

Agnon's Antagonisms

Cynthia Ozick

SHMUEL YOSEF AGNON, the 1966 Nobel winner for literature, was born one hundred years ago, in Galicia, Poland, and died in Jerusalem in 1970. Not long after his death, I wrote a story about Agnon, a kind of parable that meant to toy with the overweening scramble of writers for reputation and the halo of renown. It was called "Usurpation" and never mentioned Agnon by name. Instead, I pretended he was still alive, not yet a laureate: "It happens that there lives in Jerusalem a writer who one day will win the most immense literary prize on the planet." I referred to this writer as "the old man," or else as "the old writer of Jerusalem"—but all the while it was Agnon I not-so-secretly had in mind; and I even included in my story, as a solid and unmistakable clue, one of his shorter fables: about why the messiah tarries.

To tell the truth, this midrashic brevity (God knows where I came upon it) was the only work of Agnon's I had ever read. Nothing could have tempted me to look more extensively into Agnon, not even the invention of a story about him: though I was enchanted by the dazzlements his great name gave off, my story was nevertheless substantially blind to the illuminations of his pen.

I could hardly blame myself for this. For decades, Agnon scholars (and Agnon is a literary industry) have insisted that it is no use trying to get at Agnon in any language other than the original. The idea of Agnon in translation has been repeatedly disparaged; he has been declared inaccessible to the uninitiated even beyond the usual truisms concerning the practical difficulties of translation. His scriptural and talmudic resonances and nuances, his historical and textual layers, his allusive and elusive echoings and patternings, are so marvelously multiform, dense, and

imbricated that he is daunting even to the most sophisticated Hebrew readers.

What, then, can a poor non-Hebraist possibly make of an Agnonic masterwork when, willy-nilly, it is stripped of a quarter or a half of its texture and its substance, when the brilliant leaves are shaken off the spare, bare, naked-toed trunk? A writer in monolingual America, confined to writing and reading wholly in English, will clearly have no Agnon other than the Agnon who has been Englished. If the prodigal Agnon can be present only in Hebrew, to read him in any other tongue is to be condemned to paucity. The Hebrew prince is an English-language pauper.

So, drawn almost exclusively to the lustiness of literary blue blood, unwilling to see it ransacked and pauperized, I have kept my distance from the translated Agnon.

But Agnon himself has a different idea of translation and its possibilities. The anecdote that illustrates Agnon's position is consummately sly—a sort of play, or paradigm, or Oscar Wildean joke. Saul Bellow tells the joke on himself in his introduction to *Great Jewish Short Stories*, a popular paperback anthology he edited in 1963, some years before either writer had captured the Nobel Prize.

In Jerusalem several years ago [Bellow recounts], I had an amusing and enlightening conversation with the dean of Hebrew writers, S.Y. Agnon. This spare old man, whose face has a remarkably youthful color, received me in his house, not far from the barbed-wire entanglements that divide the city, and while we were drinking tea, he asked me if any of my books had been translated into Hebrew. If they had not been, I had better see to it immediately, because, he said, they would survive only in the Holy Tongue. His advice I assume was only half serious. This was his witty way of calling my attention to a curious situation. I cited Heinrich Heine as an example of a poet who had done rather well in German. "Ah," said Mr. Agnon, "We have him beautifully translated into Hebrew. He is safe."

Now the "curious situation" Bellow alludes to is the fact (as he comments a moment later) that

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"Jews have been writing in languages other than Hebrew for two thousand years." No one could have been more aware of this variety of language-experience than Agnon—which is why Bellow understood Agnon's remark to be "only half serious."

But there are two entirely serious elements to take note of in Agnon's response. The first is his apparent confidence in the power of "beautiful translation." A case can be made that Heine, too, with all *his* strata of sources, from medieval ballads to chivalric romances to French satire, will not readily yield to successful translation—perhaps even less so than Agnon, because a poet is always more resistant to translation than a writer of prose, however complex the prose. And yet Agnon does not doubt that "we have him," that Heine can be genuinely Heine even in a language as distant from German, and as alien to European literary styles, as Hebrew.

All the same, it is not the translator's skill, much as Agnon seems willing to trust in it, that preserves Heine for Agnon. It is Heine's "return," so to speak, as a Jewish poet, to the sacred precincts of the Land of Israel—his return via the Holy Tongue. For Agnon it may be that Heine in German is less fully Heine than he is in Hebrew: to be "safe" is to have entered into the influences of holiness; redemption is signified by the reversal of exile. Whatever happens outside the Land of Israel, whatever ensues in the other languages of the earth, is, to be sure, saturated in its own belongingness, and may indeed be alluring, and without question "counts" in the world of phenomena; but counts differently, because it is outside the historic circle of redemption that only the Land possesses. The world beyond the Land, however gratifying or seductive, is flavored with the flavor of exile.

AT first glance Agnon's witticism, "he is safe," appears to be in praise of translation as a relatively easy triumph of possibility—but only, it seems, if the text in question is drawn from the tongues of exile into the redemptiveness of Hebrew. Presumably, translation *out* of Hebrew would be considered not so much a linguistic as a metaphysical lessening. Or else, since the original continues to stand, Agnon Englished would strike Agnon as irrelevant. The calculated remark, "he is safe," is a joke that recognizes, after all, the chanciness of translation, that in fact *not* all translation "saves"; and it is this contradiction that makes the joke, since the redemptiveness of translation can work in one direction only. A flawed rendering of Heine into Hebrew may nevertheless partake of redemption; a brilliant rendering of Agnon into English backslides into the perilous flavor of exile.

And that is the second serious point. When you reverse the direction—when translation becomes *yeridah* (descent from the heights of Jerusalem;

desertion) rather than *aliyah* (ascent to the sublime; return)—the witticism collapses, a different tone takes hold, and a chink opens into dread, into the regions of the unsafe, of the irrational, into the dark places of alien myth, of luring mermaid and moon-dazed mountain nymph, of Pan and unbridled Eros. The Lorelei will chant her deadly strains out of the bosom of the Rhine, but never out of Lake Kinneret (the Hebrew name for the Sea of Galilee). And Saul Bellow's domesticated metaphorical anecdote—Agnon drinking tea and speculating about Heine's salvation—becomes a parable that, when set to run in reverse, can turn into a tale of baleful exilic potency.

Imagine, for instance, that it is not the Land of Israel that is the magnet, but all the lands beyond. Imagine that the longing of heroic temperaments is for exile rather than for redemption. Imagine everything seen upside down and inside out: a yearning for abroad instead of for Jerusalem; a pilgrimage in search of holy talismans that leads away from the Land toward half-pagan scenes. Imagine a sacred tongue that is not Hebrew. Imagine an Exodus undertaken for the sake of returning to the wilderness. Imagine trading the majestic hymns of Scripture for wild incantations and magical ululations. Imagine the Land of Israel as a site of drought and dearth and death and crumbling parapets and squatters and muteness, while faraway countries flow with rivers and songs and color and grace and beauty and joy.

All these ominous reversals of "he is safe," Agnon has made; he has made them in a work of fiction. If the Land of Israel assures immortality for Jewish poets, the corollary must be that exile can shore up only the short term, the brief lease, until the final slide into oblivion. But what of the opposite proposition? The proposition that the old, old myths, the legends that precede Sinai by a millennium and more, the fables that continue to girdle and enthrall the world, will outlive all? The proposition that compared to the loud song of the Lorelei, out of whose strong throat beat the hypnotic wing-whirrs of a hundred birds, the biblical Hannah's murmured prayer—unaesthetic, humble, almost not there—falls into insignificance?

Such a proposition may be an unlikely meditation for the pen of the "old writer of Jerusalem," "the dean of Hebrew writers," who in 1950, when he delivered up the tale called "Edo and Enam,"* had reached the lively age of sixty-two; sixteen years later we see him flying to Sweden, exultant in a *yarmulke*. Does the pious *yarmulke* contradict the tale? The tale may be said to hang on the case of the translation into Hebrew of a pair of newly-discovered ancient languages; and yet no redemption will come of it. Heine's "Die Lorelei," a song about death through allurements, is transmuted

* "Edo and Enam," together with a second novella, "Bethrothal," is available in English (*Two Tales*, translated by Walter Lever, Schocken Books).

into a Hebrew ballad, and is thereby deemed "safe." But the Enamite Hymns carry, and carry out, the real power of death by allurements: they are all peril. Transported to the Land of Israel they have the capacity to kill, though they too are "beautifully translated" into the Holy Tongue.

Their devoted translator in the story is Dr. Ginath, a scholar without a *yarmulke*, a wholly secularized scientific philologist and ethnographer, who will go to any length to get hold of lost languages: once, for example, he posed as a mystical holy man from Jerusalem, "Hacham Gideon," in order to pry out the secret tongue of the living vestige of the tribe of Gad. "These days," remarks the narrator of "Edo and Enam," "it is as if the earth had opened up and brought forth all that the first ages of man stored away. Has not Ginath discovered things that were concealed for thousands of years, the Edo language and the Enamite Hymns?" Dr. Ginath is the author of "Ninety-nine Words of the Edo Language," and also of an Edo grammar, but

the Enamite Hymns were more: they were not only a new-found link in a chain that bound the beginnings of recorded history to the ages before, but—in themselves—splendid and incisive poetry. Not for nothing, then, did the greatest scholars come to grips with them, and those who at first had doubted that they were authentic Enamite texts began to compose commentaries on them. One thing, however, surprised. . . . All these scholars affirmed that the gods of Enam and their priests were male; how was it that they did not catch in the hymns the cadence of a woman's song?

"I could hear," continues the narrator, "a kind of echo from my very depths . . . ; ever since the day I had first read the Enamite Hymns that echo had resounded. It was a reverberation of a primal song passed on from the first hour of history through endless generations."

That "cadence of a woman's song" belongs to the autochthonous enchantresses, among them the Lorelei; it is the voice of the intoxicated sibyls who speak for what we may call the First Religion, which is the poetry of Eros and nature, of dryad and nymph and oread, of the sacred maidens whose insubstantial temples are the sea, the rivers, the forests, the meadows, and the hills. In "Edo and Enam," Agnon experiments with importing the hymns of this First Religion into the Land of Israel, into the marrow of Jerusalem itself, where such hymns cannot flourish, where they will grow lethal; and he also imports the singer of the hymns, the enchantress Gemulah, who, when she sang in her native realm, "stirred the heart like . . . the bird Grofith, whose song is sweeter than that of any creature on earth."

GEMULAH is from a distant mountainous region, though her people originally lived among springs. According to their

tradition, they derive from the tribe of Gad, which in the Bible once received a blessing of "enlargement." As warriors, they "advanced into the lands of the Gentiles, for they misconceived the text" of the blessing—"they did not know that the blessing refers only to the time when they lived in the Land of Israel, not to their exile in the lands of other peoples." But it is exile itself they have misconceived; they take it for eternity, and have succumbed to the First Religion.

While at least formally they maintain their ancestral hope for the return to Jerusalem, and while Gemulah's father, a learned elder of the tribe, is still able to read to the people from the Midrash and the Jerusalem Targum, "which they have in its complete text, and which he translated into their language," the Gadites are by now profoundly separated. Their speech is unlike any other. In fulfillment of their name, Gad, or Luck, they depend on the stars and deal in charms and talismans and magical texts. Though they continue to circumcise their sons, their alien funeral rites are observed "with songs and dances full of dread and wonder." Gemulah herself is "accomplished in all their songs, those that they had once sung . . . by the springs and also those of the mountains." Gemulah's father hands on to her a "secret knowledge laid up by his ancestors," as well as an arcane private language, an antic invention that separates the two of them even from Gad itself; they are a pair of oracles and sorcerers.

In order to "learn from the eagles how they renew their youth," Gemulah's father ascends into the mountains, where he is attacked and devoured by an eagle. Following a long mourning, Gemulah will be taken by her bridegroom to the Land of Israel, to the city of Jerusalem, where she will sicken and fall mute. The First Religion, woven out of filaments of purest nature poetry, is silenced in the domain of monotheism.

A dumbstruck Lorelei, a somnambulist who "walks wherever the moon leads her," like a mermaid drawn by the tides, Gemulah will at last become equal to the letters of her name when their positions are set free to recombine: a female golem. And indeed at the tale's opening we are privy to some banter about just such a creature—"Wasn't it you who said Dr. Ginath had created a girl for himself?"—and we hear the name of Solomon Ibn Gabirol invoked, the Hebrew poet of medieval Spain who is said to have carpentered a woman out of wood.

Gemulah's bridegroom is Gavriel Gamzu, a man in a *yarmulke*, a dealer in rare books and manuscripts. He began as an ordinary yeshiva student, but discovered himself in thrall to "intrinsic beauty," hence to poetry. In youth once, intending to purchase a copy of the *Shulkhan Arukh*, the major compendium of religious laws, he emptied his pockets instead for the sake of an exotic *divan* of pure verse. "Because he was so fastened to poetry, he came unfastened at the

yeshiva," and was driven to wander the world in search of the ravishments of anonymous hymns. The lure of primeval song has brought him to Gemulah's country. A sandstorm in that region, however, leaves him blind in one eye, perhaps as a divine judgment for preferring intrinsic beauty to the discipline of the codes of conduct.

From now on Gamzu's vision is halved, strangely narrowed. Wearing his *yarmulke*, he lectures against "read[ing] the Law beyond the text," and keeps a stern eye out for "those Bible critics who turn the words of the living God upside down"; but the next instant this one and only eye abandons piety and fixes on the holiness of poets, whose "hallowed hands" have the power to save from the demons of hell. It appears that intrinsic beauty and the Law cannot rest together in peace within the range of a single eye, and may not wed and live together under a roof in Jerusalem. The bewitchment-seeking spirit of Gavriel Gamzu is for the moment more at home away from home, in the lands of exile. Only there do enchantments thrive unrestrained.

Consequently Gamzu's pursuit of rapture can be fulfilled only outside the Land of Israel, in separated communities compromised by long periods of exile. If the uncanniness of Gemulah's song electrifies him into seizing her as his bride, it is not Gadite poetry alone that stirs Gamzu. In his incessant travels he has happened on other deposits of wondrous lyricism—for instance, exilic Jews whose forefathers in the time of the First Temple were young men driven from Jerusalem by the Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar. Riding on millstones, they were carried aloft to their rescue in the isolation of a mysterious new settlement, where "they saw maidens coming up from the sea," and married them; and not long afterward they "forgot Jerusalem." When the priestly scribe Ezra subsequently summoned them to be restored to the Land of Israel, they hung back. Like the Gadites, they mistook exile for permanence. This lost society, the children of mermaids, has developed rites and songs over the generations that deviate signally from the practices of Israel. The close presence of women in their synagogue and the singing of unfamiliar hymns of startling sweetness derive, no doubt, from the habits of their ancestresses the sea-maidens.

IN delineating these legendary distant tribes sunk in attrition and dilution, can Agnon have had in mind the real precedent of the Jews of Elephantine? A community founded on an island in the Nile by Jewish mercenaries under Persian governance, even after Ezra's return to Jerusalem in the 5th century B.C.E., they defied the ban on multiple temples and insisted on erecting a separate and rival edifice. The Elephantine Papyri testify to the strong position of women among them: bridegrooms had to provide dowries, for example. But the statuary that crept into their

temple architecture, and the customs that invaded their practice, including the outright worship of goddesses, severely divided the Elephantinians from the Jewish mainstream, and they disappeared into the belly of exile, leaving behind a mere archeological vapor. In "Edo and Enam," Agnon condenses the vapor of wayward paganized Jews into the honeyed elixir of Gamzu's hymns—but when the hymns are introduced into the place where the Temple once stood, havoc rules, and Jerusalem begins to unbuild.

Consider the condition of Jerusalem when Gamzu brings into the city his wife Gemulah and her father's talismans—mystical leaves, at first sight colorful, then drained of color, on which certain charms are inscribed. These leaves, long buried in a jar in a cave beneath a mountain crag in Gemulah's country, were given to Gamzu by Gemulah's father; they have the power to retrieve her when she escapes to sleepwalk under a full moon, a malady that occurs chiefly when she is away from her native surroundings.

When the charms, in the company of the now ailing Gemulah, settle into Jerusalem, their influence sets off a rash of departures, a rush back down into exile, an explosion of *yeridah*, signifying a descent from lawful holiness. The narrator's wife and children have left Jerusalem for another town; we are not told why. Gerda and Gerhard Greifenbach, who rent part of their house to the scholarly Dr. Ginath, are yearning for foreign lands, and are about to go on a tour. They are described as "dark and distracted," restless and discontent; it is likely that they suffer from the exilic emanations of the two mystical leaves in their possession, gifts from the itinerant Dr. Ginath—perhaps he found them in a bundle of manuscripts purchased from Gamzu, or perhaps he obtained them in Gemulah's country while impersonating Gideon, the Jerusalem Hacham. The Greifenbachs' house is itself tainted by exilic flaws. It was once inhabited by a quarrelsome sectarian from Germany, who ended by abandoning Jerusalem; and again by a couple named Gnadenbrod: the wife refused to live in Jerusalem, and they reentered exile in Glasgow—immediately after which an earthquake undermined the house and permanently weakened the roof.

Gemulah's presence insinuates exile into the everyday life of Jerusalem, if exile is understood to mean deterioration, peril, and loss. The water supply dries up in tanks, pipes, and taps. Angry Arabs appear out of nowhere to stab young lovers. The city is overrun with housebreakers and squatters. In the general homelessness, newlyweds find it impossible to live together under one roof. All this happens when Gemulah is loosed from her sickbed into Jerusalem, somnambulant, released from muteness only to sing her magical song, *yiddal, yiddal, yiddal, yah, pah, mah*. The body of the city is there, but only as a shell: the spirit of peace is gone from it. Jerusalem itself becomes a

kind of golem—which may account for the prevalence of the letter “g”—*gimel*—in all the names of the tale, Gemulah’s among them, since *gimel* too is an anagram for golem.

In the last scenes we see Gamzu himself turned into a golem at the sound of Gemulah’s private language, the language belonging only to herself and her sorcerer father. When Gamzu first heard Gemulah’s voice, on a mountaintop in her own country, he was entranced: Gemulah stood before him as “one of the twelve constellations of the Zodiac, and none other than the constellation Virgo”—an oracle, one of the minor divinities of the First Religion, an enchantress, an alien nymph displaced. Now, in a manner reminiscent of the mystical leaves that initially showed brilliant colors and then grew brown as earth, “suddenly the colors began to change in Gamzu’s face, until at last all color left it, and there remained only a pale cast that gradually darkened, leaving his features like formless clay.”

IT is displacement that governs the imaginings of “Edo and Enam.” Displacement—the grim principle of exile—is what distinguishes Agnon’s fictive commentary on the First Religion from, say, the visionary work of the Sicilian Giuseppe di Lampedusa or the Swedish Pär Lagerkvist, each of whom has written a remarkable modernist novella on the subject of the primal enchantress—or, perhaps, on the theme of ecstatic beauty.

Lampedusa’s enchantress in “The Professor and the Mermaid” is Lighea, “daughter of Calliope,” a siren who appears to a student of ancient Greek and couples with him, hoping to lure him to oblivion. Like her mother the muse of poetry, in the name of rapture she urges the erasure of all distinctions: “ignorant of all culture, unaware of all wisdom, contemptuous of any moral inhibitions, she belonged, even so, to the fountainhead of all culture, of all wisdom, of all ethics, and could express this primigenial superiority of hers in terms of rugged beauty. ‘I am everything [she chants] because I am simply the current of life, with its detail eliminated.’”

Lagerkvist’s parable, “The Sibyl,” has a Christian lining, and offers a darker view of the ecstatic: all the same, the oracle’s power of annihilation (and self-annihilation) is unmistakable, and her utterances in the pit at the temple of Delphi are, like Gemulah’s, in a recondite tongue never before heard by mortal ears:

I began to hiss forth dreadful, anguished sounds, utterly strange to me, and my lips moved without my will; it was not I who was doing this. And I heard shrieks, loud shrieks; I didn’t understand them, they were quite unintelligible, yet it was I who uttered them. They issued from my gaping mouth. . . . Not long afterward it happened that I was carried out of the oracle pit unconscious, violated by [the]

god . . . my ecstasy, my frenzy, was measureless. . . . I smelled a sour stench of goat; and the god in the shape of the black goat, his sacred beast in the cave of the oracle, threw itself upon me and assuaged itself and me in a love act in which pain, evil, and voluptuousness were mingled.

The siren and the sibyl, potent representatives of the First Religion, swallow up all things—every achievement, every desire, every idea—into the poetry of ecstatic obliteration, Eros joined with degradation and death. Gemulah’s bewitchment of Gamzu is no different, though Agnon’s voice, like Gemulah’s, is airier:

Because songs are conjoined, they are linked up with one another, the songs of the springs with the songs of high mountains, and those of high mountains with the songs of the birds of the air. And among these birds there is one whose name is Grofith; when its hour comes to leave the world, it looks up to the clouds and raises its voice in song; and when its song is ended, it departs from the world. All these songs are linked together in the language of Gemulah. Had she uttered that song of Grofith, her soul would have departed from her, and she would have died.

Yet finally Gamzu opposes Gemulah’s sorcery in a way imagination would never dream of opposing the siren’s song or the oracle’s cry. Who, in the gossamer realms of the First Religion, which knows nothing of exile, and where all the world is home to all divinities, would dare to stop the mouths of Delphic sibyls or glittering mermaids? But Gamzu puts his hand over Gemulah’s mouth to save her from singing the notes of Grofith, the poetry of ecstatic frenzy, which can kill. It is the hand of anti-myth.

And still Gemulah dies. She dies for magic, for voluptuous longing, for ecstasy; she dies singing the song of the bird Grofith after all, bidden to do so by Dr. Ginath, whom she mistakes for the Jerusalem Hacham, the magus who once sojourned in her country. As an act of science, the philologist Ginath transcribes the strange syllables of her mysterious language; but Gemulah has no science; she is the antithesis of science. Spell-bound under the moon, she walks on the roof of Ginath’s part of the Greifenbachs’ house—the very roof weakened long ago by an earthquake that came as a judgment upon those who abandon Jerusalem to run after exile. Ginath pursues her, and together they fall to their deaths.

Scanning the obituary notices in the newspaper, the narrator happens on a curious misprint: the announcement of the death of a Dr. Gilath. The letter “l” has been substituted for the letter “n.” Agnon’s Hebrew readers can readily guess the reason. “Ginath” (which means “garden”) suggests the bower of esoteric knowledge, the fatal *pardes* (“paradise”) into which, according to legend, four scholars, all prodigious and original,

ventured; only one of them, Rabbi Akiva, came out alive—perhaps because he more than the others revered the Law. And “Gilath”? Omitting the vowels, the root-consonants spell out the letters of *galuth*: Hebrew for exile, displacement.

Gemulah is in exile from her country of charms and talismans and conjury and divination and necromantic hymn; Jerusalem, the city of the Law, is inimical to all of these. In her native land, Gemulah blooms unharnessed, under the mild rule of poetry and play and random rapture. But in Jerusalem wizards and their hymns weaken and perish; so Gemulah sickens, and takes to her bed spiritless and speechless; it is well-known that a golem lacks the capacity for speech. When the moon calls her, she rises up to meander through Jerusalem, infiltrating her omens and influences through the city, and then Jerusalem too sickens with the sickness of exilic ailments: dread and dryness and departure.

But as soon as Gemulah is destroyed, disordered and disconsolate Jerusalem comes to healthy life again: the water begins to flow freely in the pipes, the exiles stream home, *yeridah* gives way to *aliyah*—the narrator’s family returns, the Greifenbachs hurry back from abroad, nothing more is heard of housebreakers, squatters, marauders, or separated couples. The First Religion is routed, and Jerusalem is restored.

How is it, though, that Gemulah’s husband Gamzu escapes death? Like Ginath, who is punished for flying after the enticements of the languages of exile, Gamzu has been an enamored soul

possessed by the music of the First Religion; and yet Gamzu lives. Like Akiva, he survives the penetration into *pardes*. Gamzu is safe—ultimately he can keep his eye, his only eye, on Jerusalem’s principle of Law; he wears his *yarmulke*, and has the power to stop up Gemulah’s mouth, so that (at least temporarily) she will not lose herself in the song of the deadly bird of beauty. Only in the regions beyond Jerusalem is he powerless before savage beauty.

THE principle of Jerusalem versus the principle of exile; *aliyah* versus *yeridah*; redemption versus illusion; seeking to be “safe” versus finding oneself swallowed up by the forces of obliteration. A fugue of antagonisms. One cannot even be sure of Agnon’s definitive passion, whether he leans finally to the side of lyrical sorcery or of Torah. Near the close of “Edo and Enam,” the narrator learns that Dr. Ginath has burned all his papers, among them the record of Gemulah’s inchoate utterances. Jerusalem, it would seem, has won over the wilderness. But in the very last sentences of the tale, the Enamite Hymns are lauded for their “grace and beauty,” and Dr. Ginath is celebrated for saving them for the world: is this jubilant praise rendered in the narrator’s voice or in Agnon’s own? And in the end how do we know whether Jerusalem itself is really safe, even after the destruction of the enchantress Gemulah? Heine’s Lorelei, after all, now sings in the Holy Tongue, the better to sabotage the citizens of Jerusalem.