant: "The women remembered how folk buried outside the Holy Land must suffer by having to roll their corpses through caves and tunnels underground to reach the Holy Land" (E 55; H 512). They cajole their husbands into taking them back, demonstrating their primary concern with personal and material comfort (both in this world and the next), as well as the popular association of the Holy Land with death and the end of days.

Hananiah remains the only irregular traveler in this group. It is not only his reported geographical reach ("Where was I? . . . And where was I not?") that marks him as both wandering Jew and tzaddik and threatens to undermine the mimetic status of the narrative, but also his rather unconventional form of behavior and travel. The other pilgrims (including the autobiographical Shmuel Yosef), a collective unit of specialized parts, are journeying from Galicia through Turkey to Jaffa by means of stagecoach and ship. Hananiah, by contrast, has been engaged to resolve the mysterious disappearance of the husband of a woman identified only as an *aguna* (abandoned wife); this mission brings him into the murky, liminal realm of brigands and thieves and takes the story into the realm of adventure, danger, and the carnivalesque. As a result, Hananiah literally misses the boat. He consoles himself at the port by spreading his kerchief, sitting on it, and effecting, with some divine assistance, what would qualify in the Hassidic lexicon of small miracles as a *keftzat derekh* (a literal "leap of faith," or "leap of the faithful").⁹ As the ship slowly wends its storm-tossed way toward Palestine, Hananiah, who was counted as missing, appears to the passengers as an unidentified flying object ("a kind of light shining on the sea") and finally as "the likeness of a man on the sea." A dispute arises among them as to the identity of this apparition:

And what did the Gentiles say when they saw a man sitting on his kerchief and floating in the sea? Some of them said, Such things are often seen by seafarers and desert-farers. Others said, *Whoever he is, he has a curse hanging over him so that nevermore can he rest.* That is why he wanders from place to place, appearing yesterday on the dry land and today on the sea.

On that ship there were representatives of each of the seventy nations of

the world, and each of them was overwhelmed and terrified at this apparition. So Israel stood on one side and the nations of the world on the other, fearful and staring, until their eyelashes became scorched by the sun. Then Rabbi Shmuel Yosef, the son of Rabbi Shalom Mordekhai ha-Levi, said, *It is the Divine Presence, which is bringing back the people of Israel to their own place.* (E 59, 64–65; H 514, 517; emphases mine)

At this point the tug between the gravitational and the divine forces is resolved in favor of the latter; for the duration of the trip, or so it appears, the Hassidic, mystical imagination precedes and supersedes the utopian-historical vision. But a subtle shift is already taking place; the narrative, which previously seemed to mediate almost even-handedly between the language of deferred arrival and the language of repatriation in historical time, begins to incorporate the one into the other. At the same time, the polemic mimicry between the Wandering Jew in Christian theodicy and the Eternal Jew in Jewish theodicy is resolved, as *wandering* is redefined as *return*. In appearing to the passengers through the interpretive strategies of Reb Shmuel Yosef as none other than the *shekhina* navigating the ship that carries the "people of Israel [back] . . . to their own place," Hananiah becomes the composite figure of Israel-on-the-road: nimble tzaddik, "eternal" Jew, semidivine conductor. The Wandering Jew—a character implicated in the guilt of Jesus' passion and assigned a rather dubious place in the Christian pageant of the Second Coming—resurfaces here as a diaphanous agent of Jewish redemption. Floating just above and not quite embedded in the thickness of a real journey, Hananiah manages to transform all of its properties.¹⁰ Floating just above and increasingly impervious to the ironic readings that would deflate his aeronautic kerchief, he achieves an iconic status that threatens to iconize the story itself. As a kind of jack-of-all-trades in the union of Kabbalistic workers, he engages in "repairing" the vessels that were shattered in the dim days of creation. Hillel Barzel regards Hananiah as an example of the "redemptive" recasting of received archetypes in Agnon's fiction; taking pity (*hishtak'ut*) on the wanderer, God returns him to his land where settlement (*hishtak'ut*) replaces wandering and the blessing of a long but mortal life replaces the curse of immortality and rootlessness.¹¹ But this *hishtak'ut*, taken literally as a consummated union of the mythical and the material, is also a self-consuming process. Literal repair—of anomalous situations and even of physical vessels such as shoes and trunks to be used on the journey—replaces the metaphorical status of mystical and messianic language, anticipating the substantiation of images of redemption in their "original"—that is, in real—space.

FINAL STATION: THE HOLY LAND

While Hananiah as a character is differentiated from the other pilgrims by his quasimythical status, his fate is also differentiated from that of the group, who more or less die a collective death when the exigencies of form dictate that the story be brought to a close. It is particularly significant for the literary representation of the idea of fulfillment that death enters this narrative not just as a necessary index of the return of the footloose Jew, to "mortalize" the eternal wanderings of the eternal Jew, but equally as prelude to the messianic chapter that will begin with the resurrection. That is, in order to gain "Eternal Life," the "eternal Jew" must first die.¹² The journey was, like *galut* itself, a state of suspension; no one died or got sick on the voyage. It is only after their arrival that the physicality of their lives is allowed full expression.

Death itself becomes an affirmation, even a celebration, of the material world; for unlike the Golah, where a Jew is buried with a metonymic sack of earth from the Holy Land, these pilgrims have the privilege of being buried in the soil itself. Every rhetorical resource is marshaled for this final act. The collective appellation of the group changes from the mildly ironic mark of fraternization, *ha-nilbavim*, *anshei shloimeinu*—"our comrades" or "our comrades in peace"—to the highly charged *anshei ge'ulateinu*, "our redeemed brethren"; and the reference to their death is couched in maternal images of reincorporation:

"And so our redeemed brethren dwelled together within the Holy Congregation of the Holy City, joyously fulfilling the commandment to dwell in the Land of Israel; until their end came and they passed away, returning their souls unto Him to whom all souls belong, and leaving their bodies to the bosom of their mother; for they were found worthy to be buried in the soil of the Holy Land on the Mount of Olives at Jerusalem, facing the Temple of the Lord, at the feet of the Holy One, blessed be He; until the time comes for them to awaken to everlasting life, on the day of which it is written: 'And His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives.'"

(E 124; H 549; emphasis mine)

Once again, Eretz Yisrael is the motherland to which the physical evidence and remains of life are entrusted. The story of the wanderer who has no place, like the myth of the restless souls who have no burial and the vision of the dry bones rolling in the subterranean passages to their final destination, becomes rearticulated. Here the "Art of Cartography" reaches such a high level of correlation with the ground of which it is the measure that it briefly effects a cosmic realignment.

Hananiah, unlike his fellow travelers, "lived many long years," growing stronger by the year so that "when he was a hundred years old, he was like a lad of twenty" (that is, like a lad only in the fulfillment of the commandments and the performance of good deeds; E 124; H 549), exemplifying the folk version of the traditional blessing for longevity (*ad mea ke'esrim*). Hananiah is a patently artificial assemblage of the properties that accrued to the Messiah over centuries of Jewish folktales: his versatile kerchief originates in Talmudic stories of the messianic figure who binds his wounds among the beggars of Rome;¹³ his acts of repairation are among the few unadulterated instances of successful *tikkun* in Agnon's always-decomposing universe; and his longevity is of the kind reserved for saintly individuals identified with Moses.

The *na' va-nad*, the penitential wanderer who reappears from time to time in Agnon's fiction, performs an existential quest within the general context of exile.¹⁴ However, as an unblemished synthesis of the figures of wandering Jew, tzaddik, and messiah, Hananiah is an incarnation of the ideal type to which many of Agnon's protagonists aspire, as their stories aspire to scriptural status and as their reality refers back to an edenic past. The retrograde movement of romantic desire, the gesture of recovery or nostalgia for the past and for the messianic future that is its mirror image, saturates much of Agnon's prose with a kind of melancholy; it is redirected in this story into the linear trajectory of historical possibility. More than in his other pious or pseudo-pious tales, the story of miraculous delivery is here harmonized with or subsumed under the story of human agency. The dispersal of persons and of legends, represented by divine and human storytellers collaborating in fantastic narratives, gives way to a new dynamic of ingathering. Agnon achieves a kind of continuity by treating real geographical place as corroborating and incorporating the legendary and the fantastic rather than as disenchanted the imaginary. Though Hananiah and *anshei shloimeinu* operate within different geographical and temporal schemes, they all end up in that Jerusalem where the schemes collapse into one axis that realigns the upper and the lower spheres.

Agnon succeeds in redeeming not only such scorned archetypes as the Eternal Jew but also the spiritual pilgrimage itself from its fallen status in modern Jewish literature. If, as I have suggested, we read the two travel narratives by Abramovitch and Agnon as intertexts in a discourse in which a parodic pilgrimage rehabilitated becomes, by default, a "naive" tale of ascension, then *Bilav yamim* recovers the ur-text of which *Benjamin the Third* is the parody, or the epic that the earlier work mocks.¹⁵

That is, its own parodic subtexts are embraced in the grand sweep of incorporation. Within the competing itineraries that constitute the Jewish Journey, the circular route of the "losers" is supplanted by a triumphal linear movement crowned by arrival. The voyage is no longer impeded by the delays and digressions of endless deferral; even the associative discourse of storytelling, a discourse of infinite detours, takes place on but does not impede the journey itself. This is a voyage of consequence more radical than the arrival (and inevitable departure) of the pilgrim at the holy center. As Hananiah's journey proceeds, it is transformed from the random pattern of the peregrine (*na' va-naad*), through the circumambulation of the pilgrim (*'oleh regel*), to the unerring homing pattern of the "repatriate" (*'oleh*). The footloose Jew, the shlemiel, is transformed into a subject whose efforts are measured not only by his faith but also by the concrete results of his actions.

KINUS: INGATHERING OF THE STORIES

It became evident to many writers as the nineteenth century drew to a close that a whole treasury of stories and folktales was being jeopardized in the intoxicating moment of collective redefinition. As the map comes closer than ever before to approximating the territory it represents, acts recuperating mythic geographies reflect both an urgency and a profound ambiguity. On the road for so many centuries, the Jews had created a wealth of literary signposts and simulacra. Now the road and the languages were shifting to accommodate a new enterprise that, like a Borges narrative, would conflate the highways and the story lines, the visible and invisible structures, of a reinvented Jewish civilization. If the Jews had perfected over the centuries what Georges Van Den Abbeele calls the "topological theories of language in which the utterance becomes a question of choosing the right 'route,'" they were now discovering, belatedly, the form of "travel [that] requires the ability to 'read' a map."¹⁶ The challenge would be to avoid the temptation to stretch the territory so that it coincided exactly with the map.

Shmuel Werses has traced the language of Agnon's *milbavim* to sources both in the Mishnah and in the travel narratives of the Middle Ages and the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries. The mishnaic literature of pilgrimage, with its emphasis on the round-trip dynamic of cultic acts such as the three-day trip from Jaffa to Jerusalem and back, and the aggadic incorporation of underground caves, the Ten Tribes, and the Sambatyon River provide the quasi-historical and quasi-mythological cartographic

elements in this approach to the Holy Land. The medieval and early modern texts supply prototypes for the infinitely expandable episodic structure, for the delays and impediments arising from inimical natural or human sources, for the uneven calibration—contraction and expansion—of time and topography, and for the ethnographically inspired encounters with scattered Jewish communities (encounters whose anachronism in this text lend them some levity).¹⁷ The projection of utopian spaces into the recounting of the (often uncomfortable) daily routine of travel furnishes the narrative with a point of ultimate reference much like that which a specific destination furnishes the process of navigation.¹⁸

But the most radical change in the diasporic orientation to the physical world finds its expression in a *metamorphic* landscape that replaces both metaphor and metonymy. The language of miracles in *Biblav yamim* fulfills in its hypostases the incomplete process we traced in the poetry of Yehuda Halevi, which became more intense and more substantial as he drew closer to the shores of the beloved country. It may also signify a dimension of the revolutionary shift in the relation of fictional and actual worlds. The Hebrew literature emerging both in Europe at the turn of the century and in the Yishuv of the early twentieth century was conceived by its writers and readers as an autonomous enterprise, but what came to be called the Hebrew "republic of letters" also had a constitutive role in creating a material culture;¹⁹ this is what makes Hebrew literature such an interesting example of the links between modernism and nationalism. Herzl's "if you will it, it is not a dream," the emblem of the Zionist emergence from the "dream-state" of the aggadically minded, reflects a cultural challenge of the highest order. Those forms of the Jewish imagination that were inherently nonrevolutionary because they were, in some fundamental sense, nonreferential are being mobilized to perform a revolutionary task; "*will*," the fuel that empowers the imagination, is meant eventually to supersede it.

Benjamin Harshav observes of the European diasporic culture at the end of the nineteenth century: "In their everyday awareness—as Jews—they were connected to a *universe of discourse*, a 'fictional world' outside of history and geography, based on a library of texts and their interpretations. . . . Hence the centrality of discourse (rather than love of the land) for their self-understanding. When this universe of discourse lost its moorings . . . the anchoring of a universe of discourse vis-à-vis the 'real,' historical world became the most important existential question for any alternative, any mode of Jewish culture, and for every individual."²⁰ In the analysis of the crucial relation of text to territory that

is our explicit theme, this argument may have been overstated, even if it has been the guiding wisdom for at least two generations of scholars. But it provides a useful transition to a very different epistemology. Like the journey itself, this development appeared to be one-way: Robert Alter writes that only "after writers had succeeded in creating an 'as if' reality in Hebrew" had certain prerequisites of consciousness been met that would facilitate the construction of an "actual Hebrew reality," with all its concomitant physical and social structures in the "real geography of this world."²¹ But the logic that guided the movement of modern Hebrew literature toward referentiality a century ago eventually will prove to have been only one phase in an *ongoing* dialectic; as our own century wanes, new reconstructions of diasporic culture privilege speech acts and texts once again. That was hardly foreseeable, however, at the moment of revolutionary fervor we are now examining.

The role played by the *kinus*, or collection of traditional literary material, as a proleptic act of the ingathering of the people is an important component in the construction of the republic of letters.²² The neoromantic incorporation of mythic and folk elements into Hebrew poetry and prose beginning at the end of the nineteenth century will eventually signal a more complex encounter with the past. Within the space of a few years, H. N. Bialik begins working with Y. H. Ravitzki to compile aggadic folklore in what will become *Sefer ha-aggada*; Martin Buber launches a lifelong engagement in the translation, interpretation, and adaptation of tales of the Hassidic masters; and Mikha Yosef Berdichevski collects and publishes Hassidic and aggadic legends in German, Hebrew, and Yiddish. I. L. Peretz, whose cultural appeal is to the secularizing, modernizing Jew in Poland, begins incorporating folk motifs, particularly Hassidic and Kabbalistic elements, into his fiction.²³ Sh. Ansky, the former Narodnik revolutionary, spends his last decades gathering "ethnographic" fragments of the Jewish spirit to be placed in a museum dedicated to the renewal of Jewish creativity.²⁴ The process as a whole, like acts of literary recuperation in the creation of modern national cultures generally (especially in older civilizations such as those of Greece and Ireland), involves both collecting and reinventing folk traditions.²⁵

This phenomenon is articulated in all its complexity in the fiction of S. Y. Agnon. Jewish writers of the turn of the century, depending on how radically they separated from the past, felt varying degrees of guilt and nostalgia as well as revulsion and denial, expressed as much in acts of suppression as in acts of rescue; for some the encounter with the past generated and for others it impeded their own creative enterprise.²⁶ In

the case of Agnon, who began the project of compiling the "corpus ha-sidicum" with Buber in the early twenties but abandoned it in 1924, when the fire that destroyed his Homburg home destroyed the nearly completed volume, some of the conservationist impulse was rechanneled into his fictions, most saliently into those that acquired the status of pious or pseudo-pious folktales.²⁷

In *Bilvav yamim*, Agnon adds a new dynamic to the intertextuality that had become, in its many forms, a means of rescuing the endangered past. The delusory authority of the pseudo-scientific, semimythical sources that clouded the cognitive faculties of Benjamin the Third, not unlike the romances that had clouded Don Quixote's vision, are reinvested with authority as a revalorized wellspring of Jewish spirituality. The wealth of legendary material from biblical, Talmudic, and medieval literature that appears in this novella as strands woven into a tale of both miraculous and mundane travel to the Holy Land recapitulates the Journey that is Exile and the stories gathered along the way—including Agnon's own earlier narratives. The stories, sometimes recounted by Shmuel Yosef the storyteller, sometimes incorporated into the visual experience of the pilgrims as mindramas enacted along the way, are conjured from the deepest layers of the collective consciousness.²⁸

At what was to prove the midpoint in Agnon's career, the act of recasting, through a kind of grace, elements and characters from his own stories may be as significant as the grounding of the metaphorical and aggadic imagination. The intricate ways in which he incorporates earlier figures, or their descendants, from his fictions into a given narrative contribute to the sense that he is writing the ongoing epic of an entire civilization; we see this even in his last writings, when the horrible prophecy about the future of the Jewish people from the novel *Ore'ah nata la-lan* [A Guest for the Night], made on the eve of World War II, is recorded as *fact* in the postwar, posthumously published story "Kisui ha-dam" [Covering the Blood].²⁹ The strategy, which often highlights continuities, also underscores ironies in the intergenerational unfolding of the drama of Jewish life. *A mitnaged* in one story ("Ha-nidah" [The Ourcast]) gives birth to one who appears in *Bilvav yamim* as a Hassid. The "kerchief" that will be recycled in *Bilvav yamim* appears not only in the story by that name ("Ha-mitpahat") but also in the early story "Agunot" [Abandoned Wives] (1908) that gave the writer his own name. From that short narrative, the first of many in which a heedless human act creates a cosmic rift that leads lost souls to wander throughout life seeking to make amends, the image of a penitent rabbi floating aimlessly on the great seas

on a *kerchief*, seeking to redeem 'agunot, is reincorporated in *Bilvav yamim* in the figure of Hananiah—whose direction is clear and who succeeds in fulfilling those tasks the rabbi only set out to perform.

The ontological fluidity of characters who appear here and there in previous fictions as they vacillate between aggadic landscapes and real geographies establishes the kind of "discursive unity" defined by Thomas Pavel as inherent in the open (or openly negotiated) boundaries between fiction and nonfiction "from an internal point of view": "In *War and Peace* is Natasha less actual than Napoleon? . . . Fictional texts enjoy a certain discursive unity; for their readers, the worlds they describe are not necessarily fractured along a fictive/actual line."³⁰ Here, too, Hananiah is no less "actual" than Napoleon or, for that matter, than "Shmuel Yosef."

The poignancy of ingathering the scriptural and aggadic sources along with the community who preserved them, and of incorporating the writer's own earlier work, climaxes in the final chapters when the biblical verses are not only invoked but *repatriated*. Having finally reached the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, the group of pilgrims recites the Song of Songs and "Rabbi Moshe lean[s] his head against the wall and remember[s] that he [is] standing at a spot from which the Divine presence itself had never moved." In this reconsecrated sacred center he recites the very verses—"The King hath brought me into his chambers" (Song of Songs 1:4)—that his brother Gershon had begun to recite (in another place and another story) at the moment of his death.³¹ But unlike his brother, Rabbi Moshe is able to complete the verse as "the joy of the Land of Israel" fills him. Agnon here presents another resolution to his own narrative dilemma (which is, after all, the dilemma of exile), rewriting his own story in the moment of grace, with the end in sight (E 116; H 545). There may be no more powerful confluence of text and territory, or absorption of text *in* territory, in all of modern Hebrew literature.

Throughout his long writing career, Agnon's peculiar and often elusive synthesis of (or vacillation between) poetic alternatives endeared him both to traditionalists, who regarded him as a scribe of orthodox civilization and Hassidic folklore, and to modernists, who hailed him as Kafka's Hebrew voice representing lonely individuals lost in an absurd universe. Agnon's fictions provide unique and daring examples of the recombination of modes of prophetic writing that enter as fragments into the universe of authority within which the modern poet operates. By assuming a prophetic modality, the author makes possible a selective, self-

conscious anachronism in retrieving poetic options from the ruins of past (or passing) traditions.

Comparative studies of Abramovitsh and Agnon usually attribute the difference in tone to the satiric agenda of the one and the recuperative or even romantic enterprise of the other. Abramovitsh, in any event, is living through the revolutionary moment of Hebrew (and Yiddish) creation while Agnon, whose youth corresponds with Abramovitsh's last decades, is witness to and participant in the accomplished revolution, followed by the denial and then the destruction of the Eastern European culture of origin. Regardless of a writer's particular agenda, nostalgia succeeded by a deep pessimism are natural stages in the long period of mourning over the violent death of a community. In the narrative that we have been considering, the romantic/nostalgic attitude toward a past that has been largely disinherited but not yet destroyed is manifest in characters like Hananiah and in the tales of piety and its reward. Just a few years later—on the very eve of World War II, as the struggle for material survival becomes paramount—little trace of the mythical remains in a text like *A Guest for the Night* (1939). Tropes that recur in Agnon's narratives, such as the ketchief in *Bilvav yamim*, are neither personal nor entirely public but rather *rescued* figures; as the reality of Jewish life becomes more harsh, the rescue efforts become more desperate and unconventional. The metonymic key that would have opened the doors to innumerable, replicable houses of prayer and endless stories in the European Diaspora is saved at the last minute and brought "back" to the Land of Israel in the baggage of the narrator of *A Guest for the Night*, returning from his decimated and soon-to-be-eradicated hometown in Galicia.³² It is as strong an acknowledgment of the death throes of a form of Jewish imagination as any we will encounter.

MUCH LATER: JUST YESTERDAY

Under the shadow of genocide, the tales of pious pilgrimage and arrival undergo a kind of self-mutilation that comes increasingly to characterize the writing of Agnon's last decades: *Tmol shilshom* [Just Yesterday], written during the war years and published in 1945 but set in the Second Aliyah period (1905–14), begins, as does *Bilvav yamim*, in a promissory language that could become either epic or mock-epic.

The novel opens with a highly conventionalized representation of modern rites of ascent in which the biblical allusions can be read as either

authenticating or undermining (by their very seniority) the Zionist vocabulary: "Like the rest of our brethren, candidates for redemption, sons of the Second Aliyah, Yitzhak Kummer left his land and his native home (*artzot* . . . *u-moladeto*) and his city and went up to Eretz Yisrael to rebuild it from its ruins and to be rebuilt in it."³³ Kummer's youth has been spent yearning for the Holy Land; his vision of the Land is condensed into a string of biblical verbs enacted by disembodied automatons, as if the Scriptures could be somehow literalized without human agency: these generic figures sow and plant and reap during the daytime and sit under vine and fig tree by evening (p. 7). Kummer's daydreaming impairs his judgment in the family business to such an extent that his father decides to send him to Palestine "so that he may see with his own eyes that the whole Eretz Yisrael business is a fiction (*davar badui hu*) that was invented by the Zionists and so that he will rid his heart of it" (p. 9). Yitzhak never returns, suggesting once again that Eretz Yisrael is not only not a fiction or a dream but is in fact *so real* that it kills him.

As a down-to-earth transfiguration of Hananiah the pilgrim,³⁴ this dream-intoxicated Yitzhak should have been entitled to at least minimal attention from the heavenly spheres. But it is stated quite explicitly that "no miracle was performed" (p. 100); the money for the journey had to be borrowed—at a hefty interest rate—and the journey itself had to be endured with no mediation from higher quarters. It becomes clear, in the context of the divine summons and the theodicy that suffuse the master narratives of Israel's wanderings and Agnon's own pilgrimage narratives, that Yitzhak Kummer's story takes place in a *disenchanted* world. Indeed, the book has often been read as acerbic social commentary.³⁵ But circular movement takes on particular poignancy when the venue is Jerusalem, a poignancy that may be the most disruptive aspect of this story of thwarted pilgrimage to and thwarted settlement in Eretz Yisrael. The subverted expectations of utopian or messianic salvation are represented in the aimless and hopeless wanderings through the Holy City of the mad dog Balak in an era that is described as having the face of a dog. The most desperate gesture of all is the re-creation of exilic circumstance within the utopian space where exile was to have been resolved.³⁶

Even though only twelve years separate the publication of the one text from the other, and at least one chapter of *Tmol shilshom* was written during the same period as *Bilvav yamim*,³⁷ the tension between the world of faith inhabited by Hananiah and the pragmatic world of the *nilbavim*—maintained throughout the sixty-five-page novella and resolved largely in Hananiah's favor—could hardly have been sustained over the course

of an entire novel, particularly a novel written during World War II.³⁸ Incompatibility between the kind of epic perspective that includes an unmediated proximity to the Divine and the modernist novel, between divinely authorized and self-authored texts, leads to a tension that we have already identified as running throughout much of Agnon's work. But a more radical interpretation of forms of closure and the relation of parts to the whole should be offered: a text like *Bilvav yamim* should, I submit, only be read in light of its conclusion and can therefore hardly be represented synecdochically in any of its parts—precisely because any fragment would naturally invoke the convention of the Jewish journey toward an endlessly deferred end. It is, therefore, *arrival itself* that recontextualizes the entire journey, not only giving it a particularly topical, contemporary twist but reframing the entire narrative of exile and return.

A FRAGMENT FOR FRANZ

The issue of framing the narrative is dramatized by the publishing history of the text, which demonstrates that, as we saw in the case of *Berjamin the Third*, changing contexts evoke entirely different interpretations. The first known appearance of *Bilvav yamim* is as a fragment consisting of eleven handwritten lines sent to Franz Rosenzweig, part of the 1926 "gift-text" (*Die Gabe*) to which Buber, Scholem, and others also contributed in honor of the ailing philosopher's fortieth birthday.³⁹ In its entirety, the collective tribute to Rosenzweig affords a glimpse into the rich and varied spiritual life of the far-flung Jews of the interbellum period. Anne Golomb Hoffman refers to the fragment in concluding her poststructuralist interpretation of Agnon's fiction. She considers it briefly as conveying a peculiar kind of hermeticism:

Unlike virtually every other gift offering in the collection, Agnon's is enclosed within itself; the simple presence of its Hebrew script appears to lack external reference beyond its opening dedication and its closing signature with place and date of writing: "The old city of Jerusalem, may it be built and established, *Vayechi*, 5687 S. Y. Agnon." . . . This signature is a small text of its own that invokes the temporal scheme of redemption. It sums up the identity of the writer by joining his name to the restoration of a Jerusalem that is as much the heavenly *Yerushalayim shel ma'alah*, as it is the writer's earthly dwelling place.⁴⁰

In its fragmented, or what I would call its *precontextualized*, state, this passage does seem to conform to the diasporic "temporal scheme of re-

demption" encapsulated in the signature. That Agnon sends his little text back across the seas to Germany from that heavenly/earthly dwelling place, from the place to which the pilgrims in the text are migrating, bears less significance in Hoffman's scheme than the journey through what she calls "the text that is reading" itself.⁴¹

But it is worth taking a close look at the passage in light of its subsequent history. The lines that Agnon chose as his offering to Rosenzweig describe a ship sailing on calm seas while the passengers engage in reading psalms, followed by other verses from the Bible:

A man is driven from home, and wanders to distant places; he opens his sack and removes a vessel that he had used at home with his wife and children— How he rejoices in this vessel! All the more so with a book, which he would read, study, and pore over. There is not one word in it that he has not uttered a hundred times or more, each time finding new meanings, new connotations. Instantly, his face lights up, his eyes well up with tears, and his voice quivers within his throat. This may be likened to a man exiled, who on his journey encounters dear friends who greet him with embraces, hugging and kissing him; he rejoices in them as they rejoice in him; and when he speaks his speech emerges choked from the tears and the joy of finding his friends who now accompany him. So they would sit with their books in hand reading in the Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the Writings. The holy city of Jerusalem, may it be built and established, Vayechi, 5687 [1926] S. Y. Agnon.⁴²

Hoffman's argument that the journey to the Land of Israel is actually "displaced by the metaphors of reading" embedded in this passage is meant to substantiate her claim that "for Agnon, the direction through the text remains the primary journey" and that "any place outside the text of Scripture is, in effect, an exile, from which one returns through the act of reading." It is this movement she sees as "ceaselessly acted out in Agnon's writing"; sacred space continues to be conflated with text *even as* the drama of return unfolds in the text itself. In an evocative chapter, Hoffman argues that both "Edmond Jabès and S. Y. Agnon are 'autochthons of the Book' in Jacques Derrida's phrase, [that is, they] take their identity as writers from the rootedness of the Jews, displaced people, in the Book."⁴³ That claim is further supported by the aborted journey of the gift-text itself, which was sent to Palestine from Germany after Rosenzweig's death along with the rest of his library on a ship that was waylaid and arrived instead in Tunis; the manuscript bound for Palestine then made its way to the Leo Baeck Institute in New York.

Although both reading and writing as acts of reappropriating and re-

arranging the sacred sources are major gestures toward homecoming, re-enforced in the published version of our story by the image of Hananiah skimming the waves on his kerchief while *reading a book*, this argument overlooks the tensions inherent in Agnon's writing (and his profound doubts about the enterprise of writing itself); more specifically, it fails to take account of the unique *resolution* of those tensions in the full text of *Bilvav yamim*. But the approach may well be justified as a reading of the *fragment* itself, contextualized only as a loose leaf in a volume of disparate writings.

Only seven years after the fragment appeared, the entire narrative was published in Berlin in *Sefer Bialik*, the anthology that honored Bialik's sixtieth birthday. The earliest known mention of this story, outside of the fragment sent to Rosenzweig, is in a letter written by Agnon to his publisher S. Z. Schocken in 1931, referring to the manuscript-in-progress as "among the best of my stories."⁴⁴ What is interesting here, for our purposes, is that only the first eight lines of the passage in *Die Gabe* appear in the published versions of the story. In Agnon's gift offering, which may be read in its precontextualized form as a significant gesture toward Rosenzweig, the man who had so forcefully reconceptualized the idea of *galut* as a viable spiritual condition, the destination of the trip is not specified; were it not for the title that Agnon appended to this passage—"On the Way to the Land of Israel: A Few Lines from My Story 'In the Heart of the Seas'"—it could appear to be simply another of the endless journeys of a people in exile. The redundant images of banishment, the very doubling of exile in the compounded simile or *masbal*, without teleological reference ("a man is driven from his home . . ."; "this may be likened to a man exiled . . ."), which are then expunged from the various published editions of the story, prepare the ground for interpreting the passage as an instance of aimless wandering against which only reading can provide refuge and linear structure.

What is missing, then, in this early fragment of the story, and in a view of it as an expatriate or a synecdoche of the larger narrative that is exile, is precisely the ecstasy of arrival offered in the final chapters of *Bilvav yamim*. Its counterpart in *Tmol shilshom* is the despair of the unrealized dream; but arrival here not only provides closure for what Gustav Krojanker calls the "journey of a people in its eternal road toward the desired object, the harvest of its faith," but also points to something outside of or beyond what Hoffman calls the "capacity of language to evoke a variety of meanings simultaneously, summoning up sources and

subjecting them to a playfulness that both negates and affirms their prior references."⁴⁵ In 1926, when he presumably began writing the story, Agnon himself had just resettled in Jerusalem after a sojourn of eleven years in Germany; by 1934, when the story was published, many of the ambiguities in the text had hardened into a one-way voyage with a nostalgic gaze at the past, demonstrating that the polyphony and playfulness that are the prerogative of the diasporic text have given way, for the moment at least, to fixed meanings and clear forms of closure. In a universe in which men travel and women wait, in which the return to wife describes a circular motion or a round-trip, the redemption of 'agunot, of the women whose men are lost and whose narratives have no direction, also in effect resurrects the linearity of the journey and the narrative.

By focusing exclusively on texts and the soteriological act of writing, Hoffman downgrades contexts in Agnon's fictions and the tension between them, as if she would place him in the company of the exiles in the desert or with the inhabitants of the house that exists primarily as a *bayit* in a poem.⁴⁶ But the published version of *In the Heart of the Seas* ends with an admonition that can also be taken as a hermeneutic clue, as self-reflexive or "hermetic" readings are relegated to a distinctly inferior position in the spectrum of possible readers' responses: "Some will read my book as a man reads legends, while others will read it and derive benefit for themselves. With regard to the former I quote the words of the book of Proverbs; 'But a good word maketh the heart glad'; a good word maketh the soul to rejoice and delivereth from care. But of the latter I say in the words of the Psalmist: 'But those who wait for [lit., "hope for" or "trust in"] the Lord, they shall inherit the land'" (E 126; H 550).

If the religious pilgrimage is inherently a round-trip to the Center and back, and if the messianic trip is inherently deferred, then the religious Zionist trip is inherently a one-way trip with a destination that revalorizes the material world and the referential vis-à-vis the sacred. Even the short paragraph quoted is textured and authorized by scriptural references; yet the preferred second reading is that which points beyond the text: "A good word maketh the heart glad" and sustains the Jews throughout their years of exile, but those who "will read it and derive benefit for themselves" will inherit the earth. "Benefit for themselves" (*to'élet le-'atzmam*), a phrase with a curiously pragmatic resonance, locates the fictive text in both a didactic or utopian/messianic and a referential space; the promise of reward for the faithful in the form of territorial inheritance (*ve-kovei ha-schem hema yirshu aretz*) is implicitly

withdrawn from its deferred eschatological context (that is, to judge by Hananiah's fate, the "waiting period" is over) and inserted into a new political and ideological semantic. The whimsical or ironic interweaving of the political/historical and the legendary/pious, making the utopian novel a unique forerunner of magical realism in the Hebrew narrative, boldly manipulates the given archetypes of the Jewish journey to incorporate them into the space of historical possibility.

Where irony is withdrawn, such acts resemble sacraments more than self-reflexive fictions; and, as we saw in the poetry of Yehuda Halevi, the oscillation between the two possibilities illuminates the proximity of the symbolic and the sacramental as alternative modes of approaching holiness. Just as one can make an argument for return *through* the text, so one can argue for the repatriation of the text. The story "Tehila," published some ten years before *Bilvav yamin*, is similarly a pseudo-pious folktale with a saintly figure at its center. It is set in the Mandate period, and though much of the story wends its way through the Old City of Jerusalem, it is global in its reference. Positioned at the Wailing Wall, the very *axis mundi*, the narrator invokes HA-makom (Place) in all its possibility and paradox: "From Jaffa Gate as far as the Western Wall, men and women from all the communities of Jerusalem moved in a steady stream, together with those newcomers whom The Place had restored to their place, although they had not yet found their place" (*she-heviam ha-makom limekomam va-'adayin lo matzu et mekomam*).⁴⁷ There is a ritual aspect to this passage and to the story as a whole, as if a rite of reconsecration were being performed by the community of the faithful after an absence of many years—a repossession that would realign the vertical planes to include iconographic space. "The irruption of the sacred does not only project a fixed point into the formless fluidity of profane space, a center into chaos," writes Mircea Eliade; "it also effects a break in plane, that is, it opens communication between the cosmic planes (between earth and heaven) and makes possible ontological passage from one mode of being to another."⁴⁸ The eponymous Tehila, who inhabits a place that is both of and between spaces (Jerusalem and Galicia) and spiritual planes (the Old City of Jerusalem and the ancient cemetery on the Mount of Olives), carries to her grave the "letter" (the story itself) that repairs an act of sundering that took place nearly a century before and many thousands of miles away. Reparation here consists of quite literally grounding the text in sacred soil.⁴⁹

An ancient journey that had begun "in the heart of the seas" when

the prophet Jonah floated the verse that would carry him to dry dock (2:4), and that moved through the last documented poem of Yehuda Halevi, written aboard a ship in Alexandria waiting to depart for the Holy Land through "the heart of the seas," comes to its epic and pragmatic conclusion in Agnon's story by that name. Those who "read it and derive benefit for themselves" are admonished to go beyond the "good word" to "inherit the land," delivered from the "heart of the seas" (*bilvav yamim*) unto a place that might be designated as the "heart of days" (*bilvav yamim*), the quotidian. Such a resolution was temporary, as we have seen, undermined in Agnon's own work in the postwar period by a despair nearly as great as the hope that had animated triumphal forms of closure; the dark shadow of dystopia always accompanies utopia.

But my argument, that the narratives of arrival refuse the diasporic comfort of exile in the word or repatriation in the text, does not account for the absolutely literary quality of the enterprise, the consummation of a form that had sought and resisted closure for so many centuries. The text at hand is a flawless exemplum of an aesthetics of perfection and a remarkable enactment of messianism in historical time. It does more than explicitly perform the master narrative of the Zionist century, for it proceeds by incorporating and superseding its own subversive subtexts. The writer who "finds" and "relates" the story becomes its first commentator. It is not only arrival but death on holy soil that grants the closure that the narrative of exile lacked, making the language of the real even more absorbent. The return that is death achieves perfection of form as it renders the past perfect and the future perfect. This most aesthetic gesture lives not in the "text" but in the book, which has become a kind of sacrament, its verses no longer substituting for but grounded or literally incorporated in the soil. Of course soil that is so consecrated can hardly be abandoned or negotiated. It demonstrates both the seduction and the danger of literalizing the word and abolishing metaphor from the new republic. The truncated verse from Song of Songs reaches completion at the Wailing Wall, at the very "spot from which the Divine presence itself had never moved"; Tehila's letter buried in the ground of the Mount of Olives, like Bar Kokhba's letters exhumed from the ground, contains characters that insist on traveling between and therefore canceling out the boundaries that partition this world from all the others.

By Train, by Ship, by Subway

Sholem Aleichem and the American Voyage of Self-Invention

The Jewish journey, as we've traced it from the end of the nineteenth century, assumes two alternative and dialectically related poetic forms. When the primary epic is articulated as a pattern of "return" (*shivat Zion*), its reference is to the earliest, sacred memory-places and pilgrimage narratives and to a vision of their reinscription in "political time"—a downscaled version of messianic time. Its parody, the picaresque voyage, though ostensibly linear, is episodic in form and circular in direction. Mired in the stagnancy of *galut* culture, but propelled by the skepticism of a return to the profane point of departure and the reflexive aesthetic of the romance, it issues in an implicit rejection of any utopian or epic resolution.

Mass migration westward from the homelands of Eastern Europe issued in another paradigm. As a kind of sanguine rewrite of both the epic, utopian and the anti-epic, satiric narrative of Israel's sojourn among the nations, it constitutes a third, non-epic model. The quotidian in this model is neither redeemed nor purgatorial time, but simply the time of our lives; neither time fulfilled nor time suspended, but time spent; neither Zion nor Galut but Diaspora. Although examples of the journey to (and in) America abound, and many of the writers from the "other Europe" have celebrated the haven they found there over a century of mass immigration,¹ it is Sholem Aleichem's last, unfinished novel, *Motl Peyse dem Khazns* [Motl the Cantor's Son], that comes from the same workshop

3. IN THE HEART OF THE SEAS: S. Y. AGNON AND THE EPIC OF RETURN

1. One of the earliest studies of Agnon in English, Arnold Band's *Nostalgia and Nightmare: A Study in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), captured the spectrum of Agnon's imagination during the author's lifetime as a constant swing between the extremes of the innocent, nostalgic, or mythic and the absurd, grotesque, Kafkaesque—even before some of his darker, posthumous writings had come to light. Contemporary readings sensitive to the ironic possibilities latent even in "mythic" or innocent stories such as the one before us somewhat refine this sharp dichotomy.

2. S. Y. Agnon, *In the Heart of the Seas: A Story of a Journey to the Land of Israel*, tr. I. M. Lask (New York: Schocken Books, 1947), p. 7. All subsequent references in the text to page numbers, cited parenthetically as E, are from this English edition. *Bilvav yamim: sippur aggadah shel S. Y. Agnon*, from the cycle "Sipurim shel Eretz Yisrael" [Stories from the Land of Israel] is collected in the volume *Elu ve-elu* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1971); all references to the Hebrew text, cited parenthetically as H, are to this edition unless otherwise specified. *Bilvav yamim* was first published in Hebrew in *Sefer Bialik* (Tel Aviv: Va'ad ha-Yovel, 1934) and separately by Schocken (Berlin, 1935).

3. Hananiah's kerchief, in which "all his worldly goods were tied up" (along with some of his other-worldly properties), is believed to have imparted its magical powers to the Emperor Napoleon, who "saw it and made a flag out of it and was victorious in his wars." But, the narrator hastens to add, "that is not the truth either, since, when Hananiah had passed away, they covered his eyes with his kerchief" (E. 125; H. 50). Whatever the "truth" may be, this allusion reinforces the dating of the represented events to the beginning of the eighteenth century, as Napoleon enters the story when Hananiah is already a centenarian.

4. The group leaves from Buczac, Agnon's hometown. There is, however, little evidence of any pilgrimage of Hassidim from Buczac at that time. A veiled allusion to R. Nahman of Bratzlav, who had come on pilgrimage and managed to flee Palestine on the eve of Napoleon's siege of Jaffa (1798-99), is reinforced by Hillel Zeitlin's claim that one of the subtexts of *Bilvav yamim* is the travelogue written by R. Nahman's faithful student and scribe, R. Natan from Nemirov. Cited in Shmuel Werses, *Sipur ve-shorsho: 'iyunim be-hitpatrut ha-prosa ha-ivrit* [Story and Source: Studies in the Development of Hebrew Prose] (Ramat Gan: Massada, 1971), p. 203. Werses, on the basis of other internal evidence, argues that the narrative spans the years from 1825 to 1835, but he calls attention to the anachronisms that interrupt the natural chronological flow of events (pp. 209-10). An English translation of Martin Buber's retelling of the story, "Rabbi Nachman's Journey to Palestine," concludes Buber's *Tales of Rabbi Nachman*, tr. Maurice Friedman and Stanley Goodman (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1988), pp. 179-214.

On the subject of autobiographical elements in Agnon's writing, see my essay "Agnon Before and After," *Prooftexts* 2, no. 1 (January 1982): 78-94, and Anne Golomb Hoffman, *Between Exile and Return: S. Y. Agnon and the Drama of Writing* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), chap. 4.

5. Gérard Genette finds heterodiegetic autobiography in Borges's writings, notably his "Epilogo." Genette, "Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative," *Poetics Today* 11, no. 4 (winter 1990): 765-66.

6. What I identify as the homodiegetic mode appears in Agnon's writings from "Tehila" (1925) through *Ore'ah nata la-lan* [A Guest for the Night] (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1939) to posthumously published narratives like "Kisuf ha-dam" [Covering the Blood] (1975), in *Lifnim mim ha-homa* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1975), pp. 51-104. See also "Tale of a Scribe" [Aggadot ha-sofer], in *Twenty-One Stories*, ed. Nahum Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), pp. 7-25, and "Im kenisat ha-yom" [At the Outset of the Day], in *Ad hena* [This Far] (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1974), pp. 171-77.

7. Robert Alter, *Hebrew and Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 73. See also the work of Mikhail Bakhtin on novelistic thinking, especially *The Dialogic Imagination*.

8. Nancy Huston, "Novels and Navels," *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 4 (summer 1995): 716. For a discussion of wife as the de-erotized emblem of home and of "other women" as the detours, the seductresses that distract the man on his travels, see Georges Van Den Abeele, *Travel as Metaphor: From Montaigne to Rousseau* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. xxv-xxvi, 96-98.

9. The satiric subtext for Hananiah's act is the Yiddish spoof on Hassidic miracles: "Kum aher du Philosof" [Come Here, Mr. Philosopher] is a popular song describing a rebbe who spreads his kerchief and travels over the ocean. I am grateful to Chana Kronfeld for bringing this to my attention. Reading Agnon through his own bilingual context, which embraces the secular iconoclastic strand in both Yiddish folk literature and Yiddish modernism, reveals an implied ironic subculture against which the norms of this text are struggling.

10. For a Yiddish representation of the "Eternal Jew" early in this century, see David Pinsky, "Der Eybiker Yid: Tragedya in eyn akt" [The Eternal Jew: Tragedy in One Act], in *Meshihim* (Warsaw: Fatlag Ch. Brzoza, 1906), pp. 4-36.

11. Hillel Barzel, introduction to *Shmuel Yosef Agnon: Mi'uhar ma'amarim 'al yetzirato*, ed. Hillel Barzel (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1982), p. 78. See also Gustav Krojanker, *Yetzirato shel Shai Agnon* [The Work of S. Y. Agnon], tr. Jacob Gotschalk (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1991), pp. 125-31.

12. Agnon's more conventional, or folkloric, representation of this theme can be found in the short story "Ma'agelei tzeddek," which narrates the last years of a poor vinegar maker who pursues his miserable trade in "one of the towns of Poland." He is transported in his moribund state by a Christ figure/band of angels directly to the Walling Wall: "That night a knocking was heard upon the door of the Kotel in Jerusalem. Those who went outdoors saw a flight of angels which had come from the exile bearing a mortal form, which that very night they took and buried, in keeping with the custom in Jerusalem not to hold over the dead." Published in *Elu ve-elu*, pp. 283-87, it is translated by Amiel Gurt as "Paths of Righteousness, or the Vinegar Maker," in *A Book That Was Lost and Other Stories*, ed. Alan Mintz and Anne Golomb Hoffman (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), p. 197.

See again Buber's "Rabbi Nachman's Journey to Palestine," one of the pos-

sible subtexts of Agnon's narrative, especially the reference to the tomb that "achieves its perfect form" in the land of Israel; as the site of the "resurrection of the dead," it alone is "the place of perfect burial" (p. 208).

13. Sanhedrin, 98a. Critics including Dov Sadan, Hillel Barzel, and Arnold Band have noted the coincidence of the composition of *Bilvav yamim* and the short story "Ha-mitpahat" [The Kerchief] in the early 1930s, as well as other Agnon narratives in which the kerchief appears as a central metonymy. Dov Sadan, "Ma'aseh mitpahat" [On Kerchiefs], in *'Al Shai Agnon* (Tel Aviv: Ha kibbutz ha-me'uhad, 1959), pp. 65-73; Barzel, introduction to *Shmuel Yosef Agnon*, pp. 77-78; Arnold J. Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare: A Study in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 224, 227.

To reinforce our own intertextual journey, I could cite a report in the *Itinerary* of Benjamin of Tudela of a contender for the messianic title, David Alro'i, who lived in Kurdistan and actually endangered the entire Jewish community there with his defiance of the reigning authorities some dozen years before Benjamin's visit; he is said to have miraculously escaped several tight spots, once removing his mantle and spreading it "on the face of the water to cross thereon" (Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, ed. and tr. A. Asher [New York: Hakeshet Publishing, 1841], vol. 1, pp. 79 [Hebrew] and 55 [English]).

14. From the rabbi in "Agunot" through Menashe Haim in "Ve-haya he'akov le-mishor" [And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight] and Yudel Hasid in *Hakhnasat kallah* [The Bridal Canopy], the *na' va-nad*, or wanderer who is not a pilgrim, describes a kind of penitential arc in space. This movement can be also traced in the Yiddish fiction of both Isaac Bashevis Singer and his elder brother, Israel Joshua Singer. See I. J. Singer's *Yoshe Kalb* (1932) and Anita Norich's commentary on it in *The Homeless Imagination in the Fiction of Israel Joshua Singer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 19-39. For a discussion of I. B. Singer, see chapter 8.

15. The opening passage of *Bilvav yamim*, for instance, can be seen as a revisionary performance of the opening of *Benjamin the Third*.

16. Abbeele, *Travel as Metaphor*, p. xx.

17. For a full discussion of Agnon's sources, see Werses, *Sipur ve-shors'ho*, pp. 221-33. The geography of the voyage from Galicia to Jaffa through Moldavia and Turkey is as accurate as the geography in *The Travels of Benjamin the Third* is imaginary.

18. In a hostel in Istanbul, for example, the pilgrims meet a Sephardic emissary who unrolls before them the mystical geography of Jerusalem, Safed, Tiberias, and Meron (E 84-88; H 527-28).

19. For a discussion of the Hebrew "republic of letters," see Dan Miron, *Bodedim be-mo'adam: le-diyukana shel ha-republika ha-sifrutit ha-ivrit be-tehilat ha-mea ha-esrim* [When Loners Come Together: A Portrait of Hebrew Literature at the Turn of the Twentieth Century] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1987), pp. 13-19.

20. Benjamin Harshav, *Language in Time of Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 20-21.

21. Paraphrasing Dov Sadan here, Alter goes on to argue that to the extent that such an extreme statement holds, it is true primarily through hindsight, as it was mostly "on Central and Eastern European soil" that writers of the Hebrew Enlightenment such as Abramovitsh, Gnessin, and Berdichevski thought they were creating an "authentically European Hebrew fiction" (*Invention of Hebrew Prose*, p. 71; emphasis mine).

22. The term *kinus* is applied to the ingathering of people and of books. Bialik refers to the "heziyon ha-kinus ha-sifrutit," and the centripetal dynamic is envisioned as literary as well as human. If, Bialik declared in a speech delivered before the Second World Congress for Hebrew Language and Culture (Vienna, 1913), we desire to revive the energy, vitality, and influence of literature, then we must generate a new national "*kinus*—not religious, of course—of the best Hebrew writing of all the ages." *Ha-sefer ha-ivri* [On the Hebrew Book] (Jerusalem: Goldberg, 1913), n.p.

23. Ruth Wisse argues in *I. L. Peretz and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991) that Peretz in the 1890s is the counterpart to Herzl in advocating the renewal of a modern, secular Jewish culture that would acquire an autonomous minority status in Poland. On acts of literary rescue as forms of "creative betrayal" that account for the proliferation of Yiddish storytellers at the turn of the century, see David Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

24. Sh. Ansky is the pen-name of Solomon Zanwil Rapaport. His particular act of *kinus* in the early years of the Soviet Union has an even more interesting afterlife as a traveling exhibit, which provides a more contemporary dimension to the entire story of exile and homecoming. Ansky's "dybbuk," the restless spirit of the unburied dead, is reconfigured in the post-USSR world as an emblem of the indigenous homelessness of Ansky himself and of the Jews at large. One Israeli reviewer of the 1994 exhibit of Ansky's collection at the Israeli Museum, *Be-hazara la-'ayara* [Back to the Shretl], writes that "the *golah* is here and the shretl is here. . . . [T]he exhibit presents the shretl to present-day Israel in a concave mirror—without either of the participants in the specular dialogue being capable of knowing who is the representative of the banished dybbuk (*ha-dybbuk ha-meshulah*) and who is the true expression of the root culture." Eli Shai, "Kemihah mistit le-negi' ba-kame'a" [Mystical Yearnings to Touch the Sublime], *Ha-aretz*, Book Section, July 13, 1994, p. 8. This statement and the exhibit itself, like a previous installation at the Israeli Museum titled *Wandering*, are symptoms of the restlessness, the nostalgia, and the postmodern or "post-Zionist" yearnings for a free and creative reconnection with the past complicated by a fear of the resurgence of constrictive religious forms in late-twentieth-century Israeli culture.

25. For a critical discussion of the parallel invention of national and modernist cultures in Greece and Ireland, and of the roles that literature plays in forming the modern nation-state and that the language wars play in "consolidating" national identity, see Gregory Jusdanis, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), and David Lloyd, *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence*

Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

26. On Bialik's work on *Sefer ha-'ivri* and *Sefer ha-aggadah*, see Dan Miron, *Bo'ah, laylah: ha-sifrut ha-'ivrit bein higayon le-i-higayon be-mifna ha-mea ha-'esrim* [Come, Night: Hebrew Literature between the Rational and the Irrational at the Turn of the Twentieth Century] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1987), pp. 183-89. Whereas the evaluations of Bialik and Ravnitzki's enterprise have been many and varied, Michael Fishbane finds such anthologies as *Sefer ha-aggadah* inherently valuable as acts of canon formation. He argues that even when considered in terms of the national cultural movement that it was meant to serve, and even with its flawed or controversial presentation of the aggadic texts, *Sefer ha-aggadah* can be "compared to the periodic collections of Hebrew literature that have occurred earlier in Jewish history such as the redactions of the Bible, the Mishnah, and the Talmuds over the course of a millennium. . . Each act of ingathering produced an anthology (the quintessential Jewish genre) of certain favored traditions and it marginalized others." Fishbane, "The Aggadah: Fragments of Delight," *Proof-texts* 13, no. 2 (May 1993): 187.

27. In a more formal recuperation, Agnon collected source material on the High Holy Days, *Yamim nora'im*, and he viewed the project as equivalent or complementary to Bialik's *Sefer ha-aggadah*. On Agnon's responses to the challenge of *kinus*, on his rather complicated relationship to Bialik and *Sefer ha-aggadah*, and on the ill-fated enterprise that he began with Buber and that Buber was left to complete on his own, see Haim Be'er, *Gam abavatam, gam sintatam: Bialik, Brenner, Agnon, ma'arekhet yahasim* [Their Love and Their Hate: H. N. Bialik, Y. H. Brenner, S. Y. Agnon] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1992), pp. 207-9, 220-25, 286-87. Buber, Bialik, and even the paralyzed Franz Rosenzweig strongly petitioned Agnon not to abandon the Hassidic book after the catastrophic fire, but to no avail.

28. "The ship went on, the waters moved as usual, and a still small voice rose from the ship. It was the sound of song and praise rising from one firmament to another": the voices of boys and girls exiled by Titus after destroying the Temple, who jumped into the sea and were taken by God ("in his right hand, as it were) and brought to an island where they spend the ages speaking of the "glory of Jerusalem" (E 61-64; H 515-17). These children are Israel's memory, as encapsulated in its myths and its mythic geography. Here they facilitate the journey that finally reaches its destination.

29. See Ezrahi, "Agnon Before and After," pp. 90-93.

30. Thomas G. Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 16.

31. S. Y. Agnon, "Ha-nidah" [The Outcast], in *Elu ve-elu*, p. 56.

32. Once the signifier of the mobility of generations of Jews, the key is a metonymy of the Temple itself and the key that was relinquished when Israel went into exile. See Ezrahi, "Agnon Before and After," pp. 78-94.

33. S. Y. Agnon, *Tmol shilshom* [Just Yesterday] (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1971), p. 7. Hereafter references will be made parenthetically to this edition.

34. Yitzhak obviously is also the namesake of Isaac, the prototypical sur-

vivor; and he is great-grandson of Yudel Hasid, the picaresque hero of Agnon's earliest novel, *Hakhnasat Kallah* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1974) (*Bridal Canopy*, tr. I. M. Lask [N.Y.: Literary Guild of America, 1937]), whose progress is facilitated by a miraculous monetary endowment and semimiraculous climatic events. On that novel and its relevance to Agnon's portraits of wandering Jews, see Dan Miron, *Histaklut be-ravneker: 'al Hakhnasat Kallah me-et Shai Agnon ve-sviva* [The Motley Canopy: A Study of S. Y. Agnon's Narrative Art in *The Bridal Canopy*] (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-me'uhad, 1996).

35. On *Tmol shilshom*, see Amos Oz, *Shitkat ha-shamayim: Agnon mish-tomem 'al elohim* [The Silence of Heaven: Agnon's Fear of God] (Jerusalem: Keter, 1993); Hoffman, *Between Exile and Return*, chap. 7; and Nirza Ben Dov, Agnon's *Art of Indirection: Uncovering Latent Content in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993).

36. One of the earliest of the modern pilgrims to the Holy Land, Herman Melville's *Clarel* (1876), also traces a labyrinthine pattern through the city of Jerusalem—and through eighteen thousand lines of iambic tetrameter.

37. Like many of Agnon's narratives, parts of this long novel were published separately; the chapter on "Rav Geronam yakum purkan" appeared in *Moznaiyim* (May 14, 1931, pp. 5-7) some fifteen years before the novel was published, at the time Agnon was working on *Bilvat yamim*.

38. What Gustav Krojanker describes as an "old world epic," in which there is still an unmediated relation to the Divine, a confluence between outside and inside, is not the province of the modern novel. Krojanker identifies the fusion of the "real" and the legendary planes, the "historical-fictional journey," as a peculiar form of "aggadic epic" (*Yetzirato shel Shai Agnon*, pp. 78-79, 12.6-27).

Along complementary lines, Dan Miron argues that the modern novel was an alien form that Agnon explored nearly to its fullest degree, stopping just short of drawing the conclusions to which the novelistic inquiry inevitably leads, conclusions that are the equivalent of a form of exile from the "spiritual, personal source" located in Scriptures. In the later novels, especially in *Shira*, which he never finished, the demands of the hour and the demands of the genre as it was practiced by his contemporaries made closure, with its resolution of the tensions between the world of faith and the historical reality of the twentieth-century Jew, harder to achieve. See "Agnon's Transactions with the Novel," *Proof-texts* 7, no. 1 (January 1987): 26. See also Hoffman, *Between Exile and Return*.

39. Originally published in a limited edition of 300 copies, *Die Gabe* was reprinted by the Leo Baeck Institute with comments and short translations by Martin Goldner: *Die Gabe: For Franz Rosenzweig on His 40th Birthday, 12/25/26* (New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 1987).

40. Hoffman, *Between Exile and Return*, p. 177.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*, p. 178 (quoting *Die Gabe*, p. 9).

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 178, 57. "I use the term 'textuality' to suggest that issues of boundary and transgression, exile, and return are acted out within the domain of the writing itself," says Hoffman; "in a geography of language and text, [Agnon's] writing moves between exile and return" (pp. 2, 5).

44. Cited from the Agnon-Schocken letters in Be'er's *Gam ahavatani, gam sinatani*, p. 287. Whereas it now appears that Bialik did not fully endorse Agnon's own high opinion of his story, and may in fact have withheld the first "Bialik Prize" from Agnon in 1934 because of his ambivalence about *Bilvav yamim*, Agnon did receive the prize for the story the following year, a judgment taken after Bialik's death. This incident is discussed in the addendum to the 1993 third edition of Be'er's book, pp. 414-21.

45. Krojanker, *Yetzirato shel Shai Agnon*, p. 128; Hoffman, *Between Exile and Return*, p. 180. One could perhaps argue further that what gnaws at the heart of Agnon's fiction and comes out most powerfully in manuscripts such as "Kisui hadam" ["Covering the Blood], which was published posthumously, is not only the threat to authority of the self-authorized modern text but also the despair over a world from which these carefully preserved schemes of meaning have been withdrawn.

46. *Bayit* is the Hebrew word for both a house and a stanza in a poem; in medieval poetry, the opening line of a verse is referred to as a *delet* (door) and the closing line as a *soger* (shutter). For a more explicit allusion to the language "housed" in the poetry of Paul Celan, see chapter 5.

47. S. Y. Agnon, "Tehila," in *Ad hena*, p. 183; tr. as "Tehila" by Walter Lever in *Firstfruits: A Harvest of 25 Years of Israeli Writing*, ed. James A. Michener (Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett, 1973), p. 62. I have slightly emended Lever's translation, although the result is still far from satisfactory.

48. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, tr. Willard Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1959), p. 63.

49. Earlier in this homodiegetic fictional narrative, the first-person scribe-narrator effects another kind of passage from text to territory; sitting at the feet of one of Jerusalem's many "men of learning," he finds relief from the tedium of the man's scholarship by allowing his eyes to escape through the window and his language to escape through a rhetorical *trompe d'oeil*:

I asked my questions, and he replied; or spoke of problems, which he resolved; or mentioned obscure matters which he made clear. How good it is, how satisfying, to sit at the feet of one of the scholars of Jerusalem, and to learn the Law from his lips! His home is simple, his furnishings austere, yet his wisdom ranges far, like the great hill ranges of Jerusalem which are seen from the windows. Bare are the hills of Jerusalem; no temples or palaces crown them. Since the time of our exile, nation after nation has come and laid them waste. But the hills spread their glory like banners to the sky.

"Tehila," p. 40 (emphasis mine)

The transport from language to landscape, from tedious discourse to holy space, is effected by means of a simile ("like the great hill ranges . . .") that conveys both the instrumental power of poetry and its ultimate subordination to sacred soil.

The theme of the book that is "lost" by being incorporated into the material of Jerusalem appears with a different twist in Agnon's story "A Book That Was Lost," which appeared posthumously in *Ir u-melo'ah* [An Entire City] (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1973), pp. 207-11 and is the title story of the collection of his stories edited by Alan Mintz and Anne Golomb Hoffman, *A Book That Was Lost and Other Stories* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), pp. 128-35.

4. BY TRAIN, BY SHIP, BY SUBWAY: SOHELEM ALEICHEM AND THE AMERICAN VOYAGE OF SELF-INVENTION

1. From Mary Antin's *From Plonsk to Boston* (New York: M. Wiener, 1986), originally published in 1899, to Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (London: Heinemann, 1989), Jewish journeys to America have been well documented over the last century. Writers from the Other Europe is a Penguin series launched by Philip Roth that features writers from Eastern Europe who were relatively unknown in the West.

2. Dov Sadan, "Three Foundations: Sholem Aleichem and the Yiddish Literary Tradition" (1959), tr. David G. Roskies, *Prooftexts* 6, no. 1 (January 1986): 57 (translated from *Avnei mifstam: masot 'al sofrei yidish* [Corner Stones: Essays on Yiddish Writers] [Tel Aviv: Y. L. Peretz, 1961], vol. 1, pp. 45-54). Critical interest in Sholem Aleichem has increased dramatically since Sadan wrote those words, as witnessed by the very issue of *Prooftexts* that reproduced this essay.

3. See above, chapters 2 and 3. In the original version of the epistolary narrative, the shtetl to which Sheyne Shendl was attached was Mazedpffe, not Kasrilevke.

We might note Natan Alterman's 1945 Hebrew "elegy" to the Jews of Eastern Europe, written in Palestine as the "last" letter from Menakhem Mendl to his wife, Sheyne Shendl; Menakhem Mendl remains in the Hebrew imagination as the quintessential Wandering Jew, as his wife remains "in the shtetl" even after it has been destroyed. (This poem is discussed later in this chapter and in chapter 8.)

For an interesting Marxist critique of *Menakhem-Mendl*, written in the mid-1930s, see Max Erik, who maintains that while Menakhem Mendl, the irrepresible traveler and petty businessman, is intoxicated with the metropolis (Odessa, Yehupetz [Kiev]), Sheyne Shendl remains "frozen and immobile, contentedly stuck in the Kasrilevke mire." Erik equates the "faith" she exhibits in the status quo and in divine providence with the "precapitalist [but also pre-modernist] fantasies" that characterized Benjamin's position in *The Travels of Benjamin the Third*. Erik, "Menakhem-Mendl" (1935), tr. David G. Roskies, *Prooftexts* 6, no. 1 (January 1986): 36-38.

4. Hillel Halkin calls Tevey a "God-arguer." Introduction to Sholem Aleichem, *Tevey the Dairyman and the Railroad Stories*, ed. and tr. Hillel Halkin (New York: Schocken Books, 1987), p. xxiv.

5. The cycle was originally called simply "Ksovim fun a komi-voyazher." A few of the stories that Sholem Aleichem adapted and appended to the text when he reworked it from 1910 to 1911 had been written between 1902 and 1903.

6. Sholem Aleichem, "Tevey Leaves for the Land of Israel," in *Tevey the Dairyman*, pp. 108, 110, 111; from the Yiddish original, *Gants Tevey der milkhiker*, in *Ale verk fun Sholem Aleikhem* (New York: Sholem-Aleykhem Folk-fond oysgabe, 1927), vols. 1-2, pp. 183, 185, 187. All subsequent page references to these stories, made parenthetically in the text, are to these Yiddish and English editions (designated Y and E). Halkin added "go to die," which is a gloss on the more allusive Yiddish that translates literally as "all old Jews go to Eretz Yisroel."