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THE PRINCE AS A PAUPER: A DISFIGURED ROYALTY IN S. Y. AGNON'S *A GUEST FOR THE NIGHT*[1]

by

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le-Ḥayim—
Dedicated to Professor Henry A. Fischel
Mentor, teacher, friend.
—Still mighty at eighty.

Among the characteristics of modern literature has been a tone often attained by rendering ironic those classical texts sacred to the particular

[1]The original Hebrew version of this paper was accepted for publication, with some differences, in a forthcoming anthology of essays on S. Y. Agnon. The author hereby wishes to thank the editor of the Hebrew edition, Professor Hillel Barzel of Bar-Ilan University, for permission to publish this revised and translated version in *Shofar*.

A Guest for the Night, tr. M. Louvish (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), is the title of the translated version of the novel, entitled by Agnon as *'Oreaḥ nata lalun*, a phrase he borrowed from Jeremiah 14:8. The Hebrew original now constitutes the fourth volume of Agnon's collected works, *'Oreaḥ nata lalun: kol sippurav shel shemu'el yosef 'agnon*, 4 (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1966). For purposes of this paper, all citations and most spellings of terms and names will be from the English translation. Page numbers referring to this source will follow any reference in parentheses within the text.

heritage out of which they sprang. Not to be left out, Hebrew and Jewish writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are also noted for challenging values previously elevated by their national literature to the realm of the inviolable. In so doing, these writers looked to sway the hearts and minds of readers to question paternal values and bring about a change in world-views as a mark of the Jews' re-entry into history.

One of the far-reaching notions in ancient Hebrew literature, which would later adversely affect many Jewish lives, concerns the biblical assertion that the People of Israel are a nation selected by and having an eternal covenant with God. This idea, phrased in a number of alternative fashions such as "of all the peoples on earth the LORD your God chose you to be His treasured people,"[2] has been understood by Jewish sources of old as a given truth. In ancient, post-biblical, Hebrew literature, the biblical verses regarding the chosenness of the Jews spawned phrases such as "all Israel are royal children" (BT Shabbat 128a and elsewhere).[3]

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[2]Thus in Deuteronomy 7:6; similar phrasing may be found in Exodus 19:5, Dt. 14:2 and 26:18. The notion of the election of Israel is expressed, in addition to the above, in different ways in the Bible. Citations from the Bible are based on *Tanakh, the Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1988).

[3]This phrase is repeated variously in Mishnah Shabbat 14:4; BT Shabbat 67a, 128a; BT Bava Metsiah 113b; BT Yevamot 79a; Zohar Pt. 3, 28a, 223a, 225a as published by Mossad Harav Kook, Jerusalem, 1946. A similar saying—"all Israel are children of ministers"—may be found in Mishnayot, Shabbat. Also of note is "a scholar and a king, the scholar preceded the king. If a king dies, all Israel merit kingship. R. Shimeon says all Israel are children of kings," (see Meir Ish Shalom, ed., *Seder 'eliyahu rabba ve-seder 'eliyahu zuta [tana devey 'eliyahu]*, 2nd edition [Jerusalem: Bamberg and Werman, 1960], and particularly *Derekh 'erets*, ch. 1, *Seder 'eliyahu zuta*, ch. 9, 7, p. 4). Also: "until David's election all Israel merited kingship and when he was elected, all Israel were exempt," in Moshe David Gross, ed., *'Otsar ha-'agada: me-ha-mishnah ve-ha-tosefta ha-talmudim ve-ha-midrashim ve-sifre ha-zohar*, 3rd ed., vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1961), p. 692, n. 255.

A cursory survey of available literature indicates that, in addition to Jews, other groups have, at one time or another, held ethnocentric notions about themselves prompted variously by theological, cultural, racial, or other considerations. Such beliefs have been held by the ancient Greeks, by followers of Islam and medieval Christianity, and by the Soviet Union, nationalist France, and Japan, as noted in Shmuel Almog and Michael Heyd, eds., *Chosen People, Elect Nation and Universal Mission: Collected Essays* [Hebrew, entitled *Ra'ayon ha-behira be-yisra'el u-va-'amim: kovets ma'amarim*] (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1991). Another recent study, regardless of whether one agrees with its author's perspective, also sheds light on how, in addition to Israelis, Ulster-Scots and South Africans have defined themselves as chosen above other nations and hold to a notion of a covenant modelled after that of the Bible (see Donald Harman Akenson, *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel and Ulster* [Ithaca and London:

In light of the chasm which has formed between the covenantal promise and the reality of the Jews' servile state among the nations, we find expressions of frustration and dismay in medieval Jewish literature. Numerous phrases, scattered through the writings of Hebrew authors such as Solomon Ibn Gabirol and Judah Halevi, bemoan the state of an inverted world wherein Jews have been demoted to an obsequious state in the lands of those meant to serve them. Ibn Gabirol, for example, asks in his poem "*sbesh nigzeru latset*," "Why must I, my King, be slave to a maiden's son?" [*lama 'ebi, malki, 'eved le-ben 'amah*].[4]

By the nineteenth century, the Hebrew-Yiddish satirist Mendele Mocher Seforim, pen name of Shalom Jacob Abramovich (1836–1917), when giving his cynical character's view on the Jews' misfortune for being expelled by Bismarck from his domain, explains that "for we Israelites are, after all, the sons of kings!"[5] In a similar vein, concerning his countrymen, James Joyce has also written that "We are all Irish, all kings' sons."[6]

It is not totally surprising, then, that a witty and satirically minded S. Y. Agnon (1888–1970), heir to the wealth of the Hebrew (and Jewish) literary tradition, and also a product of his time, would turn his attention

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Cornell University Press, 1992, p. 5]). And so as not to leave anyone out, Akenson asserts that "Every European nation at one time or another has had leaders or prophets who say that their country is chosen of God and is, in effect, the successor of the children of Israel, and that its citizens are living in a promised land" (p. 5). The author of an article in a recent special issue of *Time* (Fall 1992), regarding time and progress, asserts that the imperial Chinese, too, believed themselves to be above other nations (p. 21), to which we might add the Shoshone Indians, Tibetans, Zoroastrians and the Makuya of Japan. Of related interest to the above is the Jewish geocentric notion regarding Jerusalem. This view is echoed, remarkably, in the name of the Inca capital, Cuzco, meaning the navel of the world (see Gustavo Perednik, "At the 'navel' of the world," *The Jerusalem Post International Edition* [week ending August 10, 1991], p. 14). Not to be forgotten is that the most disastrous consequence of heated pursuit of racial superiority has been the history of Nazism.

[4]Thus in Hayim Shirman, ed. and annotations, *Ha-shira ha-'ivrit bi-sefarad u-viprovance*, vol. I, pt. 1–2 (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Mossad Bialik, 1961, pp. 242–43). For additional readings on the poetical works of these two and of other Hebrew writers, see, among others, T. Carmi, ed., *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981, esp. pp. 204–316, 333–352); Israel Davidson, ed., *Selected Religious Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1952); and Raphael Loewe, *Ibn Gabirol* (New York: Grove-Weidenfeld, 1989).

[5]Mendele Mocher Seforim, "Shem and Japheth on the Train," tr. Walter Lever, in Robert Alter, ed., with intro. and notes, *Modern Hebrew Literature* (New York: Behrman House, 1975), p. 27.

[6]James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 31.

to this notion in his writings. Ironically, his early utterances about Jewish life and depictions of the shtetl were understood by readers as nostalgic retrospects of a bygone world, not as ironic observations. Yet more recent readings have exposed Agnon's sophisticated and multivalent art in all its complexity to the modern reader. Recognition of Agnon's subtle and ironic tone was demonstrated in the 1940s, when the Hebrew literary scholar Baruch Kurzweil led the way in redefining the parameters whereby Agnon's fiction is to be addressed.[7]

A Guest for the Night, Agnon's most sophisticated novel, is replete with accounts of personal and national disaster coming in the wake of the First World War. It tells of how the protagonist, who is also the novel's chief narrator, gradually comes to acknowledge the finality of the physical and spiritual destruction of post-World War One European Jewish life. Although not written as a forecast of things to come, the account testifies to the moral, spiritual, and physical bankruptcy of East European Jewish communities preceding the Holocaust. The narrative also presents an account of the cultural and ideological upheavals in Jewish life as a consequence of the clash between religious tradition and the secularism brought about by the *baskalah*, or Jewish enlightenment, of the previous century and a half. Out of these ashes, as the novel demonstrates, little has survived unscathed from the waves of destruction. The devastation spared none, affecting all irrespective of faith or attachment to riches, property, and status, or of one's relationship with Gentile neighbors.

The Guest-narrator, the novel's leading protagonist, appears to have fled back to his hometown Shibush,[8] only to realize that, in place of the

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[7]See Baruch Kurzweil, *Massot 'al sippure shai 'agnon* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1970) e.g., p. 86; Arnold J. Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare: A Study in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968); James S. Diamond, *Baruch Kurzweil and Modern Hebrew Literature*, Brown Judaic Studies 39 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983); Esther Fuchs, *Cunning Innocence: On S. Y. Agnon's Irony* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1985). In his study, Band tells of the novel's initial appearance in the late 1930s in installments on the back page of the daily *Ha'arets*, upon whose front pages at the time appeared foreboding headlines concerning events in the Land of Israel and Europe (*Nostalgia and Nightmare*, p. 285).

[8]As extrapolated from the parable on p. 29 concerning the Old Beit Midrash, or House of Study, serving as a *sukkah*, or booth, offering shelter to the weary. The destruction of the Guest's home in Talpiot (a Jerusalem neighborhood [pp. 33, 207–208, 396–97]) and his and his wife's emotional state indicate that he has fled back to a place representing for him a paradise of childhood. Out of the very same parable, as well as due to other things which befall him, it turns out that the Guest realizes that the only remnant of that supposed paradise is the Old House of Study, or Beit Midrash, and it, too, is in a state of ruin.

pious Jews of the past, it is now populated by an assortment of Jews and non-Jews, religious and secular, people of faith and atheists, whom Fate has cast upon its streets. The Jews are shown to be more dead spiritually than alive physically, a generation not about to bequeath much of itself to the future. Against the background of this dying society, the hero's personal tragedy unfolds. His initial unwillingness to accept the lachrymose reality which surrounds him finds expression in his escapist tendencies and futile attempts to return Shibush to its purported past glory. Over the duration of the story, he comes to realize, and possibly accept, that the town of his youth is no more. His efforts, doomed from the outset, are the stuff of the plot termed the story of the Guest.[9] In that story, the Guest discovers that what remains of Shibush is but a skeleton of the past, a mere shadow of what was, striking terror into the heart of one who expects to resurrect the past. The reality which is Shibush (meaning in Hebrew a defect, error, breakdown, disruption, and confusion) negates the Guest's deeds, thereby declaring, as it were, the final and irrevocable passing of that longed-for past. Thus, even the ruins of the town, those of

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The terms hero, Guest, and narrator in this novel refer to three states of one personage. Together, they constitute the unified image of the main character of this work, although individually they are not identical. The term Guest refers to the character who has returned to his hometown of Shibush only to remain there for nearly a year. The term narrator points to the source of the voice the reader hears, as it were, throughout the account. The narrator is the one residing in Jerusalem as he retells to himself and the reader the events befalling him during the visit to Shibush. He is liable, in this role, to respond with asides to the very events he tells or about the behavior of the Guest. He does so out of his "epic situation," as the notion is sometimes known (see n. 12 below). In using the term hero or protagonist, I refer to the combined personage, the Guest and narrator together, holding similar views throughout the narrative, or when it causes one of the two other aspects to emerge as the other is being referred to. At times this is the most convenient term to use when the two aspects of the main character cannot be easily separated, or when we cannot refer to one of the two with any certainty. Also, this term is used conveniently when the discussion aims to refer to both aspects of the main character. Regarding these terms and others, see Josef Even, "*Sofer, mesapper u-meḥabber: nisayon le-sinteza meḥkarit shel teḥum merkazi ba-sipporet*," *Hasifrut* 18–19 (1974), pp. 137–163; Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961, pp. 70–71, 74, 158–59, 257, 295–96, and elsewhere).

[9]Gershon Shaked identifies two central cycles in the novel: the Guest's plot and the plot containing the record of the devastation of Shibush. The monologues constituting the cycle of destruction, which only seems to stand as a secondary layer of the novel, overcome the cycle of the Guest and negate his aspirations. And see his "*abdut ve-ribbuy: li-she'elat ha-mivneh shel ha-roman* 'oreaḥ nata lalun," *Moznaim* 22:5–6 (1966), pp. 460–462; continued in *Moznaim* 23:1 (1967), pp. 34–41.

the Old House of Study (the Old Beit Midrash), the Great Synagogue and some of the residents, streets, and structures, all stand over the abyss about to swallow up that which still remains.

The story of the Guest, then, is an account of his vain attempts to prove that a modicum of the faith and piety of the past has survived down to this day. This cycle is foiled by its anti-romantic opposite, in which events expose the hero, and reader, to the realities of the day.[10]

His frequent reaction when confronted by harsh reality is to secure a haven in the Old House of Study (p. 28). There, the illusion he harbors is perpetuated by the semblance of continuity, especially by the perception that the quorum of Jews meeting there for study or service gives credence to the belief that values of the past may be restored. Therefore, as much as the hero adheres to objects and locales that serve as a bridge between him and the past, so is he also bound to characters—among them Rabbi Hayim and Freide the Kaiserin, to name but two—representing tradition's ongoing presence in the here-and-now by their adherence to the customs of bygone days. By their very existence, these characters serve as testimony to the feasibility of a renaissance, and, by the same token, their certain fates point to the ultimate outcome of the Guest's hopes. Their deaths speed up the protagonist's coming to terms with reality and acknowledgment of the final conclusion of traditional Jewish life in Eastern Europe. Only then does he take measures to save himself from the devastation awaiting him in Shibush.

The hero's escape from the reality pervading Shibush is expressed by his attempts to revive those customs and institutions associated in his mind with the ideal lifestyle of bygone days. Through these acts he hopes to serve as an example to the residents of Shibush, inducing them to follow suit and turn back the wheel of time to a more perfect reality. His efforts in this direction, and eventual failure, represent the arena of the Guest's spiritual crisis, which prompts him to make the fateful step to leave Shibush and all her institutions behind.

In addition to renewing the prayer service via a *minyan*, or quorum of ten adult males, and the study of *Torah*, the Guest strives to imbue the residents of Shibush with the awareness that, since they are children of a

[10]Also, most recently, Anne Golomb Hoffman has followed this line in her illuminating reading of the issue from the standpoint of the novel's self-conscious textuality and the significance of episodes having to do with books, such as that concerning the meaning the book *Yadav shel mosbe* has upon the plot (Anne Golomb Hoffman, *Between Exile and Return: S. Y. Agnon and the Drama of Writing* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991], pp. 96–98).

chosen people, they are, as the traditional phrase has it, children of royalty.[11] This act, set against the dismal backdrop of the social, spiritual, and physical ruin of Shibush, illuminates the protagonist's naïveté before he learns to come to terms with the new world.

In the following discussion, I propose to examine the nexus between the themes of chosenness—as manifested through language and situations associated with aristocracy—and the Guest's coming to terms with reality. In the process, I shall trace the means whereby the theme of nobility is illuminated and examine some of its consequent significance to the protagonist, who yearns to realize for himself and those living in Shibush the idea of chosenness. Far from being monolithic, the presentation of this issue in the novel is couched in an ambivalence which characterizes the narrator as much as the Guest. For, on the one hand, this awareness by the protagonist feeds on the traditional aphorism asserting that "all Israel are children of royalty" (p. 30). Yet, on the other hand, the plot acts to counter this naive perception, forcing his realization, as he admits, that it is indeed a sad turn of events "that the son of a king forgets that he is the son of a king" (p. 30).

Significantly, by way of underscoring the ambivalence and irony associated with this theme, the narrator attributes the above conclusion to the Guest as the latter sits in the House of Study (pp. 29–30). The narrative's structure of that episode is interesting in that it is two-layered, representing the consciousness of one character, though at two different and separate time periods. On the one hand the reader shares the thoughts of the Guest as he sits in the House of Study in Shibush, whereas on the other hand these very observations are intertwined with the narrator's, that is, the story-teller's, account as he turns to address the reader and reveal his views out of his epic situation.[12]

Presentation of the narrator's thoughts at this juncture in the story is significant in furthering the theme of royalty, which is raised here and continues to be examined from several points of view through the novel. The question arising in the Guest's mind—and perhaps also in the

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[11]As noted above, in n. 3, this phrase recurs in various sources from Mishnaic texts on.

[12]The notion of the "epic situation," derived from Bertil Romberg's study of first-person narrative, refers to the time, place, and condition of the narrator at the time of narrating the tale: Bertil Romberg, *Studies in the Narrative Technique of the First-Person Novel*, tr. M. Taylor and H. R. Borland (Stockholm: Folkroft, 1974), pp. 33–38. As noted in n. 8 above, the narrator of this story resides in Jerusalem and tells of events which have occurred to him during his visit to his hometown some ten years earlier (for illustrations to support this contention, see the following pages in the novel: 208, 377, 380, 449, 476–77).

narrator's—concerns the reason why a Jew needs to study the Torah:

> For what reason did the Holy One, blessed be He, choose us and lay upon us the yoke of the Torah and the commandments, for isn't the Torah heavy and difficult to observe? Some solve the problem one way and some another, but I will explain it by a parable. It is like a king's crown, made of gold and precious stones and diamonds. So long as the crown is on the king's head, men know that he is king. When he removes the crown from his head, not all are aware that he is king. Does the king refrain from putting the crown on his head because it is heavy? On the contrary, he puts it on his head and delights in it. The king's reward for the crown being on his head is that everyone exalts and honors him and bows down before him. What good does this do the king? That I do not know. Why? Because I am not a king. But if I am not a king, I am a king's son and I ought to know. But this man has forgotten, he and all Israel his people, that they are sons of kings. The books tell us that this forgetfulness is worse than all other evils—that a king's son should forget he is a king's son. (pp. 29–30)

The narrator's conclusion is that the Torah is a distinguishing badge placed by the Creator onto His people in order to mark, separate, and distinguish them from other nations. As a reward for studying Torah, explains the narrator, the People of Israel are respected, praised, and exalted by other nations. Yet he appears to have no satisfactory answer as to the consequent question—namely, for what reason do the People of Israel need such honor, respect, and exaltation? He explains his inability to answer by attributing it to an imperfection which causes him, like the rest of the People of Israel, to forget that he is a son of kings.

Influencing his interpretation of Jewish history, the narrator's own emotional state prompts him to claim that this forgetfulness[13] is the source of all evil besetting the Jews, since it causes them to abandon their tradition and cling to secularism. It is at this juncture, continues the narrator, that the people's appeal fails them before their Maker and they are subjected to trials and tribulations. This metaphysical inclination in interpreting Jewish history, which is also reminiscent of the mystics' notion of *hester panim* ("the concealing of God's face"), is not a new feature of Agnon's implicit *Weltanschauung* but is reminiscent of the view found

[13]The issue of the narrator's forgetfulness is a literary contrivance which results in the ironic depiction of the narrator-protagonist as an authentic hero. The many comments having to do with the narrator's forgetfulness are scattered throughout the novel, such as pp. 66, 124, 165, 168, 174, 187, 210, 274, 284, 297, 349, 379, 383, 458. Concerning the literary contrivances in the characterization of the novel's protagonist, see Gershon Shaked, "*Ha-mesapper ke-sofer: li-she'elat demut ha-mesapper be-*'oreah nata lalun *me'et shai 'agnon*," *Hasifrut* 1:1 (1968), esp. pp. 22–28.

even in his earliest of works, "Agunot." There, too, Jewish history is interpreted in terms of the relationship between the People of Israel and the Creator.[14]

And while the narrator, as he appears to be safely ensconced in Jerusalem while telling of his visit to Shibush, is the one attempting to justify the instruction to continue the tradition by studying the Torah, the Guest himself is not shown as adhering to every word of that tradition and does not always study Torah for its sake. For much of the time he is pictured as sitting in the Old House of Study, merely "looking" at the books (p. 29).[15] His parable about the *sukkah* (or booth) providing shade on a hot day (p. 29) indicates that the Guest views the Old House of Study more as a haven from the harshness of life than a place for studying the old books.

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[14]The tale "Agunot," which appeared initially in 1908 (see Band, *Hasifrut* 1:1 [1968], p. 17ff), was fixed in *'Elu ve-'elu* of Agnon's collected works, pp. 405–416. The translation of this story may be found in S. Y. Agnon, *Twenty-One Stories*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Shocken Books, 1970), pp. 30–44. Concerning this story, see Gershon Shaked, *Shmuel Yosef Agnon: A Revolutionary Traditionalist* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1989). Concerning the metaphysical orientation of the author, see Hillel Barzel, *"Tefisah historiosofit bi-yetsirat 'agnon (Shesh shanim li-fetirato),"* *Yedi'ot 'aḥaronot* (13 February 1976), p. 1; continued in 20 February, pp. 6, 17.

[15]It is indeed a difficult task to distinguish at time between utterances of the Guest as opposed to those of the narrator. At times it even appears that the two are made to share in these expressions, whereas in some cases it seems as if the statements attributed to the Guest are more likely to be those of the narrator as he observes events from his vantage point. Such is the case with the episode under discussion. By fixing the stated segment among accounts of introspections, parables, and opinions, the narrative moves the plot to the realm of thoughts and ideas.

The resultant impression is that the details are directed from above, from a perspective easily identifiable with the sphere of the narrator who weighs and evaluates that which is set out before the reader. The brief formulation of the Guest's problem in seeking refuge from the reality he encounters in Shibush also serves as a good indicator of the narrator's point of view being the chief contributor of these words. The significance in determining the boundaries between the narrator and his Guest protagonist is that in this instance it is possible to detect a highly subtle means at the author's disposal for characterizing his figures and supplementing their views.

Hasidism and Aristocracy: In the Shadow of King David

The Guest's recollections and reconstruction of Jewish life in the past are affected by a strong nostalgic tendency, a view romanticized by painting that past as a lost paradise made corrupt by people's misdeeds. The nostalgic effect is achieved, in part, by having the narrative selectively concentrate on recalling characters of heroic proportion against whom the narrator compares those living in Shibush at the present. Among the more notable among these are portraits of Hasidic sages (*zaddikim*), customs, and ways of life.

In his presentation of a semi-documentary account of the diverse Hasidic sects that existed in Shibush some two generations ago (pp. 191–202), the narrator provides the reader with an account of Jewish life in the past. The narrative, as found in the later editions of the novel, extends over two whole chapters, "Chapter Four and Thirty: About the Houses of Prayer in Our Town" (pp. 191–198), and "Chapter Five and Thirty: Additional Matter" (pp. 198–202). The history of the production of these accounts is telling: an examination of the novel's manuscripts and first published edition reveals that initially this account was less elaborate and sufficiently small to comprise a single chapter, labeled as the twenty-eighth chapter of manuscript number 1:695 of the Agnon Archives.[16] The fact that this chapter, more than any other in the novel, was developed so extensively and reworked so often—judging from its repeated revisions and expansions—is testimony to the special regard Agnon had for it.

We find, for instance, alterations among the various extant manuscripts of the novel. The chief one to have survived, catalogued as 1:695, is at variance in terms of content and languages from the typescript, catalog number 1:1. By contrast with his tendency to contract the novel, Agnon worked to expand this account whenever revising the novel. The expansion often meant internal modification of sentences, added accounts, and deleted prior statements or their relocation within the chapter.

[16]I am particularly thankful to the Jewish Studies Program, the Middle Eastern Studies Program, and the Office of Research and the University Graduate School of Indiana University for the support extended to me at various stages of this research project. Recent work on this paper was made possible by a Travel to Collections Grant of the National Endowment for the Humanities, to which I am also thankful. I also wish to express my gratitude to the Agnon Archives and its co-director, Mr. Raphael Weiser, and his staff at the National and University Library of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, for the assistance and insights provided me in deciphering Agnon's manuscripts.

The novel's first published edition, appearing serially in the daily *Ha'arets* in 1938–39, testifies to the extent of the twenty-eighth chapter's growth. At this juncture, for example, over a dozen lines were added to the paragraph beginning today with the words "In those days . . ." and ending with ". . . quiet and not noisy" (pp. 194–195). The *Ha'arets* edition also reveals another addition, this time of two whole paragraphs, beginning with "In any case . . ." and ending with ". . . to roast an ox" (pp. 200–201). These are but two examples of many wherein changes have been introduced to the novel.

It might be worthwhile to add at this juncture that the chapter under discussion, chapter twenty-eight of the *Ha'arets* edition, was divided in two only after the conclusion of the serialized edition. The title of the original chapter, "About the Houses of Prayer in Our Town," left the second half with the logically simple, though narratologically pithy—since the whole account is purportedly the product of an author-narrator—"Additional Matter." I would suggest that the chapter was divided in two in order to abbreviate the length of the account within the chapter and retain a chapter length in keeping with those of the rest in the novel while still retaining all the documentary material. Only during the last phase, when Agnon again revised the novel for publication of his collected works in the 1950s, was there a considerable reduction of this account, in keeping with the overall compression of the whole novel,[17] an issue I plan to examine in another article.

Judging from his account of the diverse Hasidic movements in Shibush, the narrator's view appears to be that their leaders have constituted, in the past, the spiritual and patrician class among Jews. For while describing their ways and practices, the narrator employs a terminology clearly linking these figures with an aristocracy (pp. 138–39, 168). And while the reader is thus rewarded with much verifiably accurate evidence, one of the goals of the following discussion is to contend that included among these details is a strong measure of Agnon's habitual irony. Consequently, we must read the account on two tiers: as a documentary account pointing to the narrator's sentimental regard for bygone days and also as an implicitly ironic account of the futility of the search for a lost world and unreachable ideal.

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[17]Here my findings contradict the account by Band, n. 7 above, p. 283 and elsewhere. As regarding the history of Agnon's editing of his work, see esp. Yaakov Mansour, *'Iyunim bi-leshono shel shai 'agnon* [Studies in the Language of S. Y. Agnon] [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1969), pp. 37–52, and esp. 52–53. As an example, see the author's survey of the emendations made in various editions of *Temol shilshom*, (Mansour, *Iyunim*, pp. 221–232).

An apt illustration of the narrator's attitude toward the affinity between Hasidism and Jewish spiritual nobility is his explanation that the reason behind the adoption of peasant shepherd melodies for Hasidic songs and prayers was that they had originally been Jewish melodies, "handed down from King David, melodies that were carried into captivity among the worshippers of stars and constellations . . ." (p. 192). These melodies were reinstated by the Hasidim, whose desire was to emulate what they perceived to have been the ways of King David, thereby identifying themselves as heirs to royalty and as its contemporary manifestation. In consequence of such a view, it is only natural that Hasidic students are given the title "princes of the Torah" (p. 194).

Since it is the narrator who relates the Hasidic prayers to the melodies of King David, it is no wonder that he goes on to lend Hasidic leaders titles of aristocracy and royalty: concerning the Tchortkover *zaddik*, he notes that ". . . the Tchortkover is of the seed of the House of David, and if the generation were deserving, he would be King of Israel . . ." (p. 196). And regarding the *zaddik* of Kupiczince it is said that ". . . all his ways were like those of the Ruzhiner's grandsons—he behaved in royal style" (p. 199). Out of his familiarity with this world, Agnon—or his narrator—demonstrates that it is not only in their practices, but also in their ways of life and demeanor that these *zaddikim* actualized the notion of aristocracy and its ways to their followers.

Explicit external evidence as to the practice of attributing patrician qualities to such Hasidic masters is amply available in accounts by and about Hasidic figures. Thus, for example, we find that the leaders of Hasidic sects were in the habit of establishing courts for themselves, in which they and their heirs would reign. As in the case of European royalty, any approach made to a Hasidic chief necessitated penetration through a series of aides, bodyguards, and servants. Furthermore, as we find in the testimony of one of these Hasidic writers, Abraham Adler, who wrote of the Beltzer Rebbe, the leader of the sect, upon ascending to the role of leader, would be installed by means of a coronation ceremony.[18] His rise, often to a lineal throne (pp. 56, 57), would also be viewed as seizing control of Jewish spiritual life in a territory deemed the realm of his reign (p. 46). The leader, or *zaddik*, may then rule over his domain with the aid

[18]Abraham Adler, *The Righteous Man and the Holy City: Aharon of Belz* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Library, n.d.), pp. 59, 108. Most recently, notions such as the Rebbe's coronation or the present or former possession of great wealth by his family are confirmed in Jerome R. Mintz, *Hasidic People: A Place in the New World* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), esp. pp. 11, 16, 129, 271–72.

of advisors and even a personal "foreign minister" (p. 49) functioning as intermediaries between him and his followers and the outside world. And, as in the domains of kings, there would also be changes in regimes among the Hasidim, as the throne was passed down to the heirs. At times a new leader would, as in a coup, arise in a sect whose leader had either died or lost control over his domain (p. 193).[19] And, as in temporal kingdoms, the *zaddikim* made converts for themselves from among other sects, thereby enlarging their territory through alternate means of "conquest" (pp. 198-99).

It is a bygone world, as imagined in the hero's memory, which serves as the backdrop against which the bankruptcy of the current generation is unveiled. Aside from the heroic images of the Hasidic leadership, the narrator refers to other men of the spirit, figures from the past against which none in today's Shibush can compare. Among those are the hero's father, Rabbi Abraham, and his family and, to some extent, Rabbi Hayim in his days of glory. In addition, the familiarization of the reader with the Hasidic world as it used to be, in two chapters whose account rings documentarily credible, enables the story to underscore the tensions between the ideals and institutions of the past and the vestiges of that world which the Guest attempts to rescue.

The Rabbi's Family: How Have the Mighty Fallen?

Whereas the world of the past, and Hasidim in particular, is enshrouded in the narrator's imagination with a mystical, legendary aura, present Jewish life and culture is viewed as spiritually, morally, and physically flawed. In his visit to Shibush, the Guest witnesses the impoverishment of the institution of the rabbinate in town, an apt synecdoche for Jewish spiritual life in eastern Europe. For as compared to rabbis of the past in Shibush, it becomes evident that not only is the current one without the requisite rabbinical ordination to deserve the title of rabbi (pp. 156, 167), but his intolerance of alternative practices raises doubts as to his abilities to function effectively as one. The community, in turn, does not give him the respect due his office or the ideological support for his positions on issues (p. 170). In the account of the bitter dispute about the rabbinical seat of Shibush between supporters of Rabbi Hayim and the teacher who

[19]Adler, *The Righteous Man*, p. 46 and elsewhere.

won and became the town's rabbi,[20] the narrator notes that, even from the standpoint of scholarly erudition, the latter did not deserve to be heir of an office occupied by highly respected dynasties of rabbis (p. 155). Moreover, his arrogance and self-centeredness, as shown in the episode wherein the Guest visits his home, lend credence to the narrator's claim that the current rabbi of Shibush pursues honor while his acts are meager and divisive (pp. 170, 179). In every encounter between them, it is the rabbi who loses more of his respectability as he is persistently identified with those taking a narrow, severe, and anti-Zionistic outlook concerning the observance of tradition.[21]

The tempestuous encounters between the rabbi and the Guest, and the manner wherein the discourse is set forth between the two—the Guest is depicted as barely saying a word, lending the dialogue a monological character of statements uttered by the rabbi into which the Guest intrudes from time to time with a scathing remark—indicate the narrator's success in posing the rabbi in negative light. In so doing, the narrative substantiates the view that the rabbi is indeed of dubious qualities and does not merit in the least the role of representative of the rabbinical establishment and traditional Jewish leadership.

The downfall of the rabbinical elite, from their stature as spiritual wardens of Jewish communal life, from those who added to the name and respectability of a community down to Shibush's current rabbi, also finds expression in the latter's progeny. For while the sons of the great spiritual luminaries of the past followed in their fathers' footsteps to become pillars of their communities, the deeds of the rabbi's son and grandchildren are a clear sign of the generations' corruption. The reader learns that the rabbi's son has become the editor of a sectarian, propagandistic newspaper of the orthodox, anti-Zionist wing of East European Jewry. The fruits of his labors, as well as his own ideological bent, further shake the already crumbling foundations of faith. Like his father, so too Pinhas Aryeh belongs to an anti-Zionistic religious movement. Yet, unlike his father, he is shown

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[20]An account reminiscent of Agnon's tale "*Shne talmide ḥakhmim she-hayu be-'irenu*"; yet unlike there, this rabbi's name is never mentioned in the novel, which may be construed as a significant indicator of the narrator's implied regard for him. Pnina Meislish, n. 21 below, attempts to identify the historical model for this character.

[21]For a historical background of this sect see Pnina Meislish, "*He'ara 'ḥat le-*'oreah nata lalun," *Yedi'ot 'aḥaronot* (13 February 1976), pp. 2, 7. Also see her M.A. thesis, "*Ha-tashtit ha-historit ba-roman* 'oreah nata lalun *me'et shai 'agnon*" ["The Historical Background of the Novel *A Guest for the Night* by S. Y. Agnon," in Hebrew], M.A. thesis, Bar-Ilan University, 1984, esp. pp. 58–61, 87–91.

to have forsaken the study of the holy books and channeled all his energies into the journalistic profession, which prostitutes the tradition, rendering it a tool with which to disseminate his ideological prejudices. The sole instances of Pinhas Aryeh's use of traditional writings are when he cites from them slogans to sustain his views and to pursue his ideological enemies.

Pinhas Aryeh's regard for the tradition, as much as it seems to lack genuine commitment and conviction, is still considerable when compared to the place Judaism takes in the lives of his children, the rabbi's grandchildren. For while Pinhas Aryeh does uphold a measure of the ways of the past, the rabbi's grandson and granddaughter live a life devoid of any significant Jewish religious or cultural content. The fact that they refrain from desecrating the tradition in public—for they do not work on the sabbath, although his daughter does attend the opera on that day—is rooted in their dependence for livelihood upon their father (pp. 274-75). In light of these developments, the subtextual aphorism that the deeds of the fathers are a sign for the children (BT Sota 34a) takes on an ironic twist.

The rabbi and his son and grandchildren are testimony to the tarnished visage of the aristocratic social stratum in Jewish life of the Diaspora. The rabbi's home is an apt example of the impoverished image of the prince who now betrays his origins and mission. Agnon does not merely depict the physical and cultural demise of East European Jewry, but also underscores the fact that the spiritual leadership of that Jewry, like the very notion of an elite leadership, is but a pathetic reflection of its ancient archetypes.

Freide the Kaiserin: A Double Irony

In her name, image, and way of life, Freide the Kaiserin typifies the state of Jewish aristocracy of her days. She and her family, explains the narrator, had the appellation of Kaisers (emperors) bestowed upon them by local townfolk intent on mocking members of this destitute family for their haughtiness and arrogance (p. 78). Moreover, Ephraim Yossel, Freide's deceased husband, "whom the jesters of the town used to call Franz Joseph" (p. 265), is said to have had features resembling those of the famous Austro-Hungarian Emperor. The effect is comical when we consider that the Jews of the realm used to call Franz Joseph by the

affectionate name of Ephraim Yossel[22] and ironic in light of the poverty in which the Shibush Kaiser lives. However, in face of her Jobean fate—losing her husband and sons to war and exile and remaining alone in a shack of a house—she sardonically asks, ". . . am I really a Kaiserin? . . . Now that the Kaiser is no longer Kaiser, what does it matter?" (p. 79). The words not only give voice to her personal plight but also are a statement about the institution of royalty in the world. Namely, the end of the First World War bears witness to the decline of many of Europe's dynasties, including a diminution of people's reverence for the status of royalty and toward the King of Kings as well.

Thus on the one hand the countenance of aristocracy—Jewish and other—is disfigured, whereas on the other hand Freide's latent nobility is made manifest, as she is the representative of pure and uncorrupted faith. She is a last vestige of a family whose sons and daughters, the latter of whom resembled princesses, as did the rest of the daughters of Shibush (pp. 79–81, 142–43), were put to death unjustly. To add to her bereavement, her last living son, Elimelech, left town (pp. 79–81) only to find life on the outside as unbearable as at home.

In her way of life, and for being his mother's governess, Freide is viewed by the Guest as the abode of his longed-for childhood past. He harbors a particular affection for Freide, cares for her welfare and sees in her tenacity to keep her house an indication that one can return to one's home and preserve a measure of the refined faith of bygone times. No wonder, then, that her death, which shakes the Guest (pp. 290ff) and comprises another stage in the process of eradication of his hopes, arouses in him a process of spiritual self-examination concerning the reason for one's being on earth (p. 291).

Unlike Freide, who clings to ancestral traditions, her son Elimelech rejects his heritage and its values. His embittered attitude toward religious establishment stands in marked contradiction to the meaning of his name ("my God is king"). Elimelech's rebelliousness finds expression, for instance, in his refusal to show respect to others or exhibit a "royal demeanor" as a son of the Kaiser family. While his mother accepts her bitter fate abjectly, Elimelech repudiates his "lineage," treats disparagingly his Jewish heritage, and attempts to escape the future that awaits him in Shibush by leaving town. And while Freide remains one with whom the hero sympathizes, Elimelech is portrayed in considerably less affectionate terms as one who is bitter, resentful, and cross, who arouses in the Guest

[22]Meislish, *Ha-tashtit*, p. 72.

feelings of anger and guilt. Aside from the letter Freide receives from her son (pp. 124-25), by means of which the reader witnesses Elimelech's tormented soul, this character stands as one occupying an extreme stance in the ideological spectrum encountered by the Guest in Shibush. So, while another character struggling with tradition, Daniel Bach, is depicted as regarding with some skepticism the traditions of Judaism and the deeds of the Creator, Elimelech upholds the more extreme notion of uprooting Jewish values and denouncing faith in God. So it is Elimelech's views, opinions, and behavior which bring upon him the hero's wrath, while the relationship between the Guest and Daniel Bach remains positive and sympathetic throughout the story.

Yet, despite the tension between the two, the narrator's regard for Elimelech remains complex and contradictory in that he sees in this ideological rival a measure of his own self. For as the hero did in his times, Freide's son also abandons his home to seek a better refuge in the world. Like the Guest, Elimelech is away from home when one of his parents dies. And while he leaves at an early juncture of the story, Elimelech's presence remains palpable to the end. His face and fate during his wanderings haunt the Guest on many occasions, an indication of the kinship and the inevitable analogy arising between them.[23] Although from the standpoint of his name and Jewish ancestry Elimelech deserves to realize the aristocratic lineage of his family and people, the times have conspired to create a fate which has caused him to reject his destiny and the Guest's idealistic expectations and instead leave to find his place in this world.

[23]The theme of departure from, and perhaps even return to, Shibush is shared by the Guest and Elimelech. The latter, though, does not appear to consider the Land of Israel a viable refuge, destination, or alternative to his hometown. Other issues they appear to hold in common are: the trials and travails of their existence outside Shibush; rebellion against ancestral values; abandonment of a parent; and absence at the time of death of that parent. Compare these details as regarding the Guest (pp. 86-87, 207-208, 106-107, 82, respectively) and Elimelech (pp. 13, 21, 465, 124-25, 11, 78-79, respectively). Elimelech is also mentioned in other places and contexts in the story; see, for example, pp. 2-3, 9, 289-93. Still needed is a study of the novel's characters as doubles of one another, reflecting each other while deepening the themes surrounding the Guest.

Rachel: The Oblivious Princess

The examples above elucidate and underscore the extent to which the image of Jewish nobility has become deformed and bankrupted in Shibush, being also an observation on the decline of East European Jewish life. These representatives illustrating the case—among them the rabbi, his family, Freide, and her family—promote the view that the leaders of the community, those representing a continuity with the past, no longer merit the aristocratic position they occupy. The non-leaders, some of whom possess noble attributes, do not want the honor, and the generation of the children does not continue the ways of the past. They do not strive to realize the self-concept of an exalted people but challenge the Guest's sense that all Children of Israel are children of royalty.

The present generation's disregard or forgetfulness, as the Guest would see it, of their royal lineage, and their refusal to seriously regard the promises of tradition, are expressed most lucidly in the episodes concerning Rachel, the innkeeper's daughter. More than in anyone else, it is in her image and manners that the Guest discovers vestiges of the lost aristocratic demeanor of his people. Yet, much to his chagrin, she is oblivious to his view of her glorious ancestry and mocks him for his attempts to arouse positive feelings in her toward her heritage. Rachel is one of the novel's most central characters, and around whom the narrator constructs the notion of royalty in Israel. For that reason, it is important to devote some attention to episodes reporting the encounters between her and the Guest.

Prior to presenting the first dialogue between the Guest and Rachel, regarding her apathy toward her heritage and its traditions, the narrator himself raises the issue of aristocracy only to follow it with a comment concerning Rachel's forgetfulness as features of present Jewish life:

> The books tell us that this forgetfulness is worse than all other evils—that a king's son should forget he is a king's son.
>
> Rachel, the innkeeper's younger daughter, has also forgotten that she is a daughter of kings . . . (p. 30)

The juxtaposing of these two issues underscores the strong association in the narrator's mind between Rachel's image and his ideological conviction regarding Jewish chosenness. Yet, even at this opening juncture, the chasm between his and Rachel's views becomes crystallized.

The episode opens with an argument between Mr. Nisan Zommer, the innkeeper, and Rachel, his daughter, about the value of upholding the ways of the forefathers. The Guest's reaction to the father's inquiry of him, reported narratologically by means of a general summary of what was said,

is simply, "So I had my say" (p. 30), implying his agreement with the innkeeper. It is no wonder, then, that in reaction to his concealed comment, Rachel's mocking response expresses her reservations about his views as she repeats the words ostensibly uttered by the Guest that "Every daughter of Israel should think of herself as a daughter of kings" (p. 31). Their contradictory views are symptomatic of the generational gap between the fathers, who continue to adhere to remnants of the faith, and the children, who oedipally rebuff all those values.

By ridiculing the claim that every woman of Israel is a daughter of kings, Rachel underscores her alienation from her people's heritage. Since she is a representative of the younger generation, her refusal is an expression of independence, a break in a generational chain bridging past and future. In response, and while asserting that since she is not sufficiently mature Rachel should be forgiven for her words, the narrator transparently attempts to rationalize and excuse the behavior of a character for whom he still harbors a special affection and wishes to protect:

> Rachel is no longer a child, but not yet a young woman. . . . At first sight it seems that there is something impudent about her, but by the way she bends her head it can be seen that she does not think much of herself . . . (p. 31)

This defense notwithstanding, it appears that her unequivocal response to his views is nevertheless difficult for him to grapple with while he attempts to attribute noble qualities to her.[24]

The narrator's affection for Rachel is indicated, in part, by the attention he pays to her physical appearance, particularly to those aspects of Rachel which conform to his views regarding the proper appearance of a young woman—her neck, forehead, eyes and lips (p. 31), hair, dress, and personality (pp. 72–73). These details arouse in him associations with the highborn ancestral pedigree, as he believes it to be, of any young Jewish

[24]If we are attentive to the categories of discourse in the dialogue between the Guest and Rachel, we notice the narrator's skepticism or qualms about identifying with the Guest or clear disassociation from him. This is not the place to present a detailed discussion regarding the stylistic and compositional means whereby this impression is established in the novel; however I mention the opening wherein the narrator seems almost intent upon concealing, as it were, the comments made by the Guest regarding the value of tradition. In the course of the conversation, the protagonist reveals his affection for Rachel regardless of the hostile views she harbors for his opinion and against tradition (see n. 8 above).

woman.[25] By comparison, other young people in Shibush illustrate more poignantly the rebellious aspect of the generation, among them Erela Bach and David Moshe, the Rabbi's grandson.

Other stronger illustrations demonstrate the narrator's identification of Rachel as the daughter of royalty, signifying aspects of Jewish nobility. In an episode in which the Guest is said to be telling her stories, the narrator suddenly turns—from within what is termed his epic situation[26]—to the reader and declares that "If I were telling Rachel this story *at this very moment*, I should tell her the story of a king's daughter . . ." (p. 73, emphasis mine). This departure from the narrative's continuity delays the unfolding of what is ostensibly the main plot, while turning the reader's attention to the narrator's intrusiveness into his own story as he reacts to the events he tells.[27] The revelation of the narrator's inner self points to his continued affection for Rachel with whom, through the medium of his story, he continues to carry on an imaginary dialogue.

The juxtaposing of an episode detailing a dialogue between the Guest and Rachel with an imaginary one, in which the *narrator* wishes to tell her a tale, reinforces the contention that Rachel is at the root of the transformed image of that princess. The episode suggests that the causes behind the distorted image of Princess Rachel are the very convulsive events of modern times which have corrupted the noble character of humankind.

The resemblance between some residents of Shibush and nobility constitutes an ironic phenomenon which is both comical and tragic. For while those whom the royal title is most befitting appear to reject the accolade, those not deserving the designation pursue it with all their might. Thus it appears that the "aristocracy" of the Jewish community becomes a reduction, in a parodic fashion, of the traditional notion of Jews

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[25]No wonder then that, to him, she is the symbol of hope and optimism for the future. In accord with this view, the hero interprets Rachel's closing of her eyes as a gesture of one "Not like her father, who wants to preserve what he has already seen, but like one who half closes his eyes to see what is still to happen" (p. 31). The moral for literary interpreters of Agnon, in striking this analogy, is that the transference of any act or situation from one place to another, or from one work to another, demands careful consideration of the context and background to each and every source.

[26]As propounded by Romberg; see n. 12 above.

[27]For a most illuminating discussion of the role of the narrator as the teller of the story see Gershon Shaked, "*Ha-mesapper ke-sofer: li-she'elat demut ha-mesapper be-*'oreah nata lalun *me-'et shai 'agnon*," *Hasifrut*, 1:1 (1968), pp. 17–35. Reprinted in revised form in his *'Omanut ha-sippur shel 'agnon* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1973), pp. 228–287.

being children of royalty. In what follows I shall focus on two characters who wholeheartedly wish to be among the Jewish nobility, Schuster the tailor and Zechariah Rosen the feed merchant.

Schuster the Tailor: A Royal Jester

Schuster the tailor stands as a tragicomic figure in the novel. His name, denoting the profession of a shoemaker—and also serving as a pejorative term for a shoddy craftsman, for one who is incompetent in his profession—stands in marked contrast to his profession as a tailor. His dubious skills are reinforced in the story by evidence such as the shopkeeper's wife's comments as she volunteers to invite for the Guest ". . . my own tailor and you will see the difference between one tailor and another" (p. 51). His few customers, personal traits, and curious ways, which stand to put off those who come to him, point to Schuster's impoverished condition while he aspires to be thought of as the clothier of ministers and princes.

In their first meeting, at which Schuster's regard for the aristocracy is already made evident, the tailor explains to the Guest his preparedness to sew him an overcoat with the justification that

> The District Governor is friendly to me, and he will not resent it if I put off his work, for I have already made him a number of garments and you, sir, certainly need an overcoat . . . (p. 48)

Later, in words which seem to feign innocence, the narrator reinforces what has been implied about the tailor by indicating that it is indeed ironic that

> At first the tailor used to boast to me that all the nobles flocked to his door, as they were great connoisseurs and knew that he was an artist. But as soon as he started to make my coat he forgot the nobles and they forgot him, and not a man turned up to have a patch put on. And this was really a surprise: here was a skillful tailor, expert in making clothes, and he was left to sit in idleness. (pp. 58–59)

The double irony in these words stems from the fact that the Guest, too, came upon this "craftsman" and did not go to a truly expert tailor. Over the course of their relationship, though, the Guest's belittling attitude toward Schuster becomes increasingly evident until the narrator states unambiguously that the tailor is a confirmed liar (p. 255). The development in the tailor's presentation, beginning with the mere showing of his behavior and moving on to the narrator's explicit description of his character, allows ample time for the reader to reach this conclusion before

being informed to that effect by the narrator, and before the Guest arrives at the same conclusion. Consequently, the narrator appears naive because of his inability to make an early judgment of the tailor's character. Thus, in the same way as the Guest's eyes open to notice the reality that surrounds him in Shibush, so also does he come to realize the tailor's personality.

Moreover, it is not merely the protagonist who identifies Schuster's reverence for aristocracy. The shopkeeper, who sells the Guest the cloth for his overcoat, mocks the tailor's boasting for having lived in Berlin (p. 51). "And if he was in Berlin," she says derisively, "what about it? Perhaps Hindenburg commissioned him to make him a tefillin sack? . . ." (p. 51). Challenging the Guest's impression that the tailor merits the title of artisan, she wants to recommend her own tailor, who she claims is a true artist. However, in this episode, which appears at the beginning of the development of relationships between the two, the shopkeeper's wife's words serve merely to foreshadow things to come. The Guest's pride and conscience do not permit him to exchange one artisan for another; he is thus compelled to remain with the Schusters and tolerate their tales.

If, on the occasion of their first meeting (p. 48ff), the tailor demonstrates his high regard for the nobility, the second meeting (p. 57ff) underscores the abject poverty in his home. The appearance of the tailor's dwelling and its furnishings stand in marked contrast with "the plush-covered chair that stands near the fireplace . . . they brought it from Berlin . . ." (p. 57). That chair confirms that even materially the tailor strives to belong to members of the upper crust, since the chair had originally belonged to a noble German family that fell on hard times (p. 58).

The episode containing Schuster's tale of an aristocratic German family that has lost its fortunes during the Depression appears to be designed so as to underscore the absurdity of the tailor's pursuit and aping of genteel behavior. Unlike the German nobles, the tailor strives to attain high social status by mimicking the life of nobility. The chair, which was but a minuscule component of its owners' patrician culture, becomes in the tailor's home the central symbol of the new owners' futile aspiration to greatness. In fact, however, the chair's location in the tailor's house emphasizes ever more strongly the poverty and want in the existence of Schuster the tailor and his wife Sprintze.

Although the analogy between Schuster and German aristocracy may be said to be antithetical, one might also point to a number of elements they hold in common. As the German family deserves its title, so are the Schusters worthy, like anyone in Israel, of the noble sobriquet promised

by tradition. However, even more poignant than this irony of fate is the note that the very chair under discussion is a counterfeit, only made to resemble an antique chair of ancient nobility (p. 58). If there is any basis for regarding the chair as a synecdoche, a sign of dominion, then the difference between this phony chair, supposedly a seat of noble princes, and the original one is analogous to the difference between the Schusters and a family of true nobles.

In spite of the array of symbols surrounding him and his wife, Schuster the tailor appears in the novel as a flat, two-dimensional character.[28] His personality and actions are narrow and focused about a limited number of circumstances, his reactions are predictable, and little if any change occurs in him or his views. When speaking, Schuster repeats the theme of being close to genteel families who depend on him and his services. In addition to signifying his flatness, these refrains comically underscore Schuster's detachment from reality and illuminate the theme of nobility in a grotesque light.

In another meeting between them, on the evening of the fast on the occasion of Hanoch's disappearance, the tailor again associates himself with the wellborn. He does so indirectly as he offers an explanation for his asthmatic wife's practice of spending long periods in bed ". . . so that her neighbors should come to visit her and see her bedclothes, which have come from a count's mansion—for the friendship between us I do not give his name . . ." (p. 174).

Since it is characteristic for the tailor to separate himself from the rest of Shibush residents, it is no wonder that a measure of pride is evident in his voice when he asserts that as a craftsman, "full up with work" (p. 175), he redeemed himself from the need to fast. His claim is that as a busy man he cannot fast and also satisfy the demands placed upon him by his customers, all lords and ladies, who are having more clothes made for themselves for the winter (p. 175). Shortly thereafter the tailor faints, a clear indication that he was indeed fasting—most likely without much choice.

Schuster's loquaciousness and pompousness, for he is just another "puffed-up pauper" (p. 51), characterize him as a tragicomic protagonist. In spite of the levity with which the tailor regards any event, even the most tragic, the reader cannot remain oblivious to his bitter fate, for Schuster was put through such trials as fighting in the Great War, being displaced

[28]The concept of flat and round characters has been discussed by E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955), pp. 67–78.

and impoverished by economic hardships and subjected to racial and ethnic prejudice, seeing his children die, and not being able to use his vocation to put bread on the table. It is true, however, that the details of the misfortune befalling the Schusters are not foregrounded as in the case of the Zommers and the Bachs, for example. Instead, the narrative underscores and exploits the character's comical aspect, thus providing a measure of relief in the plot. In so doing, the example of Schuster's life and fate underscores this man's perseverance against adversity at the same time that he makes laughable the notion of the continued survival of a Jewish upper class.

Zechariah Rosen the Feed Merchant: A Davidic Shoot?

A familiar character in the novel, whose name was altered considerably in the course of its initial appearance in installments, is the one known now as Zechariah Rosen. His name was changed from Gavriel Sametani to Zechariah Rosen only at the time of the novel's first bound publication by Schocken in 1939. Agnon appears to have been so strongly committed to this character's prior name that an examination of the installment edition, the one appearing in the daily *Ha'arets*, reveals that there, too, in some of the issues, this character appears as Sametani.

A comparison of the two names, in the hope of offering possible motives behind the change, is instructive. By substituting Zechariah for the prior name of Gavriel, the ironic tone associated with the former name is lessened. By this I mean that in the Hebrew meaning of the original name one finds references to the idea of manliness, power, and salvation, the latter stemming from the association with the name of the angel Gabriel. These qualities are far from being represented in this character, who is the novel's most extreme exponent of one obsessed with the pursuit of status and respect and the futile attempt to prove his Davidic lineage. Rather than underscoring this irony, the new name of Zechariah is indicative of the notion of the continuation of the Covenant and harbors a note of optimism. These attributes are derived from the meaning, in Hebrew, of this name, having to do with memory and the tone of consolation contained in the words of the prophet Zechariah. In altering the name of this character, significantly on the eve of the Holocaust, Agnon's act implies that, by being less mocking and negative, the message Zechariah has to bear is more consoling and hopeful concerning the Ingathering of the Exiles. In light of the outcome, namely the annihilation of European Jewry, the message in his name is again tainted with a measure of irony.

The change of the character's last name from Sametani to Rosen, however, does not substantially alter any meaning. It appears that the sole advantage is that the character receives a more authentic, plausible name—although the name Samet is not unknown. Yet the change of name does not signify any turning away from the significance of the narrative or the conclusion to which it brings the reader, namely the ironization of the matter of aristocracy as expressed through either name.

The term "samet," deriving from the French "samit," and also found in Yiddish, is written in Hebrew as "samet" or "samut." It refers to a type of expensive cloth made of precious, heavy silk, or velvet.[29] Because of its value and appearance, this material was often used for the apparel of members of the genteel class. It thus turns out that Mr. Gavriel Sametani's name symbolizes the sorry state of present-day nobility. Moreover, in light of his activities and portrayal in the novel, his name is a further indication of this character's strivings to be related to nobility.

The reason behind substituting the name Rosen for Sametani is not altogether clear. Yet there is no basis in the claim that the change was due to substituting a Hebrew term for a Yiddish one. The term "samet" continues to be used in the novel in its conventional sense, to signify "velvety hands" (p. 79), "velvet satchel," (p. 230), or a "velvet hat" (p. 385). More plausibly, Rosen, the character's new name, echoes the Hebrew "*rozen*," denoting "count, baron, earl,"[30] and points more emphatically and ironically at the counterfeit aristocracy pervading the present.

Finally, the term Sametani has the ring of the Yiddish term denoting loneliness and sorrow,[31] notions which capture this character's situation, though more so that of his son Yekutiel. Yekutiel seems to the Guest, as he looks at him half ironically, a prince in tattered clothes, for he is the remnant of an illustrious family of "lords and nobles" (p. 357). Yekutiel, too, like others in Shibush, has forgotten that he is the son of kings. He is ironically compared to a prince awaiting his intended match which is no

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[29]Regarding the notion of samet, see Avraham Even-Shoshan's Hebrew-Hebrew dictionary, *Ha-milon he-ḥadash: be-shiv'ah kerakhim* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1958, "samet" in vol. 4, p. 1812; "ketifah" [velvet] in vol. 6, p. 2327). Also see Uriel Weinreich, *Modern English-Yiddish, Yiddish-English Dictionary* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), p. 524 ["samet," "sametic," "sametn"]; p. 352 ["velvet"].

[30]Avraham Zilkha, *Modern Hebrew-English Dictionary* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 258.

[31]Weinreich, *Modern . . . Dictionary.*, pp. 191 ("lonely/lonesome"), 302 ("sorrowful"), 517 ("smutneh").

longer to be found, for Shibush is short on young women, and none of them merits marriage to the son of royalty, "for all the girls in our town have forgotten that they are kings' daughters" (p. 357).

Zechariah's name and demeanor trumpet his pursuit of the highborn. Like his fellow Shibushnik, Schuster the tailor, Zechariah also identifies himself as a member of the titled, although he limits this society to Jewish circles only. Zechariah's claim is that he is of the family of Rav Hai Gaon, who, according to tradition, was of the seed of King David (p. 85). His tenacious hold on this dubious claim, in the face of the Guest's assertion that Hai Gaon died childless, includes Zechariah among those in pursuit of an imagined pedigree. Similarly, as the chair in the Schuster house supposedly attests to its owners' high social rank, so Zechariah maintains a collection of "documents" which, in his eyes, are proof positive of his glorious lineage (pp. 85, 173, 357).

Unlike the tailor's flat image, though, Zechariah's personality is more complex in that he is also the town's unofficial chronicler. His account concerning the annals of Shibush and its houses of worship (pp. 173–74, 435, 450) are attended by a measure of veracity. Consequently, insofar as his image is concerned, Zechariah has a dual function: he is a reliable chronicler but also a hopeless dreamer. In his latter role he stands alongside Schuster as a comical manifestation of a lost nobility, whereas by virtue of his memory he eternalizes the past.

Zechariah's place in the novel may be best illustrated by the episode following Rabbi Hayim's burial ceremony. At that time, Zechariah reveals his affinity for the past by demonstrating an uncanny ability to read the invisible writings on tombstones, even though all the inscriptions have been so obliterated by time as to prevent the Guest from deciphering them (p. 435). The narrator's comments to this effect conceal a measure of mockery for Zechariah's ability to do so. The context of Zechariah's account also implies its doubtful authority, for at that juncture, and by way of analogy, the narrator, in a less than complimentary fashion, remarks that Zechariah married a relative, "for high-bred families are in the habit of marrying into each other" (p. 435). The connection made between the names read by Zechariah and those in the book *Shalshelet ha-kabbalah* (The Chain of the Kabbalah), known apparently to the hero as a fabrica-

tion,[32] reinforces the doubts as to Mr. Rosen's reliability as the chronicler of Shibush.

On the other hand, while it is possible to read the scene above as the narrator's ironic comment, Zechariah Rosen seems to be painted in this episode in his more serious aspect. For he does appear to retain in his memory events from the past, and it is not altogether unlikely that the writing he appears to read off the tombstones was originally there. It is thus likely that the episode needs to be taken as true rather than another satirical exposé of this character. For the fervor with which he, Zechariah, seeks to support his contention of being of the nobility may be seen as being at the root of his ability to retain details that were, indeed, accounts of Shibush in her glory days.

It thus appears that, on the one hand, the narrator presents Schuster and Zechariah ironically and mockingly, whereas on the other he appears to empathize with Yekutiel's sorrowful fate and lot in life as he sees in him the contemporarily transformed image of Jewry.[33]

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[32]The narrator's biting remark is evident in so much as he indicates his regard for the book *Shalshelet ha-kabbalah*, cited in this case. This is reinforced by the realization that the Guest, too, regards with considerable cynicism the tales about the efficacy of the departed ancestors as protectors of their living progeny (p. 83). The book, purportedly presenting historically valid accounts regarding known figures from Jewish life, mingles into the documentary material a considerable dose of legends without any attempt to distinguish between the real and the imagined. This propensity is also a characteristic of Zechariah as portrayed by the narrator. *Shalshelet ha-kabbalah* was composed by Gedaliah Don (or Ibn) Yihyah (1522-1588). See Joseph Dan, *Ha-sippur ha-'ivir bi-yemey ha-beynayim* [The Hebrew Story in the Middle Ages, in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), pp. 25, 135, 137, 158-61, 240. Also see Mayer Waxman, *A History of Jewish Literature*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bloch, 1943), II, 476-79.

[33]As noted at the conclusion of n. 25, it might be expedient for us to proceed with greater caution, for we will be found guilty of identifying Yekutiel Rosen as a reduced version not merely of a prince but also of Moses. This idea is suggested by a proposed assertion that since Yekutiel was one of the names attributed by tradition to Moses, then this character, too, might represent the state to which a Moses had reached in today's world. For the connection between the name Yekutiel and Moses in Agnon's works, see Baruch Kurzweil, *Masot 'al sippurey shai 'agnon* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1970), p. 92; Avraham Holtz, "*Mi-shelemut la-'avodah zara: 'iyunim be-'pat shelemah' le-shai 'agnon*," *Hasifrut* 3:2 (1972), p. 300.

Afterword: Other Aspects of Nobility

Apart from these illustrations of the reduction and rendering ironic of the notion of nobility in Agnon's *A Guest for the Night*, we find that terminology ordinarily associated with this theme is scattered throughout the novel. An examination of the contexts of these terms reinforces conclusions of the kind noted above and extends the horizons of meaning as they apply also to the non-Jewish world. Namely, the theme of royalty serves as but one facet of the novel's motif array which lends it its unity of meaning and structure, an array in which is explored the essence of the notion that the world represented in the novel signifies the decline of all affinities for nobility in the broadest sense of the term.

It appears that modern times represent for the novel's protagonist an accelerated process of the decline of the human spirit as it has been manifesting itself from one generation to another. And it is not only that this expected decline—Jewish tradition even has a phrase reflecting the idea that each succeeding generation is lesser than its predecessors—has been taking place, but the post-World War One world has inverted even the notion of national chosenness, corrupting it to be taken as being chosen for suffering. And in place of the grandeur and awe which the Guest associates with the notion of the exalted class, the terms associated with aristocracy become identified with situations and characters denoting chaos, distortion, and ruin.

Already at the time of his entry in town, the Guest recognizes the state of things as he notes the sorry state of the King's Well (p. 2), which Yeruham Freeman is later depicted a repairing (pp. 54, 84). The appearance of the ruined well and the bubbling sound of its waters as they pour out into the street announce the death and ruin of the place:

> Even the King's Well . . . had its steps broken, its commemorative tablet cracked; the golden letters of his name were faded, and sprouted mosses red as blood, as if the Angel of Death had wiped his knife on them . . . and the well spouted water, pouring it into the street, as water is poured in the neighborhood of the dying. (p. 2)

Another episode, one which seems marginal to the central plot even while being so telling, is the Guest's encounter with a woman sitting in the market place though having no merchandise to sell:

> Once I asked a certain woman, 'Why are you sitting in the market when you have nothing to sell?' 'So where should I sit,' she replied, 'in the garden of the king's palace?' (p. 362)

The words "in the garden of the king's palace" echo those from Esther 1:5, indicating that at least this practical woman, one who appears to be in tune with realities, sees no alternative to spending her time in the here-and-now rather than be involved, as the Guest is, in futile attempts to reinstate an aristocratic demeanor among Jews.

Through the story, the state of Europe's royalty is viewed in the same light as that of the well-born class among the Jews. For while in the past Emperor Franz Joseph was held in high esteem by the Jews (p. 28), the stature of kings and princes has become diminished since the War's end. And whereas the image of the coming generation was anticipated in the narrator's youth by groups such as anarchists and revolutionaries of all stripes, who were not loath to strike at king or aristocrat (pp. 328–29, 391), conditions worsened later when many of the nobility became endangered, some to be removed from their offices and others stripped of their wealth and status (pp. 57–58, 189). Rachel, the innkeeper's daughter, who reacts mockingly to every comment by the Guest asserting that the nobility should be treated with respect (pp. 30–31), represents, in her reaction, those of her generation who have lost all respect for the aristocracy, be it of the material or spiritual sort, Jewish or Christian.

Just as Yeruham Freemen attempts to repair the town's ruins, material or spiritual (pp. 84–85, 90–91, 298), so the Guest acts with a desire to revive its spiritual life. However, the spiritual crisis which has reached its zenith with the Great War contradicts the Guest's actions and aspirations. The Messiah, who should have appeared following such times of great tribulation, has been lingering, whereas the Jews remain in the Diaspora still waiting for him to lead them to the Promised Land (pp. 38, 214, 450).

The inverted, grotesque, world of the Guest's time shows its face particularly in opposition to his expressed and implicit ideals about the genteel ways of people in the past, whether Jews or Gentiles. One of his conclusions during his visit is that the imprint of nobility on people has now vanished. Instead, the present retains a parodic version of the past. As the narrator testifies, the revolutionaries who came before the War, those who aimed to threaten or imperil the lives of the aristocracy, were themselves of noble birth (pp. 324–25). In their deeds, these sons followed the ways of their ancestors as they strove to unseat others of their patrician class in order to elevate themselves. Yet the rulers who followed in the wake of the War were of no use and did not bring any remedy, for under their yoke people suffer and hunger even more than before, asserts the narrator (p. 315).

Similarly, the aspect of those representing the high class of post-War Shibush has also been perverted. Among the chief representatives of this

group are Dr. Zwirn the lawyer and Anton Jacobowitz, the wealthy Gentile. Both, says the narrator, gained their wealth by capitalizing on the deprivations of the War. Both represent types devoid of conscience and a sense of justice (pp. 309, 363–65). The narrator, yet, appears to satisfy himself with only a few remarks concerning the lawyer, whereas Jacobowitz's character is sketched with many more details (pp. 363–65). His wealth, for instance, is said to have come to him as a result of exploiting the confusion of the War and its aftermath for his own benefit as he seized the properties of those who have fled the town (pp. 363–65). It is also ironic that this Gentile knows the customs and traditions of the Jews (p. 363) and speaks their Yiddish, pointedly noted as being the kind spoken before the War (pp. 363, 364). His abilities make grotesque the sacred notions of Jewish traditions: as he uses the Yiddish language to tell of his family and Christian society, he terms his son "a rabbi" who "presides in a yeshiva." He also appropriates Jewish yeshiva student terminology as he brags that his son-in-law is a "dayan [religious judge], and scholars crowd around his door." He adds that "on our Sabbath for the Closing Meal of the Holy Day," they host Professor Lukaciewicz, "to eat pigs-feet with cabbage, and blood sausages, and liverwurst," and to drink "Christian wine" enough to fill a *mikveh*, or pool of the Jewish ritual bath (p. 365).

The narrative follows the stages in the Guest's gradual recognition of the new reality as it penetrates his conscience until he succumbs to the conclusion that the present generation is indeed paltry and penurious when measured against that of the past.[34] His adamant refusal, initially, to give recognition to the new world order in Shibush means that, through the novel, he witnesses a barren, grotesque, and hollow world devoid of the past's aura and constituting the opposite of that for which he unremittingly yearns. On the stage of this new reality, he observes the actions of players with no consciousness of nobility, who deny the past and its traditions and, consequently, do not merit the old titles. And when some among the Jews and Gentiles are shown as upholding the ways and fashion of the past,[35] they are presented as exponents of a process of reduction, for their ways are depicted in such a grotesque fashion as to compel the hero to concede that the end of tradition and his childhood is nigh. The Guest finally arrives at the conclusion that all prospect of

[34]Also see Meislish's thesis, n. 21 above, p. 57.

[35]This is a detail which, as it appeared at the novel's opening (pp. 8–9), has as yet not brought the Guest to realize and admit to himself the truth.

sustaining the lifestyle he so loves is entwined with *'Erets Israel* and his return there.

The force of *A Guest for the Night* and its innovativeness lies, as Gershon Shaked so appropriately observed,[36] in its shattering of the continuum of the conventional plot line. In its stead there arises before the reader's eyes a more central plot, one constituted of the fragments of motifs and leitmotifs scattered throughout the novel. These particles, then, contribute to the structure of meaning in the novel while formally enabling it to stand as an objective correlative of the reality which it strives to reflect. The above reading of the significance of but one theme[37] and its manifestations on the horizon of meaning is an apt one as it points to the bankruptcy of east European Jewry in particular and twentieth-century humankind in general.

[36]In his essay "*Tikbolot ve-zimmunim*," in his Hebrew survey of the narrative art of S. Y. Agnon, *'Omanut ha-sippur shel agnon* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1973), pp. 47–64, and in his latest study, also available in English: Gershon Shaked, *Shmuel Yosef Agnon: A Revolutionary Traditionalist* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1989), pp. 137–46.

[37]See, among others, the following studies based on word-motifs in *A Guest for the Night*: Yael Sagiv-Feldman, "*Bein mafteah le-man'ul: keri'ah ḥozeret be-'ironia 'agnonit 'aḥat*," *Hasifrut* 32 (July 1983), pp. 148–54; Stephen Katz, "Chewing on Air: Toward a Sensory Interpretation of S. Y. Agnon's *'Oreah nata lalun*," *Hebrew Annual Review* 4 (1980), pp. 93–106.