

YAAKOV ARIEL

Good Germans, Confused Jews, and the Tragedy of Modernity: S. Y. Agnon Remembers Leipzig

The Israeli author Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888–1970) spent a few months in Leipzig during World War I and visited the city again in 1930.¹ Long decades later he immortalized his impressions of Leipzig and its inhabitants in a major novel, *BeHanuto shel Mar Lublin* (in English: *In Mr. Lublin's Shop*, in German: *Herrn Lublins Laden*). Written in Jerusalem in the 1960s, and published five years after his death, *In Mr. Lublin's Shop* is one of Agnon's central works, and the one best representing his views on the course of Jewish history and Jewish-German relations.² The only Hebrew book whose theme is a German city in a time of global war, *In Mr. Lublin's Shop* is also an important Jewish literary reaction to urbanization, modernity, and nationalism, and their effects on people's lives and minds.

Agnon begins this unusual novel with a short preface in which he recalls a *midrash*, a rabbinical extrapolation. The *midrash* tells the story of a scholar who has been rewarded with a remarkable gift: the knowledge and comprehension of all the interpretations of all times on the Hebrew Bible. The author asserts that like the ancient sage, he too, during a few hours of sitting in Mr. Lublin's office, was enlightened and managed to comprehend the whole course of Jewish and non-Jewish modern history. He offers this novel as an account of his inspired hours at this fictional place, when he could finally understand the tragedy of Jews and non-Jews in the modern world.

While the setting of the novel is Leipzig of World War I, *In Mr. Lublin's Shop* offers much more than Agnon's impressions of Leipzig and its people during the period. This seminal work gives expression to Agnon's opinions on modernity and its disruptive effects on Jews and Germans as well as on the relationship between the two peoples. Agnon sees modernity and the national German movement as causing a breach in what on the whole had been a workable, if not harmonious, relationship between Jews and Germans. The book deals at length with the universal confusion and destruction brought by the war and, more importantly, albeit less overtly, with the loss of purpose and direction that modernity has brought about among Germans and Jews.

¹ On Agnon's life, see Dan Laor, *Haii Agnon* [Agnon's life], Tel Aviv 1999.

² Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *BeHanuto shel Mar Lublin* [In Mr. Lublin's Shop], Tel Aviv 1975. In 1993, eighteen years after the appearance of the Hebrew edition, the Leipzig based publisher Kiepenheuer issued the first German edition of this 'Leipzig novel': Schmu'el Josef Agnon, *Herrn Lublins Laden*, Leipzig 1993. This was followed by a paperback edition Fischer, Frankfurt a.M. 1997.

In Mr. Lublin's Shop deserves special attention because, among other things, it offers an important Jewish response to the end of Jewish life in Germany and to the Holocaust. Agnon's Germany is a nation that has hosted Jews in its midst for over a millennium, for the most part treating them kindly. It turned against Jews, but not before it turned against its own heritage and true nature, harming itself in the process. Agnon's analysis of the cause of the rift between the two people, although carrying a restrained sadness, is devoid of anger, and stands in contrast to more harsh Jewish analyses of the German responsibility for the Holocaust.³ The novel signifies a change of heart on Agnon's part, too. In an earlier novel on his time in Germany, *Ad Hena (Until now)*, written during and immediately after the Holocaust, his feelings towards Germans were less generous, betraying an element of bitterness.⁴ In this latter novel, on the other hand, Agnon gives the Germans as individuals and as a people a clean bill of health. Their unfortunate behavior during World War II did not result from any inherent bad character. That they were sick was not their fault; they caught a virus that affected everybody. In the last analysis they were victims, too.

Agnon sees modernity as having similar effects on Germans and on Jews. Both people have been at their core decent, hard working and well meaning, and he does not blame either people, or groups within them, for straying from the right path. They are all *tinokot shenishbu*, innocent people unaware of the long-term destructiveness of their decisions.

Agnon touched in this novel on major features of the Jewish and German encounters with modernity, and his impressions of the tragedy of German and Jewish histories. Although Agnon was not an historian or a sociologist, his unique and insightful perspective on the course of Jewish and German histories is worth noting.

The Scene: A Surreal Leipzig

In *In Mr. Lublin's Shop*, Agnon places himself, in addition to being the author, in two positions. He is the protagonist-narrator-philosopher, who shares with us his reflections; an older Agnon with a mature perspective on life. He is also the young and naïve protagonist of the novel's official period, World War I. The book is clearly a work of fiction and does not shy from utilizing the supernatural to create its scenes and situations. At the same time the novel is presented as an autobiographical account: the author sharing his experiences and thoughts with his audience, either as an intelligent but naïve young man, or as an experienced, reflective and analytical narrator – the author as an alleged protagonist.⁵

³ For example, Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, New York 1996.

⁴ S. Y. Agnon, *Ad Hena [Until Now]*, Tel Aviv 1952. Cf. Hillel Weiss, Notes on the Holocaust in Agnon's Work, in: *Nativ* 5 (1997), 55–65; Hillel Weiss, *Until Now [Ad Hena]* by S.Y. Agnon as a preface to the Holocaust, in: *Criticism and Interpretation*, Winter 2002, 111–146.

⁵ On Agnon's manner of presenting the narrator and its origin, see Malka Shaked, *Wrinkle in the Skin of the Sky. Webs of Connections in Agnon's Fiction*, Jerusalem 2000, 13–27.

Agnon first came to Leipzig in 1917, to be near family members while recuperating from an illness and regaining his strength. While initially unenthusiastic about the place, Agnon came to like the city and its inhabitants, preferring it to what he saw as the huge and harsh Berlin. He made friends in the city, engaged in conversations with people of all walks of life, and carried on bibliographical and literary work.⁶ The Leipzig of World War I was home to thousands of Jews whose origins were in Agnon's old country, Galicia, the Austrian part of Poland. Together with Jews from other parts of Eastern Europe, first, second, and third-generation Galician Jews made up the majority of the Jewish population in the city.

The choice of Leipzig as the place where Agnon "came to understand it all" is therefore not accidental. Leipzig, more so than other major cities in Germany was an ideal laboratory for examining the effect of the encounter of Eastern European Jews with modern German culture over a number of generations. Leipzig, more than other cities, was also Agnon's choice to make his point about the fundamental goodness of Germans. He remembered the city and its inhabitants fondly, and his memories of his stay in the city provided him with an ideal locale in which to dramatize the effect of modernity on Jews and Germans in a sympathetic yet critical manner.⁷

In that respect, *In Mr. Lublin's Shop* should be read as a novel mirroring urban life. Robert Alter pointed out that at the turn of the 20th century "the kinetic and disorienting reality of the new 19th-century urban scene" changed the modes of writing from naturalism to impressionism and symbolism.⁸ By turning to a poetic kind of prose, authors could express a wide, at times contradictory range of experiences. A number of authors began offering not realistic maps of cities, but portraits of urban scenes as reflecting human consciousness. Agnon's Leipzig certainly falls into that category. Agnon needed to find a way to compare and contrast different generations of Germans in their relation to Jews. For that purpose he created a fictitious as well as surreal collection of characters whose biographies are in the realm of the imaginary, yet make perfect sense within the framework of the novel. The events of *In Mr. Lublin's Shop* take place in a surreal office and its adjunct shops and workshops where Germans of different generations carry on their work. Mr. Lublin, a mail order merchant, has an office and not a shop front, which comes to explain why the author is asked to "guard the shop" instead of the owner, and why the narrator could spend the time quietly on his own in Lublin's office with no interruptions, reflecting on the course of Jewish and German histories. The novel blends the real and the surreal and turns the imaginary into reality.

⁶ On Agnon's first stay in Leipzig, see Laor, Haii Agnon [Agnon's Life], 110–116; cf. S.Y. Agnon – S. Z. Schocken, *Hilufe Igrot* [S.Y. Agnon – S.Z. Shoken, *An Exchange of Letters*], Tel Aviv 1991, 39–92.

⁷ On the Leipzig Agnon encountered, see Yaakov Shavit, *Be'ero Shel HaSoher MeLublin* [In the City of Mr. Lublin] in: *Makom Aher* 101 (2003), 106–112.

⁸ Robert Alter, *Imagined Cities. Urban Experiences and the Language of the Novel*, New Haven 2004.

Agnon offers some lively descriptions of the Leipzig of World War I. Even during the war, the Central European coffee shop culture continued, albeit in a subdued manner and with second-rate ingredients. *Gottschedstraße* today the heart of the city's night life was at that time an elegant shopping street with jewelry shops. The *Gewandhaus-Orchester*, Leipzig's internationally acclaimed symphony orchestra, pursued its performances, and bookshops continued to buy, catalogue, and sell books. Yet the atmosphere in the city was far from joyful and Agnon does a good job in portraying the depressing effects of the lingering war. He also offers tragi-comic descriptions of the atmosphere of blind patriotism, which prevailed in the city, oblivious to the destructiveness of the war. Like other novels and short stories Agnon has written, it carries a "gothic" atmosphere.⁹

One group of people who are different and represent older, more sane Germans are Mr. Lublin's neighbors, but they are not ordinary citizens of their time. Agnon wished to introduce the readers to non-contemporary, pre-modern Germans, and to confront the older Germans with their modern great-grandchildren. For that he has constructed a cluster of shops and workshops that surround Mr. Lublin's office, and are more in the realm of the imaginary than a real place.¹⁰ The narrator justifies the unusual location by explaining the nature of Mr. Lublin's business: his is not a storefront business or a conventional office that needs to be in a fashionable part of town. Clients or patrons do not visit the office as it sells its merchandise through the mail. The location of Mr. Lublin's office serves a few purposes. Creating a magical atmosphere, the fictitious compound houses shops and workshops from pre-modern times where craftsmen continue to produce artifacts using pre-industrial methods. The small-town social atmosphere of the place as well as its slow past create a pastoral and at the same time surreal and gothic scene. Agnon utilizes the colorful fairytale-like life stories and personalities of the German craftsmen to pass judgment on their modern descendants and demonstrate the destructive impact of modernity on Germans and consequently on their relations towards the Jews.

At the same time, the unusual location and surreal atmosphere of Mr. Lublin's office is a statement in and of itself. It is a demonstration against the urban industrial and anonymous setting of the modern city. The narrator notes that after the German-French war and the unification of Germany in 1870, many older houses were destroyed in Leipzig. By buying this strange collection of workshops and establishing his business there, Lublin saves a piece of the older city and with it some of its lost culture, which the author considers to more innocent, well-meaning and humane than that of the Great War era. The author views the unification of Germany as a destructive act. Instead of fighting small wars among themselves, he depicts the Germans as currently fighting a total war against a series of foreign nations. Their

⁹ Cf. Arnold J. Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare. A Study in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon*, Berkeley, Calif. 1968, especially 54–125.

¹⁰ Agnon created surreal circus-like "crazy" scenes before. For an analysis of the surreal elements in *Tmol Shilshom* [Only Yesterday] see Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi, *Sentient Dogs, Liberated Rams, and Talking Asses. Agnon's Biblical Zoo*, in: *AJS Review* 28 (2004), 105–136.

imperial agenda, he argues, ultimately led to the Great War and the disintegration of the good relationship between Germans and Jews. Differentiating between the craftsmen in the old cluster of shops, who in the author's eyes are conscientious and decent, and the shallow and ultimately destructive modern Germans, the author makes his point: Jews had been safer among pre-modern, pre-industrial, and pre-nationalist Germans.

Mr. Lublin's shop thus serves both as a metaphor and as a scenery where a change-of-time drama is being performed. Much of the novel's content however takes place outside of the compound of Lublin's shop, allowing readers opportunities to look into the lives of Germans and Jews of the period in the larger Leipzig community.

The Jews of Leipzig

The author presents a series of personalities that represent different social milieus and cultural options among German Jews. Mr. Lublin himself is one such person. Initially, an Eastern European Jew, who arrived in Leipzig as a child from the author's hometown in Galicia, Lublin's biography and character stand for more than just the man Lublin. It is the story of the move of Jews from traditionalist pre-modern values and ways of life to the modern German urban setting, its opportunities and dangers. Within that framework, Arnold Lublin, whose original name was Aaron, represents secularized, prosperous, and acculturated German Jews. Immigrating to Germany as a child and marrying an indigenous German Jewish wife, Lublin is both an Eastern European Jew who Germanized and a German Jew going through a process of acculturation, and moving up the socio-economic ladder. Advancing from an itinerant peddler to a prosperous merchant, he represents the process of modernization and acculturation of German Jewry.

In line with the middle class German demand for *Bildung*, Lublin immersed himself in German bourgeois culture and became a patron of the arts. He does not miss the old world and has done everything he could to become German.¹¹ The German heritage is closer to his heart than the Jewish tradition. He bought unfashionable property in the older section of Leipzig in order to safeguard and preserve German history and architecture, but had no interest in Jewish texts and thought. The author offers the following observation: "Mr. Lublin was a German citizen and he saw himself ... as a German holding to the religion of Moses. There was not much of the religion of Moses in Lublin, but a German he was with all his heart."¹² Had Lublin thought that being Jewish and German were incompatible, he would have left Judaism altogether.¹³ But the War gives him reason to be optimistic about the integration of Jews into the German nation. "Now that the Germans see how dedi-

¹¹ Agnon, In Mr. Lublin's Shop, 30.

¹² Ibid., 14.

¹³ Ibid.

cated the Jews are to the German cause they will fully accept us," he asserts.¹⁴ In his vision of Jewish life in Germany, as in other realities, Lublin serves as a paradigm for German Jews in general. Agnon idealizes the history of Jewish life in Germany and sees Germans as having treated Jews decently. However, in his view, Jews are Jews, and Germans, Germans. Good Germans are Christians and it is in the best interest of Jews that Germans remain faithful to their ancestral religion, which has provided them with a moral compass. Likewise, it was in the best interest of Jews to remain loyal to their heritage, albeit such an option became almost impossible.

Agnon is overt in his dissatisfaction with the proponents of acculturation. Representing an ideal type of a Germanized Jew, Lublin is a case in point. Lublin started his life as a traditionalist Jew and was certain at first that he could acculturate and make his way into German society, while at the same time remain committed to the faith of his parents. This has not been the case, and Lublin's connection to Judaism turned out to be minimal. An honest and resourceful entrepreneur, a devoted husband and father, a decent and even generous employer, a responsible citizen, self educated and cultured, Lublin is a highly sympathetic human being, almost an exemplary person. However, he has not "guarded the shop," showed no interest or devotion towards his Jewish heritage and did not provide his children with a Jewish education. His acculturation into German society had taken precedence over preserving his Jewish identity. The author does not blame Lublin, whom he portrays in more than appreciative terms. In sad and ironic undertones he points to Lublin's miscalculations. The Germans of Lublin's courtyard, whom he assisted and protected, and who appreciated the efforts, had no influence on modern nationalist German society; they represented the Germany of yesteryear, and the modern Germans that Lublin expected to appreciate his efforts would come to reject him.

In Mr. Lublin's Shop examines other social circles among Leipzig's Jewry, including the Orthodox. Agnon decided to contrast the values and choices of the highly acculturated social milieu of Lublin with that of their opposites within the Jewish community: the separatist Orthodox. Before coming to Leipzig, the narrator-protagonist befriends in Berlin a separatist Orthodox rabbi from Leipzig, the rabbi of *Kahal Yereim*, Community of the Fearful, those who profess to be utterly obedient to God. The narrator allegedly comes to Leipzig from Berlin to study with the rabbi, but does not become the rabbi's disciple, follower, or admirer. A student of Jewish traditional texts, he finds the Orthodox rabbi a buddy with whom he can be engaged in discussions on texts that interest them both. The rabbi represents more than an individual rabbi with whom the narrator studies the Talmud, and the author makes it clear that the rabbi's halachic rulings disappoint him. The nature of his rabbinical ministry serves for Agnon to express his dissatisfaction with rigid forms of Orthodoxy, which he considers to be a distortion of the authentic spirit of Judaism. The rabbi's spiritual leadership stands in contradiction to what the author considers to be the true spirit of Judaism. Like the names of all the persons introduced in the novel,

¹⁴ Ibid, 151.

the rabbi's name, "Rabbi Jonathan," is suggestive.¹⁵ Representing a reactionary conservative Jewish response to modernity, Rabbi Jonathan's ministry is a perversion of that of the historical Rabbi Jonathan, the first-century sage.¹⁶

In spite of differences in character, such Orthodox Jews as Rabbi Jonathan and his disciples are not unlike the acculturated Jews who have moved away from the faith of their fathers. Both are oblivious to, and distort a humane and spiritually uplifting Judaism that has been created throughout long centuries. Mr. Lublin's name, too, does not convey what it stands for, as the German-Jewish merchant represents the opposite of Lublin, the spiritual center of Polish Jewry, with its courts of pious *tsadikim*. Likewise, the contemporary Rabbi Jonathan of Leipzig thinks and acts in a manner that is the opposite that of Rabbi Jonathan, the disciple par excellence of Hillel the Elder, a pillar of an accommodationist liberal school of the rabbinical tradition, who made the *Torah* more accessible to Jews through the translation of the sacred text to Aramaic.

Agnon's understanding of the course of Jewish history resembles that of Jacob Katz, whose writings became available to the public mostly after Agnon's death.¹⁷ Orthodoxy as presented by Agnon is not a legitimate heir of pre-modern Judaism and does not carry its agenda, to help Jews live decent lives among the nations while maintaining their tradition. *Kahal Yereim* and its rabbi represent a Judaism that deviates significantly from the spirit of traditional Judaism by building a rigid, reactionary, often impractical and at times even inhumane interpretation of Judaism. The narrator is seemingly non-judgmental, but the readers can easily detect his feelings. Like Mr. Lublin, Rabbi Jonathan is a conscientious and hard working person, and like his secular acculturated counterpart he has little or no idea of how history is about to mock his choices. While Mr. Lublin is willing to give up on Jewish observance for the sake of admittance into the German mainstream, Rabbi Jonathan is giving up on human values for the sake of Jewish observance. Both are unrealistic in their different ways and both are contributing to the polarization, if not the demise of Judaism.

While Agnon highly disapproves of Rabbi Jonathan's ministry, he treats the rabbi with respect, a far cry from Agnon's portrayal of the *yereim* or *haredim* in *Tmol Shilshom* (*Only Yesterday*), his earlier major novel on a similar theme.¹⁸ In *Only Yesterday*, Agnon portrays ultra-Orthodoxy and its proponents as repulsive and does not hide his assessment that separatist Orthodox Jews were leading a life that was decisively less commendable than that of the secular Palestinian Jews. Agnon's

¹⁵ As a rule, every word and sentence in Agnon's stories and novels is there for a purpose. Cf. Leah Goldberg, *The Art of Writing a Story*, Tel Aviv 1966, the chapter: "On a Different Attitude."

¹⁶ On the original Rabbi Jonathan, see the entry "Jonathan Ben Uzziel," in: *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, New York 1904, 238.

¹⁷ Cf. for example, Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto. The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770-1870*, Cambridge, Mass. 1973.

¹⁸ S. Y. Agnon, *Tmol Shilshom*, Tel Aviv, 1946. [English translation: *Only Yesterday*, German translation: *Gestern, Vorgestern*]

point of view changed throughout the years, and Rabbi Jonathan is a more decent human being than Rabbi Grunem Yakum-Purkan, who represents ultra-Orthodoxy in *Only Yesterday*. His more presentable personality notwithstanding, in the author's view, Rabbi Jonathan too advocates a distorted sense of Judaism, as well as an inhumane attitude.

The narrator witnesses an event which he recounts in a seemingly dispassionate and neutral manner, providing the facts and letting the readers reach their own conclusions.¹⁹ He hears the details from Rabbi Jonathan himself who recounts them with stern conviction and even pride. A woman has come with a *she'ela*, a question for the rabbi, asking for Rabbi Jonathan's rabbinical *halachic* advice. The woman had not heard from her husband, who had been drafted into the army and assigned to a combat unit, where he served uninterruptedly for over a year. Worried over his fate, the young bride, who stayed behind in a small town near Leipzig to run the family business, wrote letters to the army authorities inquiring about the fate of her husband. It took awhile for the army bureaucrats to answer her letters of inquiry and by the time those letters arrived, reassuring her that her husband was alive and well, he himself arrived unexpectedly for one week of leave at home. Since she had not been to the *mikve*, the ritual bath for one month, in which she was commanded to immerse seven days after menstruation, the surprised wife left her husband alone in the house and spent the night at a neighbor's home. She neither wished to disobey the law nor put her husband's passions on trial. In the morning she took the train to Leipzig to immerse in the ritual bath. Agnon crafts with great skill and subtlety a story of a loving wife and husband who give upon spending the little time they are allowed together in the midst of the war, as well as deprive themselves of the only too natural pleasures of a young loving couple.

The story continues further unfolding absurd rabbinical rulings. The young lady goes to the ritual bath but then, realizing that "there is no guarantee that she would arrive on time at her town before the Sabbath,"²⁰ goes to Rabbi Jonathan's home in Leipzig to ask him if she is allowed to take the train home or should she stay in Leipzig for the duration of the Sabbath. Trains have a reputation for departing and arriving late and she may find herself on the train when the Sabbath arrives. The rabbi is pleased with the lady's obedience to tradition. "There are no better women than pious Jewish women," he exclaims. The rabbi advises the young wife that since she is not required to make love to her husband, but is required to observe the Sabbath, she should therefore remain in Leipzig for the Sabbath. Her husband, who had not celebrated the Sabbath nor made love to his wife for a year and a half, remains alone at home. The inhumanity of this rabbinical ruling is evident and one is left wondering if it was piety or naiveté that brought the young bride to ask for the rabbi's learned opinion. The disregard of a well meaning rabbi to human needs becomes even more frustrating when Agnon offers us one of his subtle hints to alert us

¹⁹ Agnon, In Mr. Lublin's Shop, 48-51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 50f.

that the rabbi's ruling was erroneous even from a traditional *halachic* point of view. Jewish law, as understood even by contemporary Orthodox authorities, allows Jews to travel on Friday when the normal schedule of transportation gives reason to believe that they can arrive at their destination before the Sabbath.²¹ Moreover, since the travelers have no control of the vehicle in which they are driven or flown, they are in the category of captives and are exempt from responsibility for violating Sabbath laws. The rabbi also overlooked the *mitsvah*, promoted by Jewish mystics, for men and women to make love on the Sabbath.²²

This is not the only time that Rabbi Jonathan offers a draconian non-compromising interpretation of Jewish law that departs from traditional norms. His attitude towards the Saltzmans is a case in point. While the Saltzmans and Lublins rubbed shoulders with each other, being part of the same social circles, Mr. and Mrs. Saltzman have taken a very different attitude towards the Jewish tradition than the Lublins. They tried to be loyal to the Jewish tradition at the same time that they lived worldly modern German life. Their son's name, Moritz Ernest, signifies a mixture of Jewish and universal values. The Saltzmans participated in and contributed to Jewish institutions, including Orthodox synagogues, while keeping their business, a chain of fashionable coffee shops, open on the Jewish Sabbath. The actual work on the Sabbath was done by non-Jewish employees who accepted money from non-Jewish customers but not from Jewish ones. The latter settled their accounts after the Sabbath. Many observant Jews made such business arrangements, especially in Central Europe. Their commercial interactions were not limited any more to a Jewish clientele within the confines of exclusive Jewish towns or neighborhoods. Closing shops on Friday evenings and Saturdays and Jewish holidays, could cause such enterprises to lose their licenses to conduct business, not to mention bankrupt them.

Rabbi Jonathan does not accept the Saltzmans' *via media*, which attempts to amalgamate Jewish observance with worldly pragmatism. He advocates a rigid approach that expects Jews in modern times to show less flexibility and adaptability than in previous generations. His vision of God is that of a stern and revengeful Deity, the God of Moses and Joshua rather than the God of Hillel and Jonathan. "What does the Torah tell us [about God]? The great and mighty and terror-inspiring God, who will not yield, or be appeased," the separatist rabbi declares.²³ The rabbi does not spare himself. He sees it as his duty to accompany a certified ritual slaughterer, to supervise the slaughtering of one cow, a procedure that takes an entire day. Agnon's literary repertoire includes numerous stories on *shochtim*, ritual slaughterers, whose daily work has been done for centuries without rabbis looking over their shoulders each time they slaughter an animal.²⁴

²¹ Such a ruling goes back to the Middle Ages. See Moshe Ben Jacob of Coucy, *SeMaG: Sefer Mitzvot haGadol* [The Large Book of Jewish Law], Venice 1522.

²² Gershon Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah*, Jerusalem 1977.

²³ Cf. Agnon, In Mr. Lublin's Shop, 104.

²⁴ Cf., for example, S. Y. Agnon, *Taharich Shel Sipurim* [A collection of stories], Tel Aviv 1986, 154–156.

The difference between the mishnaic Jonathan and the modern Jonathan is striking. While the original Rabbi Jonathan helped make the tradition more accessible to the Jewish masses, the twentieth-century Rabbi opposed compromises of any kind, turning observant Judaism into an option that very few could accept. As the protagonist-narrator sits in Mr. Lublin's office he invokes another rabbinical sage, this time the greatest of all, Rambam, Maimonides. According to the novel, it was during Maimonides' *yahrzeit*, day of remembrance, the twentieth day of *Tevet*, that the long hours of the narrator's stay in Mr. Lublin's shop took place. Jews have looked upon Maimonides as more than a biblical commentator and an authoritative codifier of the Jewish law. Maimonides is remembered as his generation's guide and counselor, telling perplexed Jews how to cope with the overwhelming issues of the time as well as cut a balance between cultural continuity and physical and mental well being. Maimonides has also been remembered as a proponent par excellence of the *via media*, and the thinker who brought Jewish thought to mesh with Muslim philosophy of the period. Agnon looked upon Maimonides as his supreme guide and authority throughout Jewish history. In this novel, he concludes that there is no modern Maimonides, who can offer the kind of balance between contemporary culture and Jewish tradition and guide Jews how to live among or alongside non-Jews in peace and harmony. But even if such a figure emerges, ultra-Orthodox Jews on the one hand and secular Jews on the other hand would not accept his advice.²⁵ The narrator concludes that his generation has only rabbi Jonathans in reverse: overzealous, reactionary Orthodox rabbis who separate Judaism from the general culture. On that day, the yearly day of remembrance for Maimonides, the narrator guards Mr. Lublin's shop on his own. He sees himself as the only Jew who is loyal to and yearns for the lively, inspiring, and balanced Judaism, the *via media*, personified by the teachings of Maimonides, which in his view has existed before modern times.²⁶

The author's revelation during his stay in Mr. Lublin's shop is the realization that there is no way of overcoming the breach that modernity has caused in the lives of the Jews. No *Guide for Our Generation's Perplexed* is available in modern times when rabbis such as Rabbi Jonathan are writing books of a very different character and the Mr. Lublins of our time do not bother to read the Great Eagle as Maimonides was called The Rambam's wisdom, which had informed and sustained the Jews for centuries, had become irrelevant, if not forgotten. Maimonides died in Cairo in 1204, but the relevance of his works faded out with modernity and his memory had become meaningless in the Leipzig of in 1917.

Agnon is subtly ironic and at the same time sad when he describes the fate of Judaica books that children cast away when their parents die. They donate them to synagogues, but the Orthodox have not more use for the Jewish classics than acculturated Jews. At the end, the Jewish books reach non-Jewish book dealers, collectors, scholars, and libraries. The Jews have forfeited their heritage.

²⁵ Cf. Paul Mendes-Flohr's work in progress on 'Maimonides Throughout the Ages'.

²⁶ On Agnon's relation to Maimonides, see Laor, Agnon's Life, 21.

Agnon pays little attention in this novel to the small but thriving moderate German Orthodox community, which made up about 20 percent of German Jewry at the time of World War I. Aimed at observing the Jewish tradition at the same time that they embraced European culture, hundreds of German Orthodox men obtained both doctoral degrees and rabbinical ordination. Unlike their Eastern European Orthodox brethren, German Orthodox Jews did not dress differently from the German bourgeoisie. The men dressed like other middle class men, shaved their beards, and took their hats off when entering buildings; the women dressed in fashionable clothes and hats, uncovering their hair inside homes and offices. The ideal of German Orthodoxy was going to the synagogue on Saturday morning and to the theater, or the opera, or the concert hall, on Saturday night.²⁷ Numerous members of Agnon's social circle, including his wife, Esther Marx, came from that community, and he took keen and sympathetic notice of this unique German Jewish subculture in *Shira*, a book he wrote in the 1940s–1950s, that concentrated on the German Jewish émigrés in Jerusalem, at which time German Jewish Orthodoxy was almost gone.²⁸ In *In Mr. Lublin's Shop*, the Saltzmans represent the German Jewish attempt to create a *via media* between the Jewish tradition and the demands of life in the modern world, but Agnon makes it clear that such an option was unacceptable to the majority of Jews and virtually died out with the collapse of German-Jewish equilibrium.

Dismissing the *via media* was essential for Agnon to make his point. The major options for Jews in the face of modernity entailed, in one way or another, negation of Judaism and its spiritual and intellectual achievements, either by abandoning it altogether, or by turning it into a caricature of its former self. In *Only Yesterday*, Agnon does not mention his admired rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook.²⁹ It would have interfered with the polarized dichotomy he came to portray.³⁰ There was, however, another reason for Agnon's overlooking what he considered moderate, humane, and at the same time worldly forms of Judaism: the time and place in which he wrote the book.

Leipzig or Jerusalem?

This leads to the actual theme of *In Mr. Lublin's Shop*. In this novel, the author despairs from the choices that modernity had presented the Jews. He sums them up as a choice between giving up on the Jewish tradition in favor of the general culture, or creating a rigid and inhumane Jewish environment. In doing so, Agnon related to

²⁷ On German Orthodoxy, see Mordechai Breuer, *Jüdische Orthodoxie im Deutschen Reich, 1871–1918*, Frankfurt a.M. 1986.

²⁸ S. Y. Agnon, *Shira*, Tel Aviv 1970.

²⁹ On Agnon's feelings towards Rabbi Kook, see Agnon's eulogy in: idem, *MeAtzmi el Atzmi* [From Myself to Myself], Tel Aviv 1976, 181–192.

³⁰ I owe thanks to Prof. Elhanan Reiner of Tel Aviv University for pointing that out to me.

Jewish realities of Israel of the 1960s no less than Leipzig of the 1910s, where in fact, different from the depiction in the novel, Maimonidian forms of traditional Judaism, which aimed at amalgamating the best of Judaism with the best of European culture, did exist. One must conclude, that although the novel unfolds in Leipzig of World War I, it represents Agnon's opinions, at the time he wrote the novel, on the effects of modernity on Jews and non-Jews everywhere. He chose Leipzig as the locale of the novel in order to offer a broad perspective and make the claim that modernity destroyed an equilibrium that Jews had maintained between their neighbor's culture and their particular heritage, and caused a breach in Jewish history, putting in danger its survival and continuity. In Leipzig of the 1910s, Jews gave up on either their Jewishness, or their humanity, in an attempt to preserve one or the other and at the end of the day failed miserably in attaining those goals. The book was written in Jerusalem of the 1960s, when German Jewish Orthodoxy, as well as other forms of moderate acculturated Judaism, were fading away if not gone completely. The children of German Orthodox Jews who emigrated to Palestine or America either secularized or joined the ranks of Eastern European Orthodoxy. The conservative movement had not yet established its presence in Israel, and the movement of Return to Tradition, which brought thousands of secular or liberal Jews to take interest in the Jewish tradition and make a commitment to live an observant Jewish life, had not yet made its impact.³¹

In order to fully appreciate the meaning of *In Mr. Lublin's Shop*, one can take a comparative approach and place the novel within Agnon's larger corpus of writings. *In Mr. Lublin's Shop* serves as the culmination of Agnon's seminal novels: *The Bridal Canopy* (in German: *Bräutigamssuche*), *A Guest for the Night* (in German: *Nur wie ein Gast zur Nacht*), and *Only Yesterday*. There is a direct connection between these four novels, and they should be read in sequence. In *The Bridal Canopy*, Agnon portrays pre-modern, pre-emancipated Eastern European Jewish culture as solid and cohesive. The Jewish tradition: its sacred texts, laws, and customs, as well as spirituality and ethical teachings, served as the basis for social norms and governed day to day life. At the same time, Agnon writes about traditional Jewish society from an ironic distance. He does not advocate return to pre-modern times and is fully aware that there is no turning back. In *A Guest for the Night*, Agnon visits again the Jewish small towns of Eastern Europe and finds them physically and spiritually bankrupt. Instead of the wholeness and cohesion of older times, he encounters a fragmented and depressed Jewry, cut from its roots and with little prospect for creativity and prosperity. Simon Halkin saw *A Guest for the Night* as a seminal novel which epitomizes Agnon's ideas and serves as a key to the author's views on the course of Jewish history.³² Together with the other three seminal novels, this is certainly the case.

³¹ Cf. Yaakov Ariel, *Judaism in the Age of Aquarius*, in: *Religion and American Culture* 13 (2003), 139–165.

³² Simon Halkin, *On A Guest for the Night*, in: *S. Y. Agnon, Essays on His Works*, ed. by Hillel Barzel, Tel Aviv 1982, 186–209.

Only Yesterday points out that Agnon did not view Zionism and immigration to Palestine as a solution to the breach in Jewish history.³³ In Palestine, too, Jewish life is not whole and Jews are torn between living in their ancestral country “as all other nations” and remaining loyal to their heritage. In *Only Yesterday*, modernity is presented as a haunting, lithely biting dog, and the protagonist is torn to the point of madness and death between impossible polarized options he faces in Jewish Palestine of pre-World War I.³⁴ *In Mr. Lublin’s Shop* follows in the footsteps of *Only Yesterday*, which focuses on the impossible dilemmas of Jewish life in the modern era. In both novels modernity offers Judaism a cruel choice: a distorted and even prevented interpretation of Judaism in the form of rigid, humorless, and inhumane Orthodoxy, or giving up on the spiritual and intellectual richness of the Jewish tradition altogether. Both novels come to show that the Maimonidian balance that had existed, at least partially, in pre-modern times is not available any more. In *In Mr. Lublin’s Shop*, Agnon carries this line of thought one step further.

In Western cultures, just as in Eastern European countries or in Palestine, modernity does not allow Jews to live wholly as Jews. In fact, modernity, and not physical persecution, may ultimately cause the demise of Judaism.

It would be helpful to read a series of interviews Agnon gave to Geula Cohen, a journalist for the Israeli daily *Maariv*, at the time he was writing the novel (1963–1966). Agnon complained about the complete lack of knowledge of the Jewish tradition among Israelis.³⁵ Like other members of his generation he had not realized, when taking an active part in the creation of a modern, mostly secular, Hebrew culture in Palestine, the extent of the breach that would take place between Hebrew-speaking Israelis and their Jewish roots. Agnon wrote *In Mr. Lublin’s Shop* in Israel of the 1960s, feeling that he – to speak metaphorically – was alone in guarding the shop. Few, like him, were fully open to and familiar with both European culture and Jewish texts, and in his own eyes, he was one of the last Jews to cut a balance between the two worlds and to maintain an observant Judaism that goes hand in hand with an open-minded humanistic world-view. The bitter divisions in Israeli society and culture that would polarize the country at the turn of the 21st century were only building up in the 1960s, but Agnon was reading the writing on the wall. While mostly living his life within secular Israeli society, Agnon put a *yarmulke*, a round symbolic head cover, on his head to signify his commitment to Jewish tradition, and spent much of the latter years of his life writing compilations of Jewish lore and wisdom that came to offer knowledge of the Jewish tradition and point to its richness and beauty.³⁶ During his stay in Leipzig, while attached to Jewish texts and

³³ Although his own choice was living in Palestine. See Agnon’s letters from Leipzig, S. Y. Agnon, *My Dear Esterline*, Tel Aviv 1983, 180–213.

³⁴ Todd Hasak-Lowy, *A Mad Dog Attack on Secularized Hebrew. Rethinking Agnon’s Temol Shilshom*, *Prooftexts* 24 (2004), 167–198.

³⁵ Agnon, *Answers to Geula Cohen*, in: *Maariv*, 15 February 1963; 27 September 1964; 15 February 1966; reprinted in: *From Myself to Myself*, 421–428.

³⁶ Cf. S. Y. Agnon, *You Should See*, Tel Aviv 1959.

scholarship, Agnon was not observant, but changed his mind in 1924, reaching the conclusion that observance of the Law and a regimen of prayer are essential for preserving Jewish life.

He himself wandered between the two worlds, and the theme of moving between the two cultures is central for Agnon. This theme reached its peak in *Only Yesterday*, where the protagonist, Itshak Kumar, could not find a home for his soul and peace of mind in either the secular or Orthodox communities and ultimately went crazy and died, following a dog bite, symbolizing the lethal craziness brought about by the rootlessness caused by modernity. In Agnon's view, Jews, even in the Land of Israel, were turning their backs on their tradition in spite of the wisdom, moderation and creativity it could offer, in favor of a worldly and alluring secular culture. In a somewhat different manner, the same has been true for non-Jews, with especially devastating consequences for Germans, and for German-Jewish relations.

Germans and Jews

While *Only Yesterday* focuses on the effects of modernity and secularization among Jews, *In Mr. Lublin's Shop* also focuses on the effects of modernity on non-Jews and on the relationship between Jews and non-Jews. In Agnon's view, modernity has created havoc among non-Jews just as much as among Jews, devastating their sense of cohesion and security. Worse still, modernity has ultimately created unprecedented and irreversible destruction in the form of World War I and the collapse of an age old equilibrium that existed between Jews and Germans. The breach is therefore tripled: within the religious-ethnic communities, in the relationship between the different communities, and in the international arena, where Germany was launching a futile war that brought a calamity on herself as much as on her neighbors.

To illustrate the difference between pre-modern Germans and modern ones, the writer contrasts the figures of Old Hennings and his great-granddaughter, the charming and seductive Greti Hennings. Both live their lives in Leipzig, but belong to very different social circles. Old Hennings is a relic from a pre-industrial Germany and views the new political and cultural climate with suspicion. His great granddaughter, on the other hand, is a fashionable modern young woman. In spite of his incredible old age, old Hennings, a knife-sharpener of the old school, is sharper than his more educated great-granddaughter. Whereas the old man opposes the war, the great granddaughter writes shallow patriotic war poems. Unlike her great-grandfather, she oversteps what the author considers necessary boundaries: inviting herself into a young but foreign man's rooms at night.

Agnon utilizes bitter irony in pointing to the actual reasons why Jews and gentiles engage in or oppose intermarriage. Such considerations have nothing to do with what should be the real concerns: the preservation of an ancient culture. Gentile women were interested in marrying Jewish men in order to promote their social status. The men were better educated and more affluent than the gentile men they could hope to marry. For that reason, acculturated Jews, such as Mr. Lublin, were

less than happy with the prospect of non-Jewish daughters-in-law. They were not interested in their sons' marrying women whose manners and tastes were that of the working class. On the other hand, when young Germans showed interest in the Jewish tradition, the rabbis were reluctant to convert them and allow them to enter the Jewish community.³⁷

Agnon portrays a somewhat ideal picture of the relationship between Jews and Germans in pre-modern times. He utilizes the supernatural to make his point, sharing with the readers a dream about a visit to Charlemagne's camp.³⁸ The Frankish king offered his protection and appreciation to the Jews who settled in his kingdom. In the author's view, a precondition for such a symbiotic relation was the loyalty of each group to its heritage and its faith. Agnon compares loyalty to one's heritage to the faithfulness of a man to his beloved. "There is no reason for you to assume that another woman would be any better," he asserts.³⁹ Falling in love with a woman of another faith signified to Agnon a transgression. It means the abandonment of the Jewish identity and moving away into another life. Ideally, for him, there should be clear boundaries existing between the communities, each of them observing their own customs and respecting their religious leaders and texts.

Agnon builds symmetry between the Jewish and Christian faiths, demonstrating a great amount of respect towards Christianity and towards Christians. Leaders of the religious traditions had supernatural powers within their own communities. When Christian Lemke, scion of a long line of Lutheran pastors, turns his back on his parents' faith and values, and runs away from his parents' home, joining a dubious wandering theater, and gets attached to someone else's mistress. His father, a Lutheran pastor, curses him and in doing so, puts a spell on him, which ensures that Christian's secular career would remain a failure. Lemke turns away from his parents' ancestral faith and ends in a morally and socially pervert and unstable environment. Judging Germans on their own terms, Agnon utilizes a classical German Bildungsromance, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*). While he follows Goethe's outline, the personalities and developments described in *In Mr. Lublin's Shop* are meant to show the opposite of their original literary meaning. Lemke and Wilhelm adventures end in very different physical and moral results. Like Wilhelm, Lemke matures as a result of his rebellious adventures, but it is his complete failure that taught him a lesson.

The choice of a grotesque theatrical environment to illustrate the German tragedy of turning away from traditional Christian and civic values in favor of a dangerous and harmful escapade is not accidental. In Agnon's opinion, under the effect of modernity and brutal nationalism the Germans turned their back on the Christian faith as well as their true nature and became morally bankrupt. In that, Agnon offers his interpretation on the Nazi experience, one in his eyes has tragic consequences for the Germans no less than for Jews.

³⁷ Agnon, *In Mr. Lublin's Shop*, 133f.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 153-161.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

Agnon was one of the first to portray the Nazi experience as a bizarre, promiscuous theater, a perversion of a structured and moral society. Such a metaphor has been used since the 1980s by a number of writers, playwrights, and artists.⁴⁰ It is in line with the author's view that Germans are not by any means negative persons. Like Jews they were lured astray by powers over which they had little control: industrialization, urbanization, consumer culture, not to mention self righteous and shallow patriotism. This resulted in the crumbling of cohesive religious values and structures that offered clear social and cultural boundaries, and authoritative moral guidelines. Christian Lemke was cursed and damned after leaving his father's community, values, and faith. He was redeemed by Lublin the Jew, who, by accepting him as his assistant, offered Lemke a new lease on a respected life of a decent, hard-working citizen. Following Nazism, the author suggests, Germans and Jews still needed each other in order to rehabilitate themselves and lift themselves up from physical or moral destruction. Lemke stands up on his feet again when Lublin, in this case an embodiment of Mr. Good Will Jew, and perhaps the author's alterego, is willing to accept him as a decent citizen and a useful assistant. Agnon is relating here to a new phase in Jewish-German relationship, which began in the 1950s, in which both sides need each other in order to rehabilitate themselves, in spite of strong residues of suspicion and pain.

Agnon himself began, as of the mid-1950s, to receive at his home German guests, thus accepting Germans as people in good moral standing. The relation of Jews to Germans stood at the center of tense and dramatic Jewish, and especially Israeli, public discourse in the 1950–1960s. Just when Agnon was writing *In Mr. Lublin's Shop*, Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany established diplomatic relations amid a huge public controversy. Agnon, like his friend Martin Buber, supported reconciliation between the two nations. This book, more than a thousand political manifestos, relates to Germans with empathy, interpreting the enormous political crises which led to the rise of Nazism as a cultural and moral breach in the history of the German relation to the Jews along the ages.

Agnon provides a lively picture of a romantic triangle. One man in this entanglement is Ahmichen, the director of the dubious theatrical group, who represents Nazism and its ability to fascinate and attract the masses: "Everybody likes *schmaltz*," Agnon asserts, expressing his opinion that the danger of a godless and destructive regime that captures people's hearts through theatrical maneuvers is not reserved to Germany of the 1930s–1945.⁴¹ Christian Lemke, the other man in the triangle, represents the Germans who went back to their senses, learned their lesson, and rehabilitated themselves. They are the safeguards of a sane and solid German society. However, *Friederike*, the woman in this seemingly romantic adventure, is a shallow, impressionable person, who could have easily stayed on Ahmichen's side and have become Mrs. Ahmichen, if the old destructive order would have prevailed.

⁴⁰ Norman L. Kleeblatt (ed.), *Mirroring Evil. Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*, New York 2002. An Israeli writer who related to Nazi crimes and Jewish suffering as a theatrical production in a madhouse is Yoram Kanyuk in *Adam Ben Kelev*.

⁴¹ Agnon, *In Mr. Lublin's Shop*, 135.

Conclusion

The term post-modernist did not exist before the 1980s, yet Agnon may be regarded as being a post-modernist before the word was even coined. He was a modern writer who rejected modernity based on disappointment with the experience of modernity, and after concluding that it brought more harm than good. However, while pointing to the devastating effects of modernity, and the destruction it brought to individuals and communities, Agnon does not advocate return to traditional pre-modern Judaism and is fully aware of the fact that there is no turning back. Ironically, in the first decades of literary criticism on Agnon's works a number of critics wondered whether Agnon was, in fact, a modern writer. His themes focused on pre-modern Jews and his language was mishnaic rabbinical Hebrew. In contrast to a number of Jewish modern writers of the turn of the twentieth century, such as Peretz Smolenskin, or Mendele Mocher Sforim, he did not bash at traditional Jewish society, and did not turn himself into an advocate of modernity. In the mid-twentieth century, Israeli critics, such as Baruch Kurzweil and Gershon Shaked, began pointing to the complexity of Agnon's thinking as a writer who was neither a traditionalist nor proponent of modernity.⁴² But they could not define him as a post-modernist, since the term and the school of thought did not exist.

A number of critics have pointed to similarities between the writings of Thomas Mann and S. Y. Agnon.⁴³ Both dealt with the disintegration of traditional structures in the face of modernity, and the loss of authority and cohesion that came with it, in both the civic and personal realms. Mann, however, was a devoted son of the Enlightenment who rejected the supernatural, and believed that rational humanism could build a better world. A good comparison would be between Agnon and Selma Lagerlöf, a Swedish writer whom Agnon read and appreciated. Both Lagerlöf and Agnon rejected modernity from within modernity. Both saw humanity as inherently good but irrational and not always making the right choices. Both rejected the most elementary premises of the Enlightenment, the idea of a rational society working towards its own good. Both embraced the supernatural wholeheartedly and advocated the belief that there was much of nature and of God that humans could not understand. Both showed appreciation for pious persons and pre-modern communities.⁴⁴

Another author who influenced Agnon's writings was Robert Musil. Like Robert Musil, who, in a rather passive manner, mourned the unavoidable decline and eventual demise of Viennese Habsburg culture, so did Agnon in *In Mr. Lublin's Shop* lament the disintegration of the Jewish people and their unique heritage. In a sad, minor key, and seemingly neutral language, he pointed to what the historian Jacob Katz later called "the breach that never healed": the fragmentation of Jewish

⁴² For example, Baruch Kurzweil, *Essays on Agnon's Stories*, Tel Aviv 1963, 328–352; Gershon Shaked, *S.Y. Agnon. A Revolutionary Traditionalist*, New York 1989.

⁴³ For example, Amos Oz, *A Story of Love and Darkness*, Jerusalem 2002, 133f.

⁴⁴ Agnon, *A Simple Story* follows the theme of Lagerlöf's *Jerusalem*, adapting it to a Jewish small town in Eastern Europe.

society and culture in the face of emancipation and modernity. Both Musil and Agnon dealt with themes of cultural crisis before, during, or after World War I, in central Europe. Both use the same literary techniques and create similar atmospheres. Both writers place the narrator-protagonist as a passive observer-philosopher, who does not take part in any meaningful action to change the outcome of history, and all that they offer are sad reflections. They have no solutions, no redemption to offer, and merely point with subtle irony to the disintegration of an empire or a people, the unavoidable result of modernity and nationalism. Both *The Man without Character* and *In Mr. Lublin's Shop* have no apparent plots, no beginnings, middles, or ends, but are very rich novels.

Agnon had already explored the theme of the polarization of Jewish culture in *Only Yesterday*, pointing to the impossibility of expressing one's Jewishness in a sane, constructive manner within modern culture. Zionism, he warned in the earlier novel, could not really solve the breach between Jews and their heritage, and the dilemma became apparent in the land of Israel, too. *In Mr. Lublin's Shop* carries this line of thinking further: Jewish life has polarized and lost its cohesive all-encompassing structure. Its fragmented parts have moved so far away from its sources that the core and spirit of Judaism has been lost. Jews have moved away from their identity or created a reactionary, perverted, caricature of their ancestral faith. Judaism, Agnon laments in this final novel, cannot be practiced any more in a manner that does justice to its core values and authentic spirit.

While *Only Yesterday* concentrates on the effects of modernity on Jews, Agnon places the disintegration of the Jewish culture in a larger perspective in *In Mr. Lublin's Shop*. Germans, too, were led astray by the power of secularization, industrialization, and urbanization and with even more destructive results. The personalities Agnon creates in his novel, including Lublin and his assistant Lemke represent these developments, and their life histories as well as the interaction between them signify the tragic effects of modernity on both nations.

The inability of Jews to reconcile tradition and modern secularism has served as Agnon's source of inspiration and creativity. The dilemmas and pains of the breach in Jewish history preoccupied Agnon and he spent a lifetime lamenting over them. In that he was indeed a modernist, eager to find "solutions," to construct one "way" that would fit all. He mourned his and others inability to achieve that goal. It did not occur to Agnon that what he considered to be the problem was the solution – that there were multiple means for Jews to be Jews, and that the struggles and competitions between various forms of Judaism, as well as the tensions and pains of being Jewish, were ingredients of a dynamic and creative environment. He remained inconsolable.