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METAPHOR AND METONYMY IN AGNON'S *A GUEST FOR THE NIGHT*

by

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Roman Jakobson's now classic distinction between metaphor and metonymy defines two primary modes of linguistic thought: on the one hand relations of similarity and dissimilarity, and on the other relations of contiguity or, we might say, dependence and independence. Though they find their most condensed expression in the tropes metaphor and metonymy, these same principles govern phonemic, lexical, and phraseological levels of language, and they operate as well in larger segments of discourse. A piece of fiction or poetry, for example, may develop along lines of association by likeness or through links of sequence and consequence.[1]

Jakobson's dichotomy has received much attention in various fields, and his terms have elicited varying interpretations. The model continues to be persuasive because of compelling psycholinguistic evidence and because attempts to modify the theory have succeeded most when they build on the

1. Two outstanding essays of Jakobson's on the subject of metaphor and metonymy are "Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas Sebeok (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), pp. 350–377, and "Two Aspects of Language: Metaphor and Metonymy," in *Fundamentals of Language*, ed. Jakobson and Morris Halle (The Hague: Mouton, 1956); rpt. in *European Literary Theory and Practice: From Existential Phenomenology to Structuralism*, ed. Vernon Gras (New York: Dell, 1973), pp. 119–131.

original distinction and acknowledge its intrinsic flexibilities, rather than when they attempt to alter it substantially.[2] The contrast holds special attraction for literary analysis because it offers a comprehensive perspective from which to discern unity and disunity in an artistic text. It can help us clarify how various levels of a text parallel, complement, contradict, or detract from one another.

These issues alert us to intriguing questions with regard to Shmuel Yosef Agnon's *A Guest for the Night,* since the strongly metaphoric overall organization of the novel contrasts markedly with the notable lack of metaphor at the lexical level of the text and the resulting predominance of metonymic qualities in the prose itself.

Jakobson's concepts have pertinence to Agnon first of all within the

2. Evidence from studies of aphasia continues to recommend positing the existence of two primary verbal orientations. Individuals suffering from aphasia tend toward either similarity or contiguity disorders depending on which of two separate, identifiable parts of the brain have incurred injury.

Examples of extremely valuable work building on Jakobson's ideas include the following: James Irby's "The Structure of the Stories of Jorge Luis Borges" (diss., University of Michigan, 1962) provides an example of a study that explores in depth the role of metonymy in specific texts. Anthony Wilden's *System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange* (London: Tavistock, 1972) relates the metaphor/metonymy concept to a wide range of fields, including Lacanian psychoanalysis, cybernetics, mathematical and logical theory, and Marxism. Michel Le Guern's *Sémantique de la métaphore et de la métonymie* (Paris: Larousse, 1973) presents a direct expansion of Jakobson's theoretical framework.

My discussion of metaphor and metonymy in Agnon draws on material from my dissertation, "Spatial Form in the Social Novel" (Princeton, 1980).

Works that draw on but attempt to fundamentally modify Jakobson's ideas include the following: *Rhétorique Générale* by J. Dubois, F. Edeline, J. M. Klinkenberg, P. Minguet, F. Pire, and H. Trinon (Paris: Larousse, 1970), suggests a tripartite system of metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche as the basis for a more complete understanding of tropes. This view fails to persuade me, since the essential features of metonymy, formulated in terms of context by Le Guern, apply to synecdoche as well and so reconfirm the soundness of the bipartite model. Substitutions of a part for a whole most naturally form a subspecies of metonymy and not an independent, equally important category of language. In *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), Hayden White proposed a fourfold system of tropes that revitalizes an approach to figurative language widely accepted in the Renaissance. White adds irony to metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche as basic rhetorical figures. Jakobson's model still challenges White's, since, as White himself acknowledges, irony is a phenomenon of a different order entirely from metaphor and metonymy. Not properly a linguistic operation at all, it is a perceptual one which may arise from either metonymic or metaphoric discourse. Gérard Genette, like these others, has attempted to counteract the confining nature of Jakobson's binary opposition, and he does so by calling for the revival of a plethora of rhetorical terms. See *Figures II* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), "La rhétorique réstreinte," pp. 21–40, and "Métonymie chez Proust," pp. 41–63. Contrary to what Genette claims, it seems to me that his suggestions are most helpful to the extent that they refine rather than challenge Jakobson's ideas.

framework of modernism and the reorientation of reading that modernism has brought to so much of twentieth-century literature. This aesthetic of fragmentation and discontinuity, which Joseph Frank has assessed as spatial form, disrupts links of time and causality, defying linear plot development in fiction.[3] It encourages the reader to search for parallels between disjoint segments of narrative and so to make sense out of otherwise perplexing and seemingly incoherent texts. We may say that this kind of narrative organization represents metaphoric structure in the sense that it depends most fundamentally on ties of similarity and dissimilarity rather than on causal interconnections of successive events. Exploring this kind of fragmented composition, *A Guest for the Night* — along with *The Book of Deeds* — marks an important turning point in Agnon's writing.

As Gershon Shaked has discussed at length in his essay "Ha-məsaper kəsoper," *A Guest for the Night* relies on a wealth of symmetries, contrasts and reiterative patterns in order to put into relief the shared experience of multiple characters.[4] Despite the chronological order maintained in the narration of the text the story line is highly episodic, for continual breaks in the narrative sequence accumulate as many figures cross paths with the central protagonist and relate their own anecdotes to him. This protagonist, a writer from the Land of Israel, has returned to his Galician hometown, Szibucz, in the aftermath of World War I. He hopes to restore its lost glory in writing and so, as it were, to recover its traditional ways. The plot falls apart, though, as a result of the many digressions, and through these encounters the Guest comes to see that the Szibucz of the present is irremediably different from that of the past. The secondary plots in this way come to predominate over the primary one, at first creating a sense of disorientation but then revealing parallels between the lives of the characters. Comparable tales of hardship and loss told by the various figures reflect and intensify one another as signs of the town's deterioration, alerting the reader to the scope of the crisis facing European Jewry between the wars and bringing the protagonist to understand that large impersonal forces bind all of these lives in a common destiny.

The metaphoric structure, then, above all makes this a collective novel, and one, moreover, that moves an individual to understand and empathize with communal dilemma. In this manner the fragmented composition is

3. "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," in *The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963), pp. 3–60.

4. *ʿOmanut hassippur šel 'Agnon* (Jerusalem: Ha-Kibbuts ha-Məuḥad and Keter, 1976), pp. 228–278.

instrumental in adding meaning to the emptiness of the fictional world — even though not to the individual fictional lives, to be sure. Each character feels highly isolated in his or her personal troubles, and so what results is a contradictory kind of collective unity; the members of the community remain bound primarily by mutual alienation. Nonetheless, the novelistic vision of loneliness and loss creates a dimension of suprapersonal significance that subsumes individual suffering and that the reader, along with the narrator, may come to appreciate.

A deemphasis on metaphor at the lexical level stands out by comparison with the importance of metaphor in the general organization. At issue here is not the absolute absence of devices that rely on similarity relations (such as simile, allusion, and the incorporation of rhyme and parallelisms into the writing). Instead, at question is the significant turning away from metaphor which characterizes Agnon's later works in opposition to his earlier writing. The prose in this novel, like the narrative structure, represents a major transformation of Agnon's fiction between earlier and later stages of his career, and though critics describe this change in a variety of ways, all agree that it resulted in a new economy of style, a reduction of excess and elaborate rhetoric, and a decreased use of metaphor.[5] This means that the prose of *A Guest for the Night,* while not exhibiting much metonym per se as a trope, nonetheless tends toward discourse which is metonymic in emphasis.[6] The author leans less toward operations based on likeness and unlikeness, and more to ties of contiguity.

Consider, for example, the following description of a house:

5. For discussion on the change in Agnon's style, see, e.g., Shaked, "'Al šəloša nusakhim ušəloša slaḇim bəhitpatkhut hassippur 'Yatom ḇə'almanah,' " in *'Omanut hassippur šel 'Agnon,* pp. 137–150; Robert Alter, *After the Tradition* (New York: Dutton, 1969), pp. 141–142; Arnold Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare: A Study in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 62–63; Joseph Kaspi: *A Study in the Evolution of S. Y. Agnon's Style* (Chicago: Spertus College of Judaica Press, 1969); Benjamin De Vries, "Vav ha-məhapakh," in *L'Agnon Šai* (Jerusalem: Mercaz, 1959).

6. No discourse, of course, is entirely metaphoric or entirely metonymic. At stake are not entities but relations between terms; depending on how we observe any phenomenon in language, we will discover links of both contiguity and similarity. This overlap is evident in the simple fact that to form a sentence one must select lexical items from among the possible choices available (that is, from among things in some way equivalent) and then combine those items together syntactically. The words and phrases in the resulting utterance necessarily maintain relationships of both likeness and dependence to other elements in the language. Recognizing this flexibility in Jakobson's work makes his theory of metaphor and metonymy elastic enough to account for contrary narrative impulses without becoming ensnared in reductive polarities.

דירתו של שוסטר עומדת ברחוב המלך אחורי הבאר, בין כמה בתים מפוזרים שנשתיירו אחר המלחמה, והיא סמוכה לרחוב ועמוקה קצת מקרקע הרחוב, לפיכך נודף שם ריח טחב, אלא שבלילה נודף ריח טחב בלבד וביום יש בו תוספת של ריח אבק. כל הדירה כולה של חדר אחד מרובע ואינו גבוה ממדת אדם בינוני, שאותו בית נבנה בימים שעברו, שהבריות היו נמוכים בעיני עצמם והיו מסתפקים בבתים קטנים. ולמעלה בכותל סמוך לתקרה, לימינה של הדלת, חלון ארוך וצר, שרואים בו ראשיהם של עוברים ושבים ואין רואים את פניהם, אבל שומעים את קולם ורואים את האבק שמעלים ברגליהם. ותריס אחד שבור תלוי לו בחלון מבחוץ, ובזמן שרוח עוברת מקיש התריס על החלון ופוקק את המאור. מלבד כלי אומנותו של חייט, כגון מכונת תפירה ושולחן ארוך ושני מגהצים ומראה וגולם של עץ בצורת אשה בלא ראש ובלא רגלים מחופה באריגין שמודדים בו את הבגדים אין בחדר כלים הרבה, לפיכך ניכר ביותר אותו כסא של פלוסין שעומד סמוך לתנור, שהביאוהו בעליו מברלין, ששם היו דרים, עד שלא חזרו לשבוש. (ע. 58)

Schuster's house is in King's Street behind the well, one of a few scattered houses that have survived the war. It is close to the street and a little below street level, so there is a smell of damp about the place; but at night there is just the smell of damp and by day there is a smell of dust as well. The whole house consists of one square room and is no higher than an ordinary man, for it was built long ago, when people were lowly in their own eyes and content with small houses. High on the wall, near the ceiling, to the right of the door, is a long, narrow window, through which you can see the heads of the passers-by but not their faces, though you can hear their voices and see the dust they raise with their feet. One broken shutter hangs over the window outside, and when the wind passes the shutter knocks on the window and shuts out the light. Apart from the paraphernalia of the tailor's craft, such as a sewing machine, a long table, two irons, a mirror, and a wooden, cloth-covered dummy shaped like a woman without head or feet, on which the clothes are measured, there is not much furniture in the room. And for this reason the plush-covered chair that stands near the fireplace stands out particularly; they brought it from Berlin, where they used to live before they came back to Szibucz. (p. 57)[7]

While clearly free of metaphoric elaboration — in nouns, verbs, and adjectives as well — this passage moves forward through orderly syntactical sequence that clearly indicates relations of, for instance, spatial situation (the location of the house), causality ("so there is a smell of damp"), synecdoche (parts to wholes — the sewing machine, table, irons, mirror, and dummy are examples of "paraphernalia"), and temporal orientation (this scene occurs after the Schusters' residence in Berlin).

These matters have important implications in *A Guest for the Night,* for

7. Quotations from *'Oreah nata lalun* are from the Schocken edition (Jerusalem, 1976), and the English translation by Misha Louvish (New York: Schocken, 1968).

the prose and the composition have converse effects, reflecting differences in the ways that metaphor and metonymy signify. While the former has a propensity for polyvalence, the latter fosters univalence. Therefore, whereas the structural parallelisms multiply a basic idea into a series of new permutations, creating a contradictory picture of unity and heterogeneity, the metonymic tendency of the discourse reinforces the homogeneity of the lives portrayed in *A Guest for the Night*. In this way it facilitates a remarkably uniform depiction of an extensive range of characters. For all the people of Szibucz the destructive impact of the war, a loss of faith, and a waning of tradition have eliminated the past, and at the same time the future holds little promise. Like the fragmented composition, the prose binds these characters together, but, unlike the composition, it keeps a firm grip on the restrictive narrowness of existence in Szibucz. Indeed, reality here is too stark and narrow to admit metaphoric description. As Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi points out in a recent article, the Guest makes a comment to this effect when interpreting the verse from Lamentations, "She has become as a widow."[8] Pondering the number of women whose husbands have been killed in the war the narrator reasons,

> כשראה ירמיה את החורבן הראשון ישב וכתב ספר קינות, ולא נתקררה דעתו בכל הקינות שקונן, עד שהמשיל את כנסת ישראל לאלמנה ואמר היתה כאלמנה, ולא אלמנה ממש, אלא כאשה שהלך בעלה למדינת הים ודעתו לחזור אצלה. כשאנו באים לקונן על חורבן אחרון אין אנו מספיקים אם נאמר היתה כאלמנה, אלא אלמנה ממש בלא כף הדמיון. (ע. 216)

> When Jeremiah saw the destruction of the First Temple, he sat down and wrote the Book of Lamentations, and he was not content with all the lamentations he wrote until he had compared the congregation of Israel to a widow and said, "She has become as a widow" — not a true widow, but like a woman whose husband has gone overseas and intends to return to her. When we come to lament this latest destruction we do not say enough if we say, "She has become *as* a widow," but a true widow, without the word of comparison. (p. 231)

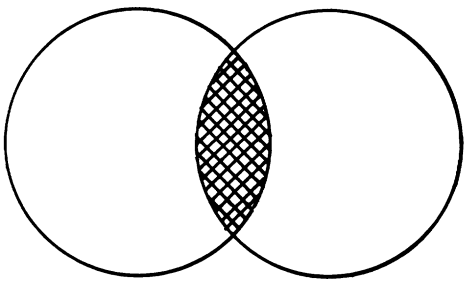
In Szibucz we are left with only the literal; the compelling and brutal facts of actuality stymie the imagination. Life in this kind of world seems to demand not interpretation but documentation, defying us to soften our perceptions, beautify them, ennoble, dignify, or enrich them through figurative language

8. "Agnon Before and After," in *Prooftexts* 2, no. 1 (January 1982): 78–94.

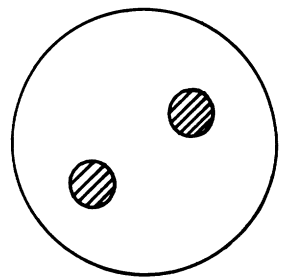
that has the capacity to add extra dimensions of meaning to any assessment of our surroundings.

The notion of context is essential to understanding the different kinds of referentiality that metaphor and metonymy entail, and so allows us closer scrutiny and more precise explanation of how the language and the organization of Agnon's novel complement one another. While metonymic process restricts itself primarily to reference within a single context, metaphor calls for the confrontation of two terms from separate contexts or different linguistic levels.[9] Certain semantic information from each level coincides with or parallels that from the other; through an amalgamation of the two realms — an amalgamation which includes both the semantic common denominators and other, more suppressed information — metaphor synthesizes new meaning. Thus, with a metonymic configuration substituting part for whole, we can say that "the hoofs raced past" to indicate that a horse ran by. Horse and hoofs are intrinsically related in the world external to the discourse. If, however, we turn to a metaphoric configuration and refer, for example, to "the sunset of an era," the discourse equates two things that are not inherently equivalent in the world outside of this statement. The image matches a setting sun with the end of a historical period and so puts into relief concepts common to both terms of the comparison: termination and decline. The sunset has been abstracted to convey something other than literal reference to the coming of nightfall, and at the same time the idea of ending has acquired added connotations. As the statement suggests a dimming of brilliance, a diminishing of power, it may also imply a special colorfulness,

9. I am drawing here on discussion by Le Guern. A simple schematization, drawn from *Rhétorique Générale* (p. 118) may illustrate most clearly the difference between metaphor and metonymy. Metaphor appears as the overlapping of two circles, that is, as the copossession of semantic elements between two contexts. Metonymy appears as the coinclusion of two terms within a single ensemble of semantic components.



Metaphor



Metonymy

perhaps a last burst of luxuriance marking the diappearance of a decadent culture.

This process of expanding meaning, proper to metaphor, is the one we have already seen at work in Agnon's novel. It should be remembered at the same time that the suppressed information of metaphoric comparison may challenge as well as enrich parallels created between two terms. Incongruities that emerge in this way may cause irony and humor, grotesque or ridiculous effects. And, just as metaphor on a lexical level allows for a clash between semantic components, disparity among larger elements of narrative may cause them to struggle against the uniformity that parallelism confers on them. For this reason the metaphoric composition of *A Guest for the Night* is an important mechanism for generating the irony so prominent in the novel. The fervent Zionists, for example, who play at farming and setting up communes in the Land, cannot transplant their dream into reality. They find themselves therefore in much the same dilemma as Yeruham Hofshi, the disenchanted and embittered pioneer who has returned from the Land and renounced his idealism. The author carefully counterpoints the courage and goodwill of the youth group members with the cynicism of their more experienced colleague in order to show us that all, despite individual differences, are caught in the same moment of historical stasis. All of them, ironically, live in the same precarious present bereft of comfort and meaning, cut off from both the strength of the past and a viable future.

Metonymic discourse reduces the possibility of such irony or semantic incompatibility, because it deals only with relations of convertibility, that is, with terms that imply one another in an integral way.[10] Its tautological nature lends it a kind of self-evidence. Due to such irreducibility Agnon's prose insists on the nontranscendental nature of collective experience in *A Guest for the Night,* even as the overall organization creates a communal portrait that encompasses and transcends the limits of individual sorrow. By combining opposite orientations in two levels of the text the author emphasizes both the meaninglessness of the present moment and the meaningfulness of recognizing and coming to terms with senseless destruction. It should be remembered that the metaphoric structure and the tendency away from

10. Convertibility is Kenneth Burke's term from *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), p. 508. It seems a very apt description to me, though Burke uses it in connection with synecdoche and not with metonymy. I would consider synecdoche a subclass of metonymy. Burke defines metonymy as the result of several metaphoric substitutions, but since the one trope can be explained in terms of the other in this framework, the definition seems less economical to me than Jakobson's dichotomy.

metaphor in the prose of *A Guest for the Night* are indicative of important innovations in Agnon's later work. These stylistic developments on both textual levels seem to have emerged in response to the historical crises of the 1930s and the collapse of old world Jewish values, and they work in tandem, not separately, to aptly convey a picture of a world in breakdown.[11]

The notion of context has a further implication for our examination of *A Guest for the Night,* for this concept reminds us that metaphor and metonymy place differing emphases on references to extralinguistic experience. Metonymy never concedes the primacy of denotation, which we may define as the widely perceived, conventionally accepted way in which words relate to the realm of understanding outside of language. For this reason metonymy is easily paraphrased. If we say, for instance, "he drank the entire glass," to designate that he drank the entire contents of the glass, we can replace the metonymic configuration with a literal one by a simple insertion of missing information. Metaphor, however, defies paraphrase, since it creates an aggregate of semantic components which the individual must weigh and reintegrate in defiance of literal meaning, that is, in defiance of already established categories of understanding. Released from the bonds of convention, metaphor directs energy away from the denotative capacities of words, admits more freedom of interpretation by the individual, and permits a turning away from the world of actuality to the world of the imagination. These observations accord with the fact that spatial form represents a perceptual experience. *A Guest for the Night* presents few extended actions and largely dispenses with the idea of plot. Instead it invites an active reading in which the reader creates mental constructs between disparate elements in the text. The reader, like the narrator, must contend with disorienting phenomena, and the reader's struggle to devise a new strategy of reading — based on parallelisms — corresponds to the Guest's need to create or perceive coherent new patterns of meaning out of social chaos.

The narrator's development to the point of being able to read this new reality correctly is a tortuous one. To a large extent he rebels against accepting the present circumstance, and one index of his difficulty in recognizing parallels, in drawing the right comparisons, is his insistence on drawing the wrong ones. He frequently tries to impose his own memories and value judg-

11. This consideration of metaphor and metonymy does not, of course, pretend to exhaust discussion of Agnon's prose in *A Guest for the Night,* since so many factors contribute to the resilience of this writing. I do not think, however, that the complexities of the language discredit my principal arguments here, nor that my basic points are incompatible with the linguistic analyses by Shaked, Band, De Vries, and Alter.

ments onto the emptiness of the current moment, and his use of simile illustrates clearly that he tries unsuccessfully to introduce additional levels of meaning into the reality of Szibucz. Moreover, the Guest often misuses simile, thereby inadvertently ironizing his own efforts and forcing the reader to question his judgment.[12] He tries, for example, to convince Rachel Bach that all the daughters of Israel are like princesses (chap. 7). She immediately invalidates this point by noting that no one respects royalty or the trappings and symbols of royalty anymore. At another point the Guest compares the tears of the city's rabbi to pearls. The allusive force of the analogy evokes pathos, but in the next breath the narrator calls attention to the vindictive personality of the narrow-minded, self-centered rabbi, and we see that he is not worthy of reverence nor of the lofty, praiseworthy description (chap. 31).

Other similes in *A Guest for the Night* manifest a different kind of bankruptcy. They purport to add a degree of significance to actions that in fact are quite self-evident. The Guest tries to assume the tone of aphorism, and this underscores his effort to impose new dimensions of meaning onto the world. Since the comparisons do not justify themselves, they serve merely to make the narrator look pretentious. For example:

פשטתי את ידי בדלת, כזה שפושט ידו ואינו מצפה שתפתח. (ע. 13)

> I put out my hand to the door, as one puts out his hand when he does not expect it to open . . . (p. 7)

The simile here elaborates in such a literal way that it constitutes no elaboration at all, but only a metanarrational comment by the narrator on his art, drawing attention to his own desire to introduce added contextual levels into the narrative. By the same token, since the Guest does not state simply that he put out his hand to the door without expecting it to open, he distances himself as protagonist from the life of Szibucz and also from his own actions. By invoking some model to explain his own behavior, the Guest plays down the force of his personal thoughts and emotions. In keeping with his general passivity, his inability to empathize, and his noninvolvement in the life of the town, this distancing reinforces the unattractive picture of him as a man who disregards his moral obligations and who flounders helplessly

12. In "Ha-məsaper kəsoper" Shaked discusses how the Guest's faulty logic in like manner undermines his credibility.

in an increasing isolation from himself as well as from others. An especially telling example of his use of simile to dissociate himself from others appears early in the text:

> נתאנחתי על אנשי עירי, שפגעה בהם מדת הדין והבטתי לפני כאדם שנפלט מן הצרה ומכניס צוארו בצרת אחיו. (ע. 16)

> I sighed for the men of our town, who had been stricken by the judgment of God, and I looked straight ahead, like a man who has escaped sorrow himself and now takes on the sorrow of his brethren. (p. 11)

The Guest deliberately stops short of asserting that the misfortunes of his people are his own, even as he tries to give the impression that he is, indeed, concerned.

Two points add to the ineffectiveness of the Guest's handling of simile. First of all, since simile constitutes an important element of *lašon haḥamim,* the Guest's endeavor to inject spirituality into the world draws not only on his own values and perceptions but on a common cultural heritage. Since the reality of the modern world cruelly defies faith, when the narrator falls back on comparisons of traditional religious force his efforts are destined to failure. The protagonist further exacerbates that situation, through his insensitivity to this dilemma, by appropriating traditional material for his own personal narration. The resulting false representation causes the Guest's similes to reverberate with inauthenticity.

Secondly, it should be remembered that simile is a figure of speech that serves a didactic purpose both in *lašon haḥamim* and in the Guest's narrative, and in this capacity it should be distinguished from metaphor. While enhancing instructive materials to make them more appealing or illustrative, simile all the same does not surrender its own claim to logic in the way that metaphor must. Simile directs its connotative power deliberately back toward denotative ends through the deliberate use of a word of comparison, e.g., "like" or "as." These words help keep the two terms of a comparison clearly apart even while specifying what the two terms have in common. Simile thereby does not divest itself of polyvalence, but it frequently keeps ambiguity and incongruity to a minimum, diminishing the importance of that excess semantic information which adds so much to metaphor. Simile mediates between the figurative and the denotative, while metaphor more confidently asserts itself in its own right as an expression of something that could not find any clearer verbal formulation.

The narrator opts for simile because he wishes to adopt the position of intermediary between the town and its past or spiritual life — without surrendering his pious intentions, without indulging in what he sees as the vanity of unhampered fantasy or entertainment, and without losing touch with the reality of his contemporaries. This stance suggests that he sees himself as representing the supreme values of the town, yet so long as he maintains himself in the prominent position here, rather than accepting the primacy of the collective crisis itself and seeing himself as part of it, his outlook remains self-aggrandizing and immature.

In a passage that explicitly expresses his opinions about figurative language we see that the text's attention to simile in this connection is neither incidental nor inadvertent, but a deliberate, self-conscious contribution on the part of the author to the characterization of the Guest.

> מיום שעמדתי על דעתי שונא אני צורות המחוברות מחלקים שונים שאינם מתחברים, כל שכן ציור שחלקיו במציאות ואילו חיבורם והרכבתם אינם במציאות, אלא בדמיון המצייר בלבד, כל שכן דברים שאינם אלא סמך מציור המוחש לציור מושכל, כלומר שדימה המדמה דברים שבנפש לדברים שבגוף, כדרך שפירשו קצת מן המפרשים את פסוק פן תשחיתון ועשיתם לכם פסל תמונת כל סמל. לפיכך משונה הייתי בעיני שהתחלתי לדרוש סמוכין ואמרתי דברים שבסמל יש כאן, שאדם מארץ ישראל ירד לחמם להם לבני הגולה (ע. 117)

> Ever since I came to years of understanding, I have hated any forms composed of different parts that do not accord with each other, especially a picture whose parts exist in reality but whose combination and conjunction exist not in reality but only in the imagination of the artist: and more especially things in which only something of the concrete image has been shifted to the abstract image — that is, when someone compares states of the soul to things of the body, as certain commentators have interpreted the verse, "Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, in the likeness of any figure." So I was surprised to find myself beginning to make analogies and saying: There are symbolic things here — for a man from the Land of Israel has come down to bring warmth to the sons of exile. (p. 120)

The narrator here clearly points out that religious sentiments motivate his preference for simile and parable over pure metaphor. He is searching for a rhetoric that is limited in scope; so as to serve didactic ends this rhetoric must be judicious and pointed. Nonetheless the Guest invalidates his own comparison at the end by contradicting these precepts in an unjustifiable way. He mismatches the two terms of a comparison by referring to himself as a bringer of warmth, as a representative of the Holy Land, and so imply-

ing spiritual consolation or guidance. His statement is overbearingly pompous, since in actuality all he has done is provide a bit of firewood to keep the Beit Midrash heated in wintertime. Figurative language here neatly exposes the weakness of the protagonist in his continuing reluctance to identify with the community and to face squarely the social upheaval that necessitates a break with the past.

The author or implied narrator of *A Guest for the Night,* naturally, does not identify with the artistic goals of the narrator as they are expressed in this passage. The overall metaphoric construction of the novel leads to precisely the kind of comparisons between spiritual and material realms that the Guest shuns. Furthermore, some genuinely forceful metaphor and simile emerges in the prose of the text; significantly, this occurs in dream sequences, moments when the narrator does not exercise conscious control over his thoughts. These episodes present pivotal syntheses of inner vision and external reality in the novel, as the Guest internalizes and comes to terms with his encounters with the townspeople. Consequently these are among the most vivid and absorbing sections of the novel. A prime example is the dream in chapter 19 in which an old man, representative of the old ways of study and Torah, turns to dust and his voice is "like the sound of a key that has gone rusty" (p. 94). The figurative phrase derives its fullness from the true pathos of the situation, from the vivid image of deterioration accompanying it, and from the strength of the key motif which develops over the course of the novel.[13] While in Szibucz the Guest obtains the key to the Beit Midrash, an object which signifies for him his entry back into the spiritual world of yesteryear. During his stay, though, the key is lost, and, until he succeeds in having a new one made, the Guest feels like an exile from the House of Study. Later he is preoccupied over the question of who will inherit the key, and finally the motif is further strengthened when the original key turns up in the narrator's luggage back in Jerusalem — perhaps as a portent of renewed Jewish religious life in the Land of Israel. Within this framework of events the simile in the dream sequence takes on meaning and validity; the comparison of the man's voice to a rusty key convincingly reinforces a moving sense of the Guest's yearning for faith and his experience of spiritual loss.

The Guest is not entirely unaware that in his dreams lies a truth escaping

13. The key motif has been discussed extensively by critics. See, e.g., Baruch Kurzweil's *Masot 'al sippurei Šai 'Agnon* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1963) and Band's *Nostalgia and Nightmare.*

his own understanding. In chapter 9, a dream about a shipload of Jews on their way to Zion confirms this point. The narrator states:

> בני אדם נאים כאלו לא ראית מימיך. אם אדמה את האנשים בחמה ואת הנשים בלבנה, הרי חמה ולבנה פעמים נכסות ואין אורן ניכר, ואילו הם האירו בלא הפסק. פעם אחת ביום הכיפורים סמוך למנחה ראיתי אור מופלא בחלון בית מדרשנו הישן והייתי סבור שאין מופלא ממנו. פתאום ראיתי שיש מופלא ממנו ולא עוד אלא של בית מדרשנו אור דומם וכאן האור חי, ואם תמצא לומר — מדבר, שכל זיק וזיק מתנגן. וכי קול יש לאור והוא מדבר או שר? דבר זה לא ניתן לפרש, ואילו ניתן לי לפרש לא הייתי מפרשו, אלא ניאות הייתי לאורו. (ע. 41)

> Never in my life have I seen such beautiful people. I might compare the men with the sun and the women with the moon, but the sun and the moon are covered sometimes and their light cannot be seen, while these people shone without a pause. Once on the Day of Atonement, near the hour of the Afternoon Service, I had seen a marvelous light in our Beit Midrash and I believed that there could be none to compare with it, but now I suddenly saw a light more marvelous still. Moreover, the light in our Beit Midrash was inanimate, while here the light was alive — or, if you like, eloquent, for every single spark sang. Has light a voice? Can I speak or sing? This is a thing that cannot be explained, and even if I were able to explain it I would not do so — instead I would enjoy the light. (p. 39)

This passage points to the difference between simile and metaphor, as the Guest searches for a comparison that will conform precisely to the idea he wishes to convey about the light. He fails because this light has ineffable qualities that the full power of metaphor (i.e., the superposition of different semantic realms) comes closer to expressing than can any of his suggested analogies. The comparisons with the sun or moon cannot succeed, because they are not logically consistent; in contrast, the assertion that the light is alive and sings also defies reason, but stands in its own right. The narrator simply accepts the verbal metaphor and acknowledges that the phenomenon of the light is inexplicable.

The moments of synthesis, of insight or revelation in the dream sequences do not imply fulfillment. The richness and plenitude of these occasions are self-contradictory, for the dreams concern a fundamental undermining of wholeness. This dream about the light, for example, ends with a series of disturbing events. The protagonist on the ship finds that his prayer shawl catches on fire and that he faces drowning. No one is there to save him but a man missing both hands. A light in the distance, which he takes as a sign of a Jewish community, is extinguished by a sudden wind.

The dream indicates that meaningful, joyous, sanctified Jewish life is gravely imperiled, yet distressing as the vision is, the depth of the Guest's realization in the dream contrasts positively with the superficial and annoying similes typical of his waking thoughts. Here the metaphor conquers; here he is integrating what he has seen around him together with his own feelings about tradition and the past. Here the story of the townspeople has become his story as well, and in this vision of heightened intensity lies a germ of understanding. This is the fulfillment only of a dreamer or an artist, perhaps, but at least that if nothing else. It is at these moments that the narrator most closely approaches identity with the author, who has a penetrating and comprehensive vision of collective crisis.

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