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**Guests At Their Own Home: Homecoming, Memory and Authorship in *A Guest for the Night* by S.Y. Agnon and the Yash Novels by Jacob Glatstein**

By

Shirli Sela-Levavi

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## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

**Guests At Their Own Home: Homecoming, Memory and Authorship in A Guest for the Night by S.Y. Agnon and the Yash Novels by Jacob Glatstein**

**By SHIRLI SELA-LEVAVI**

Dissertation Directors:

**Yael Zerubavel**

**Jeffrey Shandler**

This dissertation explores the differences in constructions of memory and of authorship in diasporic and national literature through a close reading of “A Guest for the Night” by S.Y. Agnon and the Yash novels by Jacob Glatstein. The reading is premised on a diasporic conception of Jewish literature as a cosmopolitan web of centers of production, interacting with each other. The two authors write in similar circumstances about visiting the Eastern European home in the interwar period. Both emigrated from Eastern Europe to Palestine and the United States respectively and their modernist homecoming narratives present the dilemmas of Jewish authorship on the cusp of modernity.

The discussion of memory reveals its interactions with place, language and peoplehood. The novels present a rupture in Jewish memory as a result of the upheavals of emmigration and the demise of traditional Jewish life. The authors ask questions about the continuity of Jewish narrative and life in face of changing relations to place and language. Agnon’s novel grapples with the transition from Diaspora to the ancient, historic homeland and explores the possibility of reconstructing Jewish life in it. At the same time Agnon interrogates the viability of Jewish life in a diasporic place. Agnon implicitly offers an alternative to the Zionist vision. His historical conception allows to mend the rupture in Jewish memory. Glatstein develops an alternative,

highly flexible relation between memory and place and offers modes of commemoration that are not related to fixed locations and are based on language and culture.

The discussion of authorship looks at the way the authors see their own role in the transition from tradition to modernity. Agnon's struggle with non traditional Jewish writing unfolds through his relations to different models of authorship. I explore his struggle with the romantic ideal of male authorship, and present this attempt as analogous to siring a new Jewish body in place of the dead and scattered exilic one. The discussion of Glatstein's concept of authorship reveals a highly modernist, at times post modernist and performative conception of subjectivity. He presents the writer as performing a role, while using traditional themes of Yiddish theater as subcontext.

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## Introduction

This dissertation is an intensive study of works by two writers: “A Guest for the Night” (hereafter AGN) by S.Y. Agnon, originally titled “Oreah Nata La-lun” (Hebrew, Jerusalem, 1939, English trans. Misha Louvish, Wisconsin: Random House, 1968), and *Ven Yash iz geforn* (When Yash traveled, 1938) and *Ven Yash iz gekumen* (When Yash arrived, 1940), two novels often referred to in Yiddish as “The Yash Novels”, by Jacob Glatstein (Yiddish, New York, 1940. I cite the revised translation to English titled “The Glatstein Chronicles,” trans. Maier Deshell and Norbert Guterman, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). Both Agnon’s and Glatstein’s novels were written after a visit that each author made to his respective hometown in Eastern Europe in the interwar period. The trips took place about twenty years after they had left the places of their childhood. While writing the novels, both Agnon and Glatstein were well-respected authors, each in his own cultural milieu. These similar circumstances yielded two novels that not only deal with homecoming, but also bear deeper resemblances and raise similar questions. Both are written in the first person and describe the Eastern European Jewish Diaspora in the process of historical change and decline. Both authors look at this world through the eyes of emigrants who are no longer part of it. The significance of the visits and how they are rendered as literature, therefore, greatly transcends the personal, as the authors stitch together narratives that not only embrace their relation to their past, including memory and commemoration, but also work toward shaping a vision of the future and the need to create a bridge between the past and the future. In this context they position themselves as authors and construct different concepts regarding their authorship.

Even as they share similar backgrounds, there are also significant differences between the authors’ circumstances. Agnon emigrated from Galicia to Palestine in 1908, where he became part of the new Zionist settlement, or Yishuv, which was committed to the ideal of return to the ancient Jewish homeland, i.e., Eretz Israel. The Zionist Yishuv formed alongside a small

established Jewish community that was mostly religious. With additional waves of immigration, the Jewish community settled in Palestine became increasingly Zionist throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century and adopted Hebrew as its official language<sup>1</sup>. The Zionist leadership of the Yishuv strove to form a homogenous Hebrew culture in place of the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic mixture that characterized pre-Zionist Palestine. The authors who formed the Hebrew, national literary canon based it on Zionist ideology and on a rejection of alternative, diasporic literary options.

Having emigrated from czarist Russia to New York City in 1914, Jacob Glatstein became part of the vibrant Jewish-American immigrant community in this urban cultural center and of a circle of modernist Yiddish writers, who conceived Jewish peoplehood in diasporic terms. This community maintained a link to the emerging cultural center in Palestine on the one hand and to the East European home countries on the other. Therefore, at the center of this study stands the difference between a diasporic and a nationalist construction of authorship and memory. More specifically, the dissertation looks at the ways in which two prominent authors deal with memory, the continuity of individual and communal lives, and questions of cultural and literary identity. I look at the ways in which each author constructs memory and uses it to define his relation to his Jewish identity and at the ways his relation to memory defines his authorship. The distinction between national and diasporic circumstances also creates a special context for evaluating language choice and relation to place as part of each author's perception of memory and peoplehood.<sup>2</sup>

The historical coincidence of writing novels that deal with similar themes in two different cultural circumstances allows us to look at the construction of authorship as deeply contextual

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<sup>1</sup> In 1923, the British Mandate authorities named Hebrew as one of the official languages of Palestine, along with English and Arabic. This step marked the end of a struggle that started in the first days of the Yishuv against other alternatives, mainly Yiddish. (Yael Chaver, 2004:16).

<sup>2</sup> Agnon started his literary career writing mainly in Yiddish. Glatstein did not write Hebrew but, just like Agnon, he learned the language as a child.

and culturally embedded and to understand the relation between the personal and the communal through the concept of collective memory. The novels serve as a case study that allows us to map the relations between ideas that are more often discussed in abstract terms. The following discussion considers the specific relations between memory, different kinds of peoplehood, i.e., national vs. Diasporic, language and authorship. I do not argue for a simple and direct relation between communal and linguistic circumstances on the one hand and memory and authorship on the other hand but rather offer a complex discussion of the relations between them. My discussion suggests that literature both shapes and is shaped by memory and national circumstances to the very way that authors see themselves and their art. Conceptions of authorial identity are reflected in the ways the authors conceive language and peoplehood and vice versa.

### **S.Y. Agnon - Life and Career**

Examining the place of each novel within its author's oeuvre and writing career reveals the significance of the work as a turning point in which the author reconsiders his communal, personal, and artistic identity. S. Y. Agnon was born in 1887 as Shmuel Yoseph Chachkes in Buczacz, Eastern Galicia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Until World War I Galicia was home to 800,000 Jews, which made it one of the largest concentrations of Jewish population in Europe. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jews formed 70% of Buczacz's population.

Agnon was educated in the *kheder*, a traditional Jewish school for children offering religious education. Later he had little formal education. At age 12 he started studying independently in the old house of study (*beth midrash*, a study hall in a synagogue or *yeshiva*) in town, where he read *mishnah*, a redaction of the Jewish oral traditions, and Jewish biblical exegesis. Apart from his religious education, he also learned German and read modern European literature in this language, as well as Jewish classics in Yiddish and Hebrew. His first story was published in *HaMizpeh*, a Krakow-based Hebrew weekly, in 1905, when he was 18. At this time he wrote prose, poetry and articles in both Hebrew and Yiddish (Dan Laor, 1998: 28). In 1907 he

went to Lvov at the invitation of Eliezer Rokach, a Zionist activist, editor and publisher, and served for a short time as editor in the Yiddish journal edited by Rokach, *Der yidishe weker* (the Jewish waker). During his stay in Lvov Agnon met Y.C. Brenner, a prominent Hebrew writer and editor, and made a great impression on him.

At age twenty the young Agnon immigrated to Palestine, where Zionist settlement had started in 1881 with a first wave of immigration, or *alyiah*, mainly from Eastern Europe. He arrived in Jaffa in 1908 in the midst of the second wave of immigration, which began in 1904 and lasted until 1914, bringing about 30,000 more Jews to Palestine. A small but significant group among the immigrants were young pioneers, mainly from Russia, who renewed and invigorated the settlement project started by the first *alyiah*, establishing new villages and communities in frontier areas (ibid:50). Agnon immigrated independently and, in spite of his Zionist inclinations, did not join the pioneers' project. Instead he chose to continue promoting his nascent writing career. However, his admiring relation to the Zionist pioneering project in Palestine is clearly reflected in his writing.

In Jaffa Agnon found himself a vibrant community of young immigrants, who led a non-religious, liberal lifestyle. He then quit his observant way of life and at the same time quit writing in Yiddish, using only Hebrew from this point until the end of his career (Nevertheless, his letters to friends were peppered with Yiddish phrases). In 1908 Agnon published the story "Agunot", his first major contribution to Hebrew literature. He signed it with the pseudonym Agnon for the first time. The name is derived from the story's title, "Agunot", meaning "deserted wives." Y.C. Brenner, who arrived in Palestine in 1909 and became a leading literary critic and editor in the Zionist settlement, praised the story, turning Agnon from an anonymous young writer into an emerging literary prodigy. In 1912 Agnon published his novella "VeHaya He' Akov LeMishor"

(“And the Crooked shall be Made Straight”), a retelling of a Hasidic story<sup>3</sup> in modern garb. After writing this novella he was declared by some critics as the heir of the most prominent writers of Hebrew literature at the time, Hayim Nachman Bialik and Micha Yosef Berditchevsky (ibid: 75).

In 1912 Agnon decided to leave Palestine for Germany, as the Jewish settlement in Palestine did not offer him enough opportunities to develop his career. He arrived in Germany at a significant moment in the history of its Jewish community. After years of assimilation, this community started to renew its interest in Judaism and some of the German Jewish intellectuals, mainly those with Zionist inclinations, looked to Eastern Europe as a source of authenticity and Jewish identity.

Agnon, with his East European origins and his deep roots in Jewish learning and Hasidic lore, offered these Jewish intellectuals the kind of cultural content they were interested in. His deep friendship with Martin Buber, the leading figure in German Jewish culture, strengthened Agnon’s reputation as an East European Jewish intellectual and author. In 1915 Agnon met the German-Jewish intellectual and businessman, Zalman Schocken, a Zionist who believed German Jews needed to return to their Jewish roots and admired Agnon’s writing. The collaboration between the two became a life-long relationship. Schocken supported Agnon with a monthly stipend and, in return, Schocken’s publishing house acquired exclusive rights to Agnon’s writings, which it owns to this day (ibid: 105).

In 1920 Agnon married Esther Marx, the daughter of a rich German Jewish businessman. After a long period of wandering and living in temporary apartments, he moved with his family to Bad Homburg, a prosperous suburb of Frankfurt. After World War I Bad Homburg became a temporary center for East European Jewish authors, and Agnon frequently socialized there with leading Hebrew and Yiddish literati, including Bialik, Ahad Ha’Am,

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<sup>3</sup> Hasidism is a branch of Orthodox Judaism that promotes spirituality through the popularization and internalization of Jewish mysticism as the fundamental aspect of faith. It was founded in 18th-century Eastern Europe by Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov. The Hasidim often used stories to teach their values.

Ya'akov Fikhman, and Nathan Birnbaum, among others. During that time Agnon wrote many stories that deal with the culture, history, and folklore of Galician Jews in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A new direction in his writing career started with the publishing of stories and novellas that depict contemporary Jewish life in Central Europe and deal mainly with romantic and marital relationships. In addition, and aside from his literary work, Agnon was employed by Schocken to compile and edit anthologies of Hasidic stories and texts dealing with Jewish holidays.

These endeavors earned Agnon the title of a chronicler of Jewish life in Eastern Europe, which he willingly accepted. Quite often, however, his critics used this title pejoratively. They described Agnon as conservative, and prominent critics such as M.Y. Berditchevsky and Joseph G. Klausner, claimed that his language was archaic and far removed from modern, spoken Hebrew. Other critics faulted Agnon for being irrelevant and for completely ignoring the horrendous reality after World War I, especially in the Jewish world (ibid:105). In 1924 a fire destroyed Agnon's family house in Bad Homburg. There were no casualties, but a manuscript of a new book was destroyed, as well as *Sefer HaHasidut*, a compilation of legends of the founder of Hasidism, the Ba'al Shem Tov. Agnon decided to move back to Palestine permanently. He saw the disaster as a punishment for straying from Jewish religion and enjoying life away from Zion.

When he returned to Palestine it was under British mandate, and Jewish immigration there resumed. As part of his return to a religious way of life, Agnon decided to live in Jerusalem. Although the renewed encounter with Palestine was reflected in some of his stories of that time, he more often wrote about the people of the Jewish, pre-Zionist settlement, or the "old yishuv" in this land. In 1925, shortly after his return to Palestine, he published *Polin* (Poland), stories and legends about the culture of Galician and Polish Jews.

In 1927 Agnon published his first novel, *Hakhnasat Kalah* ("The Bridal Canopy"), a picaresque story taking place in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Galicia. For the first time, critics recognized Agnon

not merely as an imitator of traditional literature but as a writer with an individual style (ibid: 197). Agnon's writing was regarded part of the emerging Hebrew canon and acquired a unique status within Hebrew letters. He was admired both by socialist pioneers and by Agudat Israel, the ultra orthodox branch of the Jerusalemite Hasidim, who perceived his Hasidic stories as an extension of the religious canon.

In 1929 the Agnon family house was attacked by Arab gangs as part of violent riots that spread across the country. Again Agnon suffered the loss of rare books but this time he was careful to save his manuscripts. While living temporarily with relatives, he decided to visit Leipzig, Germany, to oversee the printing of a first edition of his collected works, and then visit his hometown, Buczacz, and other towns and cities that had become part of the Polish Republic after World War I. Agnon had not visited Buczacz since 1913, the year he went back for a short visit when his father was dying. He arrived in the town on August 13 1930. Most of the seven days that he spent there were dedicated to visiting the graves of his ancestors and looking for traces of old childhood memories (Laor in Weiss and Barzel 1994: 264). Agnon was greeted as a dignitary of the highest rank. Large receptions were held in his honor and the local press reported the visit and described Agnon as a "great Hebrew author" (ibid; 263).

Although Agnon noted that his relatives in Buczacz and in the other towns he visited suffered dire poverty, the town that Agnon encountered in 1930 was not in ruins. The period described in AGN was actually one of vitality and cultural prosperity. The damage caused by World War I was immense, but by the 1930s most of the damage had been repaired, and Buczacz boasted a Jewish youth movement, public institutions, and a well-developed school system (ibid: 271). The motivation for the town's dreary depiction in the novel is therefore poetic and ideological rather than documentary. As Agnon's biographer, Dan Laor notes, when Agnon visited his hometown he had already made a private decision in favor of life in Palestine, and thus his view of life in Buczacz was tainted by his avowed Zionism (ibid: 272).

After Agnon came back from his tour, his wife and children went to Germany for a family visit, a fact that is also echoed in AGN. Later the family moved to a permanent home that was built for them in Talpiot, a neighborhood in Jerusalem. In the thirties Agnon started to experiment in a new literary style, highly influenced by modernist writing and psychoanalytic thought. After publishing *Sefer HaMa'asim* (The Book of Deeds, a collection of short stories), which presented this new genre, Agnon was for the first time considered by critics as a modernist (Laor 1998:258). Although most of his readers and critics did not respond well to this style (literary scholar and critic Dov Sadan being the only exception), Agnon continued to experiment with this style while still writing stories that dealt with life in the Old World and family dramas as well as editing anthologies.

In 1938, without prior planning and drafting, Agnon started writing a new novel dealing with his visit to Eastern Europe. Palestine was then in the midst of another wave of bloody riots, as Arab gangs attacked Jewish settlements throughout the country. Newspapers were full of alarming headlines reporting the further fortification of the army in Nazi Germany and the escalation of Jewish persecution throughout Europe. Agnon's relatives and friends in Europe kept sending letters beseeching him to arrange for a certificate that would allow them to immigrate to Palestine. All this time Agnon worked on his novel, completing it in less than two years. Typically he would plan and draft a novel for many years, and while writing AGN he was in the process of planning and drafting his next novel, *Tmol-Shilshom* ("Only Yesterday").

AGN was published in Palestine in Ha'aretz in daily installments starting October 16 1939. Five months after its last installment, it was published as a book, eight days after World War II started. As Laor notes, the historical coincidence of the novel's publication at the beginning of the war and the news about the destruction of entire Jewish communities in Eastern Europe influenced the book's reception. It was anachronistically connected to the current destruction of East European Jewry. Critics saw Agnon as the last witness of the East European

Jewish town before its destruction and ascribed a prophetic meaning to the descriptions found in the novel (in Weiss and Barzel 1994:276). The book was translated into English in 1968 by Misha Louvish, the only translation published thus far.

After completing AGN, Agnon continued writing “Only Yesterday,” his first novel set in Palestine. The novel describes the realization and disappointments of the Zionist dream by the pioneers of the Second Aliyah. “Only Yesterday” was published in November 1945 but Agnon started to work on it in 1926. During the years until its publication, Agnon published parts of it in serialized form. During Israel’s 1948 War of Independence, Agnon started writing a fifth and last novel, *Shira*, which he did not complete. During the 1950s he published many stories and consciously dedicated himself to the commemoration of the Old World, mainly in the stories of *Ir UMeloah* (“A City and the Fullness Thereof”) and *Korot Bateinu* (“The Beams of our House”). His last major work to be published during his lifetime was *Ad Hena* (“Thus Far”), a novella set in Germany during World War I. This novel, along with earlier works such as “Only Yesterday,” was lately interpreted by critics as a precursor of postmodernism (see Hajby, Yaniv, “Lashon, He’ader, Miskhak”, Jerusalem: Karmel 2007 and Arbel, Michal, “Katuv Al Oro Shel HaKelev”, Tel-Aviv: Keter, 2006). In 1966 Agnon received the Nobel Prize in literature, together with the German Jewish poet Nelly Sachs. He died in 1970 and was given an official state burial.

### **Jacob Glatstein – Life and Career**

Jacob (Yankev) Glatstein was born on August 20, 1896, in Lublin, a city in Congress Poland, which was under the rule of the Russian Empire. Lublin was an important commercial center in the nineteenth century, and Jews took part in its prosperity. The city was also a Hasidic center, and at the turn of the century its Jewish population numbered over 23,000 Jews, or about 15% of the total population (Janet Hadda 1980:12).

As a child, Glatstein was given religious education but was also permitted certain liberties regarding non-religious subjects. His father was a lover of Yiddish literature and introduced his son to the works of the Yiddish classics. At age thirteen Glatstein went to Warsaw to visit Y.L. Peretz, one of the canonical writers of Yiddish literature and a mentor of young writers. At age seventeen one of Glatstein's stories was accepted for publication in the Warsaw Yiddish newspaper *Fraynd*, but its publication was postponed and it never appeared as planned. In 1914, as the position of Jews in Lublin deteriorated and their businesses were boycotted, Glatstein decided to immigrate to New York City. His uncle had already immigrated to America, and the young Yankev was therefore sent to him (Janet Hadda 1980: 12-13).

Upon arriving in New York City, Glatstein supported himself by working in different sweatshops but repeatedly proved to be unsuited for manual labor. During this period of difficult adjustment he quit writing. In 1918 he decided to enter New York University Law School. His meeting with a classmate, Nokhem Borekh Minkov, changed the course of his career. Minkov introduced Glatstein to the Yiddish belletristic milieu in New York, and Glatstein resumed writing.

His first attempts to publish in the *Fraye arbeter shtime* (The Free Voice of Labor), an anarchist Yiddish periodical, were not successful. He then adopted a female pseudonym, Klara Blum, and managed to publish fifteen poems and even won editorial praise for them (ibid: 14). His significant debut as a poet, however, was made in the pages of the journal *Poezie* (Poetry), where in 1919 he published three poems: "1919", "In roykh" (In smoke) and "Tirtl-toybn" (Turtle doves), which marked him as the creator of a new, experimental style in Yiddish poetry. In 1920, together with Arn Glants-Leyeles and Minkov, Glatstein established the *In zikh* (introspectivist) writer's group, which launched a new style in Yiddish poetry. The Inzikhists published an anthology titled *In zikh*, literally "Inside the Self", containing a reprint of Glatstein's new poems as well as poems by other members of the group. The anthology opened with a manifesto of

poetic principles that emphasized subjectivity and the refraction of outer reality through inner, psychological contents. The Inzikhists gave precedence to free verse over meter and rhyme and insisted on the legitimacy of all subjects for Yiddish poetry. They asserted their Jewishness by writing in Yiddish rather than by choosing Jewish subjects (ibid: 15, Wisse 2010: xi, Harshav and Harshav 1986, 38-39).

In 1920, Glatstein published his first book of poems, simply titled *Yankev Glatshiteyn*. Using his own name as a title, he demonstrated an unabashed concentration on his self, while at the same time, “showing a break from the romantic ‘I’ to an objectified self” (Itay Zutra, 2011: 49). During the 1920s Glatstein also published two more books of poems: *Fraye ferzn* (“Free Verses”, 1926), and *Kredos* (“Credos,” 1929). In 1919 he married and was forced to earn a living. He therefore turned to newspaper work and served as a columnist under different pseudonyms. He first worked for the Yiddish daily, *Di naye varhayt* (The New Truth), as a member of the editorial board and a writer of feuilletons. In 1926 he started to work for the *Morgn-zshurnal* (Morning Journal), a Yiddish daily with a Zionist orientation, where he also published short stories. He signed the stories Y. Yungman, using his mother’s maiden name. During the 1930s he also edited the monthly literary journal *Loglen* (Wineskins) (1928-9) and the *Inzikh* journal (1934-8). At the same time he wrote a column, “Prost un poshet” (“Plain and Simple”), for the *Morgen zshurnal*. Although his journalistic work started out of necessity and was first published under a pen name, he eventually grew to believe that it was part and parcel of his literary career and was glad when, in 1938, his editor asked him to drop his pseudonym. During the 1930s Glatstein, like other Yiddish American poets, became more engaged in politics and world affairs. His journalistic work, along with growing anti-Semitism in Europe, did not allow him to focus solely on the theory of poetic language and forced him to voice his political opinions (Shandler 2012:112).

In 1934, Glatstein returned to Lublin to visit his dying mother. He took the trip to his hometown at a time of growing concern about the fate of European Jewry. Much as in the Yash novels, Glatstein traveled by ship to Paris, then took a train through Germany to Warsaw and from there to Lublin. He stayed at his mother's bedside on her last days and buried her in the old cemetery in town. After the seven days of mourning and after meeting with old friends, he went to rest for a week in a guest house on the outskirts of Lublin.

Glatstein returned to New York about two months after leaving it and started to write the Yash novels in the autumn of 1934 (Miron 2006: 253). A first excerpt, including an introduction that was later shelved, appeared in the October 1934 issue of *In zikh*. The introduction cynically describes the humble welcome he received compared to the one that awaited Louis Adamic, another author, who returned to his hometown in Yugoslavia around the same time, to be received as a celebrity and a hero in his home country.

Glatstein's first novel, *Ven Yash iz geforn*, was published in installments in *In zikh* over the course of two years and then issued as a book in 1938. At the same time, Glatstein was already working on the second novel in the projected trilogy, *Ven yash iz gekumen*. This novel was also first published in installments, appearing in the Zionist weekly *Der yidisher kempfer* (The Jewish Fighter). The novel was published as a book in 1940. Glatstein started writing a third and last novel, *Ven yash iz zurickgekumen*. After the Holocaust a single excerpt, titled "Nakhmen der zeiger makher" (Nakhmen the Watch Maker) was published. However, Glatstein was unable to complete this third novel. As literary scholar and translator of the Yash novels into Hebrew, Dan Miron, notes, after the Holocaust and the systematic murder of Polish Jewry, the visit to Lublin seemed irrelevant to Glatstein, as he confessed in an interview shortly before his death (1994:210). The first novel was translated into English by Abraham Goldstein as "Homeward Bound" and published in 1969. The translation was, however, incomplete. A translation of the second novel, rendered into English by Norbert Guterman, appeared earlier, in 1962. In 2010 a

new edition of both novels was published under the title *The Glatstein Chronicles* (New Haven: Yale). The editor, Ruth Wisse, commissioned Mayer Deshell to do a new translation of the first novel and made minor changes in Guterman's translation of the second novel. During the same time that Glatstein published the Yash novels, he also published a novel for young adults, *Emil und Karl* in 1940. The book was published in New York only several months after World War II had begun and is one of the first books for young adults to deal with the subject of the rise of Nazism and its consequences for East European Jewry. An English translation by Jeffrey Shandler was published in 2008.

Following Glatstein's return from Poland he became an outspoken polemicist and used his column in the *Morgen zshurnal* to address growing anti-Semitism in Europe. He denounced the American government's and American Jewry's irresolute response to European anti-Semitism and used his column to appeal for stronger Jewish self-defense (Shandler 2012:112). Critics debate whether he was going through a deep change as a result of his visit to Lublin and the events in Europe in the late 1930s (Hadda 1980:62, Miron 1994:206-207, Ruth Wisse 1996:140), or whether it is better to talk about a more complex and ongoing change of attitudes towards Jewish identity (Anita Norich 2007:43). In any case, it is clear that during this time Glatstein voiced his concerns about the fate of the Jewish people more explicitly and openly. He perceived his Jewish identity as preceding other identifications (Norich 2007:36, Wisse 1996:140); he denounced Jewish support of communism especially after communists condoned Arab violence against Jewish pioneers in Palestine (ibid: 113). At the same time, the turn into the Jewish world did not bring him to renounce his modernist style. In 1937 he published *Yiddishtaytshn*, a book of poems that is an ultra-modernist manifest and an exploration of the Yiddish language.

In 1938, around the same time that Glatstein started serializing the first Yash novel, he startled the Yiddish-speaking world with his poem "A gute nakht, velt" ("Good night, world"), a diatribe against Western culture that voices disillusionment with the promises of the

Enlightenment. The poem highlights the dilemma of the modern Jew, who relinquished Jewish tradition out of belief in the promises of the Enlightenment for universal equality and justice for all, only to discover that these promises were shallow and misleading. In a gesture of dramatic self-assertion, the speaker in the poem returns to the Jewish ghetto out of choice. Paradoxically, at the same time that the poem is a modernist gesture, addressing “the world,” it is written in a language that most of the non-Jewish world cannot understand.

However, a reading of the poem as positing a thesis and an antithesis, a choice between modernity and traditional Judaism, is too simplistic. Glatstein “does not say “either/or” but rather “and/also” (Anita Norich, 2007:56). Glatstein never meant to go back to Jewish traditional observance. Rather, he “embraced the textuality of the Jews rather than their physical symbols or beliefs” (ibid:55). Much like Agnon and even more blatantly, in this poem Glatstein foreshadows post-modernism, as the poem rejects master narratives about culture and history (ibid: 45). “A gute nakht, velt” has been translated into English eight times, demonstrating its ongoing significance. It was republished in Glatstein’s *Gedenklider* (“Memorial poems”) in 1943.

With this collection, Glatstein’s response to the Holocaust started to unfold. *Gedenklider* presents a mixture of hope and pessimism regarding the future Jewish culture. It exalts the beauty of the Yiddish language and at the same time refuses to use it to describe Nazi atrocities. Other themes that emerge in this book are rage towards the Jewish God and a lament of His impotence, as well as the poet’s reluctance to deal with the atrocities and his wish to deal with the mundane and with individual expression (Hadda 1980:67). *Shtralndike yidn* (Radiant Jews) of 1946 focuses again on Glatstein’s responses to the Holocaust and offers some of Glatstein’s more powerful poems. It contains poems that deal with his personal bereavement over his family members who perished, as well as a more general treatment of the Holocaust. It raises again the dilemma of the poet who carries public responsibility as a survivor of a lost world and yet wishes to indulge in individual expression.

In his 1953 collection, *Dem tatns shotn* (The Shadow of the Father) almost all direct references to the Holocaust disappear. From this point on, the main theme of Glatstein's poetry is personal relationships. However, he indirectly deals with the implications of the calamity for the future of his poetic heritage, written in a language that gradually loses its remaining readership. Glatstein died unexpectedly in 1970 at the age of 75, in the midst of the celebrations of his jubilee.

### **The Comparative Analysis – Scope and Objectives**

Several scholars have noted the historical coincidence of Glatstein and Agnon writing a story of homecoming in similar circumstances. In *The Modern Jewish Canon* Ruth Wisse reads the two works side by side as representing a similarly unusual “counterclockwise literary direction”; both authors “rejoined their artistic fate to the Jews of Poland” at a time that rising fascism in Europe stirred Jewish immigration out of the continent. This step later turned them into “witness-survivors and the works into a forshadowing of what was to come.” Wisse argues that it is not anachronistic to see these works as prophetic, as both authors were ready to look soberly at the realities of the time (2000:165). Dan Miron, in his afterword to each of the Yash novels, illuminates the uniqueness of Glatstein's work and the nature of his writing by comparing it to Agnon's novel. Both critics make important observations about the similarities and differences between the works in terms of plot, genre, the construction of time and space, and narrator-author interrelations. While these observations serve as points of departure for my discussion, my aim in this study is much broader.

Although I am interested in the two works in themselves, they also offer a model for thinking about the difference between diasporic and nationally-oriented writing. I suggest that these different contexts are reflected in the novels, especially in the authors' approach to their authorship and in their understanding of memory and continuity, both on the individual and on the collective level. I ask questions about the way an individual writer forms his (in this case)

authorial persona in relation to the communal context of his writing. At the same time, I look at the way this context, structured through cultural memory, interacts with the construction of the authorial persona. My reading of the novels also tries to examine the way nationhood and Diaspora are perceived in literature and how this perception complicates the established dichotomy between them. I suggest that rather than rootedness in national contexts, and uprootedness in diasporic ones, we find different sorts of attachments to place in both cases. Taking the ideal model of nationality as premised on the relation among people, place and language, I also examine the way the history of the language – in this case Yiddish vs. Hebrew, both affects relations to peoplehood, place and memory and is affected by them.

A comparative reading of the two novels reveals deeper similarities beyond those related to plot and narrative techniques noted by Miron and Wisse. Both authors offer an *ars poetic*, i.e., aesthetically self-conscious, discussion of their authorship in the context of their contemporary culture, and both deal with personal and cultural memory in relation to history and authorship. Both novels offer a unique conjunction of an autobiographical narrator who identifies himself as an author and at the same time reflects on his place in relation to his literary tradition and cultural memory. Both are fully conscious of the unique place their narrative has beyond the personal sphere. They implicitly conceive of themselves as representative of a whole culture by going back to Europe and placing themselves in the unique place of witnesses, as Wisse noted. They take advantage of the privilege of going back to the old hometown and then returning. In doing this they serve as a live bridge between two Jewish centers (in each case), and the journey gives them the opportunity to reflect contemporary national transformations through their personal stories.

Both Agnon and Glatstein refrained from explicitly, ideological writing, despite the fact that they both lived and wrote in a time of large-scale historical upheavals and were expected by their respective communities to voice their opinions in relation to contemporary events. Glatstein became the editor of *Inzikh* in 1934, a time in which Jewish identity in the United States was

debated and re-considered in the context of the struggle against European fascism and the demands voiced by the Communist Party to act along non-national lines against it. These demands challenged Jewish American intellectuals to choose between national affiliation and a more universal one (Zutra 2011:28). In his articles from that time Glatstein objected to this demand and favored full artistic autonomy, opposing any party dictatorship (ibid:30).

Glatstein objected to turning literature into propaganda but demanded that his fellow, Yiddish writers be primarily affiliated with their ethnic group in preference to any other identity. The same is true for Agnon; he consistently refrained from voicing any specific political views, except for two unusual occasions that frame his commitment to a moderate Zionist line: In 1929, during the Arab riots, he published two parables that denounced the pacifist policy of the *Yishuv* leadership toward the Arabs (Laor 1998: 241). Ten years later, during another wave of riots, he joined a call to end Jewish counter-terrorism on the part of Jewish underground organizations (ibid:319). Apart from his general Zionist allegiance and objection to violence on both sides, Agnon did not voice any specific political views or gave his support to any political party.

Neither AGN nor the Yash novels advocate any specific political agenda or serve as a vehicle for political propaganda. At the same time, both novels demonstrate a deep concern for Jewish life and present its complexity. Both ask how Jewish identity should be conceived in the face of contemporary challenges and offer complex answers through a variety of characters. While doing this, each writer asks questions about his place as an author in the changing world of Jewish culture. Both Agnon and Glatstein consider their authorship in relation to contemporary events, i.e., they ponder what it means to be a writer—and a writer of fiction in particular—as a way of addressing “real-life” concerns of great urgency, both collectively and individually.

## Historical Background

The historical background of my work is the mass immigration of Jews from Europe to different destinations. The most popular destination was the United States, with a small trickle arriving in Palestine in the beginning, and a much greater percentage arriving there after 1924 and the immigration restriction laws in the U.S. Between 1875 and 1924 more than 2.7 million Jews, or 30% of Eastern Europe's Jewish population, immigrated to America, with the largest number coming from czarist Russia (Gur Alroey 2011:1, Hasia Diner, 2004:79). As a result of this immigration, the transnational interrelations among Jewish centers changed, as did the status of Jewish languages and the content of Jewish identity itself.

Although traditional historiography ascribes the dramatic rise in number of emigrants after 1880 to the wave of pogroms that started in Russia in 1881, more recent accounts discuss this emigration in relation to the economic reality in Eastern Europe as well as to religious and ethnic factors. In America, Jews had a chance to put their work experience to use, in a period of industrialization and modernization that greatly increased the demand for manpower (ibid: 95).

Although Jewish immigration was part of a larger, pan-European trend, it had its unique features: the proportion of Jews among the emigrants was high relative to their share in the population of their countries of origin. Jews constituted about 5 percent of the population of the Russian Empire but made up nearly half of its emigrants (Diner 2004: 96). Another unique characteristic of Jewish emigration was the relatively low percentage of returnees to their country of origin: Between 1908 and 1924, about 33.6% of all foreigners entering the United States returned to their countries of origin, whereas only 5.2% of the Jews who migrated at the beginning of the twentieth century returned (Alroey 2011:11).

Jewish immigrants were mainly the economically disadvantaged, although the poorest and the richest did not participate. Of those who emigrated, able-bodied workers and young adults

at the peak of their physical ability far outnumbered children or older people. Typically, immigration became self-perpetuating: unmarried young family members or young married men would emigrate first. They would settle in cities, and after saving some money, they would send it to other family members, so they could join them in America (Diner 2004: 96). Immigrants tended to settle in America's big cities. They rarely went beyond New York, and the majority of those who did, went to other big cities, mainly Chicago and Philadelphia (ibid:103). By 1910 New York had the largest concentration of Jews in the world. By 1927 44% of American Jewry lived in New York.

Although the number of East European Jewish immigrants to Palestine was much smaller than the number that immigrated to America, it effected a dramatic change in Palestine's population and culture. Until the beginning of Zionist immigration, Palestine's population numbered 450,000 people, 5% of whom were Jews and most of the others Arabs. The Jewish population was religious and settled in the four holy cities of Hebron, Tiberias and Safed, and especially Jerusalem. These Jews lived mainly on charity sent from Jewish communities in Europe. On the eve of World War I, after two waves of Zionist immigration, the *Yishuv*, or Jewish settlement in Palestine, numbered 85,000 people, or around 12% of Palestine's total population of 700,000 (Anita Shapira, 2012: 61).

The First Alyia began in 1881 and included relatively small groups of *Hovevei Zion* (Lovers of Zion) that had organized in Russia and Romania in order to purchase land in Palestine for Jewish agricultural settlement. At the time the Ottoman Empire ruled Palestine and was antagonistic toward Jewish immigration and purchase of land. In 1904, before the next wave of immigration, there were thirty Jewish agricultural settlements in Palestine, with around 5000 inhabitants (ibid:42).

The second wave of immigration started in 1904 and ended in 1914 with the beginning of World War I, bringing to Palestine around 40,000 immigrants, mainly from Eastern Europe. The pogroms of 1903-1906 in Russia, with their unprecedented ferocity, and the political consciousness of the younger generation of Jews made the Second Aliya pioneers more militant than First Aliya pioneers. (Saposnik 2008:96). In contrast to the First Aliya farmers who eventually became land owners, second Aliya pioneers stressed manual work, and insisted on the “conquest of labor.” They waged a battle against first Aliya farmers, demanding to employ only Jewish workers instead of the Arab workers that were hired on the farms. Because of their fervent ideology, second Aliya pioneers were remembered in Zionist historiography as the first Zionist immigration and many of the Zionist achievements were later ascribed to them, though newer historiography raises doubts about this narrative (see Saposnik 2008:93-120). In the thirty years between the First Aliya and World War I, there appeared in Palestine not only the beginnings of modern Jewish settlement, but also the seeds of a national culture. This culture was characterized by a secular Jewish identity, a shift to Hebrew as the spoken language and a demand for independence from Diaspora cultures (ibid;54).

In 1917, with the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the World War, Britain received a mandate to rule Palestine. Throughout the years of the British mandate a precarious balance between Jewish and Arab claims for Palestine collapsed several times, ending in bloodshed. The restriction of emigration to the United States from 1924 increased dramatically the numbers of immigrants arriving in Palestine. Throughout their rule, in an effort to keep the balance between the Jewish and Arab population in Palestine, the British limited Jewish immigration, thus giving rise to illegal immigration of refugees from Europe. On August 1929 Arab violence erupted in Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed and throughout the country and continued for a week. In these riots the Agnon family house in Talpiot, Jerusalem, was also devastated.

This wave of immigration from Eastern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century changed the face of the Jewish world. Immigration to America brought Jews from largely undemocratic countries to a country in which they were granted citizenship and civil rights. On the one hand, American pluralism greatly improved Jews' chances of success and self advancement. On the other hand, the same pluralist policies faced Jews with a rising problem of assimilation as a result of acculturation. Immigration to Palestine carried with it a dramatic change in life style, and confronted the immigrants with the demand to defend themselves against Arab hostility. The transition from Diaspora to a homeland entailed a change of attitudes from that of an ethnic minority to that of a group of people aspiring to become an independent nation.

### **The Ethnic vs. the national**

This study explores two works, one written in the context of the national literature forming in Palestine, and the other written in a diasporic context, while being part of an ethnic Yiddish minority group living in a host country. The concept of ethnicity refers to common descent and culture that provides the basis of group social boundaries and members (Ewa Morawska 2011:3). This definition implies a primordial source of the ethnic group, i.e., congruities of blood, speech, custom and so on. Another conception of ethnicity, opposed to the primordial thesis, represents ethnicity as contingent on circumstances, and thus, impermanent. A third approach sees ethnicity as a social construction, formed by acts of loyalty and identification. Here, again, the Jewish case is more complicated as it involved an ancient national phase, including national sovereignty, followed by exile, dispersion and a long period of existence as a diasporic, ethnic group. In my analysis of diasporic-ethnic literature versus national literature I will consider ethnicity by using all three approaches. I will also examine the relative weight of religion, race and nationality in the group's self-definition.

In the Jewish case the transition from being an ethnic group to being a modern nation included a messianic-like return to the glory of the national past, which the Zionists consistently

evoked. Anthony Smith suggests that the transition from ethnicity to nationhood involves a triple movement: from isolation to activism, from quietism to mobilization and from culture to politics. Typically, the transition occurs when the ethnic group is exposed to international politics that extracts it from its ethnic isolation. The intelligentsia strives to mobilize the community to political action, and instead of the quietist approach that prevented confrontations with the sovereign in the past, the intelligentsia presses towards politicization and competition for power and influence (2002:153-6). In much the same way, Zionist ideology interfered in Jewish diasporic life, bringing with it political activism on a level that was foreign to Jewish life until then.

AGN is a meditation on the Zionist project of nation building, written at the time it was still unfolding. It offers a narrative that both serves Zionist ideology and criticizes it. Agnon wrote AGN in mandatory Palestine at the end of the 1930s and the novel also echoes historical events that took place in the 1920s. During this time the Jewish settlement in Palestine kept growing, thanks to additional waves of immigration, mainly from Europe. During these years, the national culture that emerged in Palestine, starting from 1881, continued to develop under the Zionist hegemony. Far from seeing Palestine as just a refuge for Jewish people, Zionist leaders strove to form modern Jewish nationhood by turning the eclectic and diverse immigrant groups, along with the more established Jewish inhabitants of Palestine, into a cohesive nation. Zionism attempted to transform Jewish culture and the meaning of being Jewish in the modern world. Therefore, it saw the emigration of Jews from Europe to Palestine only as a first step in a fundamental spiritual, mental and cultural change. (Arieh Saposnik 2008: 17).

Agnon's novel is an indirectly critical account of the national Zionist transformation that took place in Palestine, and this critique forms the background of the visit to the old country. The critique of Zionism is reflected both in certain parts of the novel and in the author's judgments and self-perception as an author. The novel reflects the Zionist rejection of ethnicity as a non-

national form of socialization, the Zionist rejection of its Eastern European origins, and its complex relation to nativeness. Hoping to create a cohesive national culture in Palestine, Zionist leaders and pioneers saw the diversity of Palestine's Jewish community as an obstacle. They perceived the ethnic, cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of the Jewish population, old and new, as undesirable and in need of correction. (ibid: 23-4). The most apparent aspect of this heterogeneity was language. The Jewish inhabitants of Palestine at the turn of the century variously spoke Yiddish, Russian, Rumanian, Ladino, Arabic and Turkish, the official language under Ottoman rule. Moreover, the eligibility of the Yishuv for charity from Jewish sources in the Diaspora was tied to country of origin, thereby further accentuating diversity (ibid: 26).

The Zionist desire for homogenization and the establishment of a unified body of organizations were also responses to the sense of crisis in Jewish culture at the turn of the century. Zionism was a reaction to the anti-Semitic discourse of Jewish decline and degeneration that depicted the Jewish body, individual and collective, as ailing and disintegrating. To treat this ailment Zionism offered physical strength, productive work and social cohesion as a remedy. Apart from the hostile, racist discourse, modernity had a shattering effect on Jewish social cohesion. The traditional ruling elites and Jewish leadership were in decline. New secular ideologies attracted young Jewish people and sometimes distanced them from the Jewish world, as is clearly reflected in AGN. The mission of the Zionist movement included, then, the transformation of different diasporic, ethnic groups into a nation. But unlike the case of other modern nationalist movements, this transformation included immigration to a different country, rather than claiming sovereignty in one's home territory. Jewish people had long perceived this territory as Eretz Israel (The Land of Israel), or the ancient historical homeland. The Zionist mission was therefore twofold: creating national homogeneity in place of ethnic heterogeneity, and constructing a sense of nativeness in a country that most Jewish people were not born in.

The Uganda affair of 1903 proved pivotal to the consolidation of a Zionist normative ideology. The affair started when Herzl suggested Uganda as a temporary shelter for Jewish people, in response to the pogroms that raged in Russia at the time, at the sixth Zionist congress in Basel. Herzl's provocative suggestion astounded many of the delegates and divided the Zionist movement for two years. This offer urged Zionists to clearly formulate their relation to territory, national culture and the unique role of Palestine for the Jewish people (Saposnik 2008: 42). The Uganda alternative was rejected by most Zionists in the seventh congress in 1905, leading to the consolidation of normative Zionist worldview, which included a commitment to the bond among the Jewish people, their land and the Hebrew language. The link among people, language and territory was a fundamental tenet of western nationalism since Herder (ibid: 43, 104). In the case of Jewish settlement in Palestine, this ideal demanded the elimination of foreign languages and a transition to an exclusively Hebrew-speaking culture, as well as the elimination of all other territorial solutions except Palestine.

One objection to the Uganda plan addressed the possibility that Uganda might be a Jewish land in addition to Palestine. To this Moshe Smilansky, one of the founders of Hadera, a First Alyia settlement in Palestine, said: "One nation that lives in two lands becomes two nations; England and the United States attest to this" (quoted in Saposnik 2008:56). The mere existence of two homelands, rather than the substitution of the ancient home country for a foreign one, was considered a problem in itself, reflecting the Zionist preference for homogeneity and cohesiveness.

As a result of the rejection of the Uganda Plan, the Palestinian center started to claim primacy and centrality in the Jewish world, which until then was led by different organizations located in the Diaspora. At the same time, Jewish settlers in Palestine started to identify themselves by juxtaposing life in the new homeland to life in the Diaspora. Exile became a foil

for Hebrewness, and the exilic Jew became the primary “Other” of the new ideal; a native-born, Hebrew speaking Jew (Ibid: 95).

The ideal of nativeness became the crux of the New Hebrew identity, formed in reaction to Jewish identity. But paradoxically this nativeness was almost always a constructed one. This paradox was reflected in the claim of the Second Aliyah pioneers who came from Eastern Europe that they were the real natives, rather than the farmers of the first Aliyah and their descendants, some of whom were actually born in Palestine. The pioneers of the Second Alyia claimed that they represented the real pioneering spirit, by being workers, as opposed to the spoiled children of the first Aliyah, whose actual birth in Palestine could not compensate for their exilic spirit. The pioneers based nativeness on conduct and ideology, rather than the actual place of birth. Thus, in the new Zionist kindergartens in Palestine, children were shaped into rooted Hebrews by educators who were immigrants from Eastern Europe (ibid:83). Similarly, the national language that the Zionist movement chose after a long debate, Hebrew, was not a local dialect, as was the case of other emerging nationalities in Europe, but rather the language of prayer and the domain of clerical sacrality, as well as the presumed ancient vernacular (ibid: 87). The Jewish vernacular of European Jews, i.e., Yiddish, was eventually rejected as it was associated with Jewish life in exile.

The transition from life in the Diaspora to a national homeland predicated Hebrew identity on the classic, hegemonic definition of nationality as the relation of one people, speaking one language to a territory. Whereas Jewish religion was the most important element in the traditional diasporic Jewish identity, Zionism advocated for secularism and freedom of religious dictates. However, Zionist leaders did not relinquish religion completely. They rejected the highly rational approach to religion that characterized the Haskalah, or Jewish enlightenment. But although they rejected religious authority, they wanted to keep the mythical themes that Jewish

religion offered, using it to deepen their claim for Eretz Israel and to develop national culture and memory (Saposnik 2008:88).

As Agnon's novel mirrors the challenges of national revival, Glatstein's Yash novels reflect Jewish identity in America as it emerged in response to the challenges of Jewish Diaspora. The author-narrator considers the meaning of Jewish identity in a democratic and pluralist country that until 1924 accepted large numbers of immigrants from all over the world and granted them equal rights. The Jewish culture that Glatstein encountered in New York and later reflected in his novels was rich and vibrant. At the same time, Glatstein writes the novels in time of crisis and different degrees of anti-Semitic discrimination in both the Old World and the new.

New York City, the Jewish center that Yash arrived in in 1914 was vibrant and teeming with cultural and political activity. The two most important cultural institutions established by Jewish immigrants were the Yiddish press and the Yiddish theater. Several hundred Yiddish papers and journals started up between 1900 and 1920. The most popular Yiddish Daily, the Daily Forward (Harshav and Harshav 1986:29). Apart from providing news coverage, Yiddish newspapers provided education to those who could not read English or attend school, served as the main venues for Yiddish fiction, poetry and criticism and functioned as "agents of acculturation", introducing and interpreting American society, politics and culture for their readers (Tony Michels, 2005:93). Yiddish theater in America began in 1882. From 1918 through the 1930s several repertory companies arose along-side the Yiddish commercial theaters. A small but lively Yiddish film industry developed among independent producers in America in the 1930s and 1940s. Many of these films adapted fiction and plays by prominent Yiddish authors. (Chametzky at al 2001:116-117).

At the same time that Jewish culture flourished, free from censorship and persecution, Jewish people in America kept struggling with the possible conflation of ethnicity, religion and

race. The danger of conflation stemmed from external causes, i.e., the prevalence of anti-Semitic discourse in American society, but also from internal causes, i.e., American Jews' concern for the plight of all Jewish people around the world. This concern implied that the glue sticking Jewish people together is more than just religion. The years between 1920 and 1940 saw a rise in American anti-Semitism that started to abate only when the United States entered World War II. This rise was related to the intellectual and cultural trends in Europe at the time. The Depression years fueled anti-Semitism as well, as farmers felt that Jews, who were mainly urban dwellers, did not suffer as much as they did. Although American anti-Semitism was milder than its European counterpart, it reflected the same ideas attributing to different "races" different moral and mental abilities (Diner 2004:208). In America, as in Europe, anti-Semitism operated within a deeply Christian culture.

The rise in anti-Semitism deterred Jewish Americans from leading open political campaigns. After 1933 and the rise of Nazism in Germany, they acted mainly behind the scenes as they believed that drawing attention to their agenda would exacerbate local anti-Semitism (ibid: 213). Throughout the years of massive Jewish immigration the main contribution that Jewish Americans could offer their Jewish brothers was waging a constant struggle against anti-immigration legislation. They presented the admittance of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe as a humanitarian act that was necessary to save them from persecution (ibid:183-4). However, when racist propaganda began to present Jewish immigration as contributing to rising crime and prostitution, American Jews understood that to keep immigration flowing, they had to vouch for the behavior of the new immigrants. Their goal was to facilitate immigration without making new Jews conspicuous in their foreignness and their poverty. In other words, the goal was to expedite Jewish immigrants' Americanization, through language classes, employment bureaus, and various types of assistance organizations. At the same time, American Jews sought different ways to cope with anti-Semitism. Some moved away from Jewish life by inter-marriage or

conversion. Some found that changing their name offered a way to “pass” publicly as a non-Jew. For others, women in particular, cosmetic surgery offered a way to pass as non-Jewish.

The Zionist movement did not have many followers in America. Jewish Americans supported the idea of creating an independent Jewish homeland, but, as a rule, did not themselves intend to emigrate to Palestine. They considered America their new home, in spite of local anti-Semitism (ibid: 227). Although Jews made up the majority of the communist party’s members and the majority in some of the unions, the vast majority of Jews voted with the Democratic Party. After the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939, communism lost its favor among many Jews and they no longer considered it a solution to the ills of capitalism (ibid: 237). In this atmosphere of heightened anxiety around one’s Jewish identity and one’s looks Yash’s narrative unfolds. It revolves around the need for Jewish solidarity on the one hand, and the fear of Jewish racial persecution on the other, turning Jewish identity into a merry-go-round of constant negotiation and role playing.

### **Language – Nation – Territory: The Parallel Development of Yiddish and Hebrew**

Using different Jewish languages, Agnon and Glatstein reflect cultural developments that took place in the Jewish world as a result of mass emigration, as well as Jewish politics and its relation to language. Mass immigration from Eastern Europe changed the relations among language, peoplehood and territory, and thus changed the dynamics of Jewish collective identity. At the time that the novels under consideration were written, the large center of Eastern European Jewry went through a gradual process of modernization, dispersed to other countries, and changed its linguistic patterns. By the 1930s Modern Hebrew was already a spoken language, whereas Yiddish had become standardized and used in formal and literary contexts. The two languages became implicated in different political and cultural movements, which, despite being

both modern and Jewish – became increasingly antagonistic to each other. This antagonism intensified in spite of the fact that most Jewish writers and speakers were still bilingual.

Until modern times, Hebrew and Yiddish existed in a state of internal bilingualism, or diglossia. Hebrew was used in writing, served as the language of prayers, and for writing laws, homiletics, rabbinic responsa and cabalistic works. It continued to develop, even though it was not a spoken language. To distinguish this language from Modern Hebrew, Max Weinreich, scholar of the history of Yiddish and philologist, refers to it as *Loshn Koydesh*, or “the holy tongue”. Weinreich suggests that *Loshn koydesh* was primarily written, whereas Yiddish was primarily oral (2008: 252). Both languages served for sacred and for profane use, depending on circumstances. Yiddish was used to translate and explicate the Torah and *Mishnah* in the *kheder*, whereas *Loshn Koydesh* served for correspondence between religious scholars on matters of Jewish law.

Throughout the simultaneous development of Modern Hebrew and Yiddish their ways diverged: Whereas in certain contexts both equally reflected Jewish peoplehood and served as a stronghold against assimilation, the inevitable implication of language in the discourse of nationalism increasingly polarized them along two different political agendas (Schachter 2012: 5). Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a growing number of European vernaculars were accepted as mature languages and later played a decisive role in ethnic minorities’ claims for recognition and emancipation (2008:15). Similarly, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Yiddish played a role in the formation of Jewish peoplehood as manifested by the Yiddishist movement. This movement, in its most radical form, saw Yiddish language as the core defining Jewish collective identity. Chaim Zhitlowski (1865-1943), its most prominent representative and thinker, argued that Yiddish was the most solid cornerstone of Jewish national existence, because it provided a portable identity for people who lacked territory and sovereignty. Yiddish thus reflected the popular will of the Jewish people in the Diaspora and served as a democratic common

denominator, beyond religion (Weinberg 1996:139). Similarly, other movements that emerged at the same time conceived of different models for Jewish diasporic existence, giving various weights to language, nationality and territory and to the relationship among them.

This growing endorsement of language politics by nationalist movements throughout the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century gradually forced writers and thinkers to take sides in the struggle between Hebrew and Yiddish. In 1908 Zhitlowsky, Peretz, and the yiddishist leader Nathan Birnbaum convened the Czernowitz conference, which addressed the claim that Yiddish was the language of the Jewish people and sought to establish an agenda for its standardization and for the scholarly research of Yiddish culture. However, the debates about the status of Yiddish did not result in its declaration as the exclusive Jewish language, and a compromise solution was reached, declaring Yiddish “a national language of the Jewish people” (Goldsmith 1997:189). Hebrew writers responded with their own conference of Hebrew Language and Culture, which took place in Vienna in 1913. These Hebrew writers identified with Zionism and believed that Hebrew represented the national interests of a new Jewish nation-state (Schachter 2012:6).

In spite of these growing tensions, until World War I there was a precarious coexistence of the languages symbolized by the bilingualism of major Hebrew-Yiddish writers including the three luminaries, Abramovitsh, Peretz and Shalom Aleichem. After World War I, signs of the rift between the two languages became more visible. The declaration of Hebrew as the official language in Palestine in 1922 followed an active struggle and often brutal suppression of other languages, mainly Yiddish (Band 2003:144). The polarization of the languages gave rise to an institutional separation of the respective literatures. As Schachter notes, in 1929, two years after a Jewish PEN club was established in Vilna, Hebrew writers withdrew and established an independent Hebrew chapter in Palestine, refusing to endorse Yiddish as a legitimate language for

writing<sup>4</sup> (2012: 5). Still, as Schachter argues, although often viewed as two separate literatures, Hebrew and Yiddish, especially their modernist offshoots, were deeply concerned with the ties between their two diasporic literary cultures long after World War I (2012:23).

### **The Literary Context: The Authors' Position within Hebrew and Yiddish modernism in the Interwar Period**

Both Agnon and Glatstein were leading modernist writers in their respective cultures. Yiddish and Hebrew modernism developed in Europe, Palestine, and America in the first four decades of the twentieth century in different trajectories. They have emerged as two distinct movements, despite the fact that there was considerable overlap in their readership and the fact that many modern Jewish writers wrote in more than one language. World War I dealt a major blow to the Hebrew renaissance that flourished in Europe before the war. As a result, the resources, support systems, and audiences of Hebrew literature were depleted. Although Hebrew writers were largely mobile even before the war, it caused a rift between writers, centers of production, and readers (Miron 2010:134,137). In the 1920s new, short-lived centers of Hebrew literature sprang up throughout Europe in places such as Moscow, Berlin, Frankfurt, Paris, London and Vienna. The short-lived but vibrant Hebrew center in Bad Homburg, where Agnon spent the years of World War I, was dispersed in 1924. In all these places Hebrew activity did not last, due to the lack of stable communities of readers. The only exceptions were the centers in New York and Palestine.

The cultural leaders of the literary center in Palestine formed a national literary canon. The norms of this canon were partly the result of debates about Hebrew literature that started earlier in Europe. As Michael Gluzman explains, “the canon is not simply a list of worthy and inspired texts, but also an implicit narrative reflecting the shared beliefs of a community. By delimiting borders, the canon articulates communal regulations, needs and concerns, thereby

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<sup>4</sup> PEN International is an organization of writers advocating cultural understanding and world peace. It was founded in 1921 and its mission is to promote literature and freedom of expression.

signifying the collective's boundaries of the permissible.”(2003:2). As critics have pointed out, the importance of literature in a time of nation building is crucial, since literary texts are deeply involved with the processes of identity formation by offering solutions to “problems of subjective and political identity” (ibid:1, 2). Through the formation of a literary canon, the community creates both the ideal of the authorial subject, and the topics that national literature should address, concentrate on, the two aspects being often related.

Ahad HaAm and Berdiczevsky started to form the Hebrew literary canon in Europe and established an ideal of the authorial subject as representing the nation. Initially, Ahad Ha'Am, the most influential literary figure in Hebrew belles letters, set the tone by demanding that the individual conceal his/her voice and subject it to the voice of the national community. Later, Berdiczhevsky criticized Ahad Ha'Am's cultural nationalism and advocated the importance of the individual voice in literature. However, as Gluzman notes, “Berdiczevsky's advocacy of the individual is shaped by and phrased in nationalist terms” (ibid: 23). The author was expected to create a model of writing in which “self and nation become figures of each other” (ibid: 28). Y.C. Brenner also contributed to the creation of a national subject who speaks for himself and for the nation simultaneously. As Gluzman notes, “this mode of writing has become ideologically dominant in Hebrew letters, perhaps because it provided a way of reconciling the mutually exclusive realms of private and public.” (ibid: 26)

The themes of Hebrew modernism differed from those of European modernism by negating exile and advocating the Zionist pioneer project of renewal. Thus, the modernist Hebrew canon excluded writers who did not emigrate to Palestine, native poets who were born in Palestine (and who did not emigrate to it), and writers who were not politically committed to Zionism (ibid: 54). The rejection was not limited to non-Zionist authors but extended to groups that were not committed to the inextricable linking of nation, territory and language. Even before the transfer of the Hebrew literary center to Palestine, the Zionist movement developed its

political agenda based on the premise that Zionism was a leading force to be reckoned with and developed a future-oriented vision perceiving itself as an avant-garde (Hever 2007:11) At the same time the Zionist movement rejected diasporic groups that espoused ideals of “working for the present” (avodat ha’hoveh) and of a Zionism that was not exclusively geared toward future life in Palestine<sup>5</sup>.

Brenner and Berdyczewski, the two intellectuals who formed the Hebrew canon in Palestine, relegated diasporic literature as minor, while acknowledging authors who accepted Zionist national norms as major, canonic writers. The first characteristic of major literature is that “the major work should be in some manner directed toward the production of an autonomous ethical identity for the subject” (David Loyd 1987: 19). In other words, the subject in the major work of literature should be a distinct individual who can at the same time serve as a model for producing universal claims. The norm in major literature demands protagonists who are ethically autonomous, and who can then serve the formation of a universal standard.

Minor literature, on the other hand, refuses the production of narratives of ethical identity (ibid: 21). In it, the individual is part of a collective, and the work of art serves the purposes of this collective. While in the major work of art the individual is a prototype for the universal, the minor work blends the uniqueness of the individual into his collective identity which is plural but not universal. Also, in the same way that the protagonist in the major work serves as a criterion for universal values, the author of this work is regarded as representing human (rather than communal) experience (ibid: 20). In minor literature, “everything [ ] is political. In major literatures, in contrast, the individual concern (familial, marital, and so on) joins with other no less individual concerns, the social milieu serving as a mere environment or a background. Minor literature is completely different; its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics.” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986:17)

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<sup>5</sup> I discuss the rejection of Zionist diasporic groups in chapter 1.

Another characteristic of minor literature is the de-territorialization of language, whereas nationalist ideology tends to envision a perfect, though always utopist, compatibility between territoriality, ethnicity and linguistic performance. The de-territorialization of language takes place when “a writer who belongs to a national minority... writes in a language that denaturalizes the connection between language and territory that is typical to modern conceptions of nationality. Therefore s/he has to write in a language other than her own, or to write in her own language outside her home country or to write in a language that is not that of the hegemonic group” (in Hever 2007: 123). The linguistic norm was especially strong in the case of Hebrew literature, as evidenced by the fact that no language other than Hebrew was even considered as an option for writers who wanted to be part of the canon.

The most significant factor that set Hebrew modernism apart from the major European literatures was the newness of Hebrew literature (Shachar Pinsker, 2010:12). This fact had both a debilitating and a facilitating effect: “Jewish writers working in Hebrew... had to overcome enormous difficulties of working with languages without long belletristic traditions, with small readerships and unstable literary and cultural infrastructures. However, paradoxically... these conditions actually made them more likely to embrace modernism and participate in it” (ibid: 20). By the same token, the lack of literary models, especially the lack of realist, mimetic Hebrew prose, can explain why Hebrew modernist fiction developed early (ibid: 13).

The revival of the novel in the Palestinian center is reflected in Agnon’s choice to turn to this genre. As Miron notes, Agnon turned to writing novels after his immigration, because Palestine offered a new, Hebrew-speaking readership to whom all foreign languages were inaccessible (2010:152). After his immigration to Palestine in the 1920s Agnon decided to cultivate the novelistic genre and therefore had to supplement all the novelist tradition that would have been written in Hebrew since the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Miron 2010:338). Agnon’s unique circumstances explain the unusual blend of styles and themes in his writing. While using

synthetic, non-modern Hebrew, his prose deals with themes ranging from Jewish lore, East European Hasidic tradition, Jewish life in Weimar Germany, and the life of pioneers in 20<sup>th</sup> century Palestine. In terms of literary traditions, his style places themes inspired by the romantic period within a modernist framework. As Michal Arbel notes, Agnon's prose presents romantic themes that are undermined by modernist doubts. Still, the modernist insights cannot obliterate the romantic streak in his writing (2006:11).

Much like Agnon in Hebrew culture, Jacob Glatstein played a key role in the development of Yiddish modernism. Glatstein started to contribute to American Yiddish poetry when it had already had several poetic generations. The *Inzikh* movement that Glatstein helped establish in 1920 rebelled against the poetics of *Di yunge* (The Young Ones) and its Impressionist poetry of mood and atmosphere. Against it, the *Inzikh* movement promoted a poetic aesthetic that resembled free conversation. Some *Inzikh* poets also declined rhyme and meter in favor of free verse. The *Inzikh* movement created a totally secular, cosmopolitan poetry, based on the urban experience and free in its choice of themes and topics (Miron 2010: 174). In addition, the *Inzikhists* evolved a significant meta-literary discourse, first in their anthology of poetry, *In zikh*, and later in their periodical of the same name. This periodical became the most important venue for modernist Yiddish theorizing about poetry.

Yiddish modernism in America was hailed as the pinnacle of Yiddish literary achievements at the time, but during the 1920s its future was questioned. Mass immigration to the United States was severely curtailed in 1924. Until then, American Yiddish culture had been sustained by a constant influx of young, Yiddish-speaking newcomers. When immigration was limited, America's still substantial population of Yiddish speakers began to age as well as decline in number. Moreover, the literary preferences of this aging population tended to become progressively more conservative, while the younger generation of American Jews turned to English culture. As Arn Glants-Leyeles wrote in 1930: "Those who could understand the Yiddish

modernists had stopped reading Yiddish, while those who still read Yiddish would not understand the modernists” (cited in Miron 2010: 177). Nevertheless, American Yiddish writers continued to produce modernist poetry at the end of the 1930s, while their prose fiction, which was more aesthetically conservative to begin with, became less innovative. Glatstein’s modernist Yash novels were almost the only exception to this rule (ibid). The conditions of Yiddish publishing promoted interdependency between Yiddish writers and their European counterparts in Poland and Russia. Yiddish writers published their books in Eastern Europe, sometimes making their reputation on the basis of their European rather than American reception. Therefore, the more Jewish immigrants passed into the American mainstream, the more Yiddish culture felt the strength of its ties to the European Jewish community (Wisse 1996: 139-140).

In the two decades between the publication of the *Inzikh* manifesto and the writing of the Yash novels, Glatstein and the other Inzikhists went from universalism and cosmopolitanism to a willing Jewish parochialism. Glatstein openly asserted his belief in Jewish literature and staunchly denounced Yiddish writers who try to make their writing easily translatable. His prime modernist book of poems, *Yiddishtaytshn*, manifests his intimate connection with the Yiddish language and its playfulness to the point of untranslatability (ibid: 143).

At the same time that Yiddish writers in America felt a growing need to address the plight of Jewish people in Europe, the question of Jewish literature and its preferred language became more acute. Acculturation undermined Yiddish as the language of a modern secular culture in America and the option of switching to writing Jewish literature in non-Jewish languages became more pressing. The two founding *Inzikh* poets, Leyeles and Glatstein, strongly rejected this option. Leyeles argued that only a Jewish language could form the basis of an authentic Jewish culture (Norich 2007:36). Twenty years after its first publication, the *Inzikh* journal, in its penultimate number, summed up *Inzikh*’s accomplishments and issued a new

manifesto. In it Leyeles stressed the link between Yiddish, as the authentic language of the Jewish people in large parts of the world, and being Jewish. (ibid: 40).

Modernist Yiddish writing in America, like European modernism in general, initially went against the grain of classic Yiddish literature by stressing individuality, though not to the point of discussing intimate, private matters. As Jan Schwarz notes, even Yiddish autobiographical writing was suspicious of the confessional mode characterizing Christian autobiographies (2005:14). The Inzikhists, with their stress on conveying the psychic inner kaleidoscope, at least partly dismissed these norms. However, during the twenty years of its development, the link between individual and national in Yiddish modernist writing was again strengthened due to the anti Semitic targeting of Jews and Jewish persecution in Europe.

The large-scale demographic and cultural upheaval set in motion by the immigration from Eastern Europe and the destruction caused by World War I raised new questions regarding Jewish peoplehood and its relation to language and territory. While nationality is ideally defined by a relatively fixed relation to language and territory, the absence of territory in the Jewish case granted more weight to the other variables. The breakdown of the traditional Yiddish-Hebrew diglossia also aroused debates regarding the relation between language and peoplehood. In different movements and ideologies throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, language and territory received different values and degrees of importance. Zionist ideology strove for the ideal, fixed relation among the three, choosing Hebrew as the national language while rejecting Yiddish and enforcing a complete separation between the languages. Diasporic Jews, including those in America, granted less importance to territory, and strove to structure peoplehood around language and culture. Within this cultural context Glatstein and Agnon occupy two positions that have much in common, since both see Jewish identity as central to their writing. However, Glatstein, who held a diasporic position, manifests an ideology close to Yiddishism, with its stress on the Yiddish language as the defining element of peoplehood, whereas Agnon chose the

Zionist position that stresses the political and territorial aspects of peoplehood. Although he was very critical of the Zionist revolution, he accepted its vision, especially that of religious Zionists.

## Memory and Narrative

Throughout this dissertation I present two different narratives of return and look at the way they deal with memory. I look at the way each author perceives the degree of rupture from the past, his personal relation to it and, by implication, the way it could be remembered by the community, the people, or the nation. In each case, relations to place and to language translate into different kinds of memory and commemoration. At the same time, the author's position in relation to the past raises questions regarding his own role as an author and molds his conception of authorship. Both novels deal with homecoming at a time of historical upheaval and examine memory in its personal and cultural context. Each author takes part in a new literary tradition that is, at the same time, the offshoot of a very old and rich culture. In both cases, the shift from traditional to modern and modernist literature effected a cultural rupture that the authors had to deal with. More specifically, the writers who are the focus of this dissertation confront the crisis of Jewish collective memory in a way that is reflected both in their contributions to the issue of Jewish memory and in their construction of authorial personae.

For both authors novelistic writing is based on a paradox: the writer attempts to create continuity in place of rupture, but novel writing itself, being thoroughly secular and modern, is one of the symptoms of the same rupture. The modern author, standing at the juncture of the traditional and the modern worlds, is himself the epitome of modernity from the perspective of a culture that revolves around religious rather than modern, individualist authorship (Agnon), and around the oral, folkloristic or lowbrow rather than the highly modernist novel (Glatstein). The central importance of memory in both cases is intertwined with the authorial position chosen to deal with the rupture in memory. However, the way of dealing with this rupture is different when

the framework is national, as in the case of Agnon, and when the envisioned future is diasporic, as in the case of Glatstein.

Maurice Halbwachs, sociologist and philosopher, described collective memory as antithetical to history. He described history as universal, academic, and based on periodization, the opposite of memory, which is particular, organic, continuous, and dynamic. Most significantly, history is implicitly presented as written, whereas memory is based on oral traditions and testimonies. As Halbwachs notes, “General history starts only when tradition ends and the social memory is fading or breaking up. So long as remembrance continues to exist, it is useless to set it down in writing or otherwise fix it in memory” (1980:78-79). Many authors have since argued against Halbwachs initial, dichotomous perception of history and memory, suggesting that the boundaries between the two are less clear-cut (Zerubavel: 1995, Jan Assman: 2011).

Although collective memory was often conceived as originally oral in form, in East European Jewish culture the case was more complicated. Writing was always a factor in cultural life, and illiteracy was not prevalent, even in the Middle Ages, at least among men (Marc Caplan, 2011: 25, Ahuva Belkin 2002:28). In addition, the different functions of orality and literacy were fulfilled by the two Jewish languages, Yiddish and Hebrew. However, the fact that Yiddish has developed into a formal, standardized written language only in the twentieth century, as part of the maturation of Yiddish culture in Europe and of the establishment of a Yiddish school system, contributed to its association with orality (David Fishman, 2005: 90). The association of Yiddish with orality, its image as a language spoken by the people, rather than the written language of formal communications, is reflected in Glatstein’s novels.

While orality was not an exclusive characteristic of Jewish diasporic culture, collective memory did play a major part in consolidating the continuity of this culture. This memory was

transmitted mainly through religious ritual and through what Ruth Wisse describes as “constant rehearsal within a social framework that encourages – nay, that demands – repetition.” (Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi 1996: 40, Ruth Wisse 2000: 1). As Yerushalmi notes, Jews did not write history in the modern sense of the term throughout the Middle Ages, and, except for a temporary upsurge of historical writing in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, secular Jewish historiography began only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, rapid modernization of Jewish life, especially secularization and emancipation, effected a break in the continuity of Jewish memory, which for hundreds of years had been preserved through ritual. With the rise of Jewish nationalism, history took the place once accorded to memory: “for the first time in history, not a sacred text becomes the arbiter of Judaism. Virtually all nineteenth-century Jewish ideologies, from reform to Zionism, would feel a need to appeal to history for validation” (Yerushalmi 1996: 86). The rupture in collective memory, along with the rise of different forms of nationalism in a homeland and in the Diaspora, form the context for the novels under discussion.

### **Nationalism and Diasporism: A Methodological Framework**

This study will try to look at diasporic and national literatures and account for their unique point of view, mainly in relation to memory and authorship. The diasporic perspective, far from being applicable only to works written in the Diaspora, opens the study of national literature to its diasporic context. In the case of Hebrew literature, and especially in the case of Agnon, a diasporic perspective will look at his work in relation to Jewish literature written in places outside the homeland and seek to understand its meaning within this broader context. Until very recently, the study of Hebrew literature was dominated by a nationalist framework that read literary works through the lens of national historiography and framed its periodization accordingly (Shachar M. Pinsker 2011: 17, Allison Schachter 2012: 24). The national perspective too often serves as a historiographic tool without questioning its limitations and even distortions. My discussion of the relation between the two novels makes sense only within a diasporic paradigm; otherwise, it is

hard to argue for a meaningful connection between Agnon and Glatstein without resorting to essentialist justifications. The two authors wrote at the same time but in different countries and contexts. Apart from being both Jewish and writing on a similar subject, the only way to see the relation between them is to conceptualize Jewish literature as including both a national and a diasporic aspect.

The way literature functions outside the national context has only recently been theorized, due to the centrality of the nationalist framework within the humanities. In a study of diasporic literature, Nico Israel puts its basic dilemma as follows:

What does it mean...to write from the position of apparent cultural outsider, of minority, and to represent that position rhetorically? Moreover, if national belonging, as Benedict Anderson suggests, can be viewed as a form of “imagined community,” then does writing of displacement present a case of the reverse, of imagined alterity, both on the part of the writer and on the part of the community in which he or she is settled? (2000: 11).

In recent decades discussions of diasporic literature have offered a frame for thinking about “writing outside the nation,” as one of the titles suggested.<sup>6</sup> However, these studies were slow to implement the recent turn in theories of Diaspora, moving away from a definition that relied on the nation-state to a more radical conception of Diaspora as a permanent condition that is not reducible to the homeland or to a return to it. The new diasporic paradigm in the humanities reflects the turn from a discussion of exile and return to homelands toward a discussion of diasporic relations.

In Jewish thought there has been a parallel negotiation of two different approaches to life outside one’s nation, one exilic and the other diasporic. The negative, punitive approach sees displacement as exile, or *galut*, “offering a bleak vision that issues either in despair or in a remote reverie of restoration” (Erich S. Gruen, in Howard Wettstein 2002: 18). The other approach foregoes the hope of return and sees the meaning and inner justification of Jewish identity in the

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<sup>6</sup> Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

diasporic way of life. According to this approach, the Jewish “homeland” is located in the text that serves as a portable temple. “A geographical restoration is therefore superfluous, even subversive. Diaspora, in short, is no burden; indeed, it is a virtue in the spread of the word.” (ibid)

Since Jewish modernism initially developed in a diasporic context, the diasporic framework is central to its discussion. The common nationalist framing of Hebrew and Jewish modernist literature has been recently challenged by several important works that powerfully claim the need to view Jewish and Hebrew modernism within a transnational frame in order to avoid the typical distortions of the nationalist methodology.<sup>7</sup> As Allison Schachter notes, in the twentieth century, “diaspora... has replaced other minority discourses by emphasizing attachments that transcend one’s citizenship or immigration status” (2012: 4-5). In a similar vein, Shachar Pinsker notes that between 1900 and 1930 Hebrew writers were highly mobile: “[T]hey belong[ed] to a loosely linked group of Hebrew writers who had no state or territory to call home, and no clear national affiliation in the modern, western sense of the word” (2010: 7).

At the opposite pole of diasporic readings we can find not only nationally centered ones, but also attempts to read Jewish literature by constructing a unified canon. Such efforts have had to confront the large diversity of languages and host cultures that Jewish literature reflects. In her book, “The Modern Jewish Canon” (2000) Ruth Wisse struggles to defend her choice of works. Although she does not fall into simple essentialism and does not define Jewish literature by the Jewishness of the author, she does offer some problematic guidelines such as “Jewish literature can be recognizable when we find it” (2000:13). On the other hand, in his book “From Continuity to Contiguity” (2010), Dan Miron offers a deconstruction of the notion of Jewish literature

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<sup>7</sup> I am referring here to Allison Schachter’s *Diasporic Modernism* (2012), Shachar Pinsker’s *Literary Passports* (2010) and Marc Kaplan’s *How Strange the Change* (2011), all of which will be cited below. Significantly, all these works cite Chana Kronfeld’s *On the Margins of Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) as the first work on Hebrew modernism that offered a diasporic perspective.

as a unified canon in favor of post-structuralist notions of “difference, hybridity, the divergent and disorderly, the unsystematic”. He recommends that the essentialist adjective “Jewish” be replaced “not only by the plural Jewish cultures, but also by cultures of the Jews” and that we prefer “the historical and existential reference to Jews, or to specific Jewish groups that lived in different times and places and evolved different cultural articulations of their sense of collectivity” (2010:17).

A diasporic reading of Jewish literature offers a way to avoid these extremes. It acknowledges linguistic variety and does not completely dissociate writers of different nationalities, but it does not make excessively strong claims about genetic or even ethnic affiliation. As Shachter notes: “Rather than view Jewish literary culture as national or as a loose complex of affiliated texts, I propose that we study these modern literatures as part of a historically situated diasporic literary culture, carefully examining the diasporic networks of literary production in order to grasp the particularity of Jewish literary culture” (2012: 21).

As opposed to the histories of travel and settlement implied by Diaspora, indigenous, native populations stress continuity of habitation, aboriginality and a “natural” connection to the land (Clifford 1994: 308). Boyarin and Boyarin distinguish between indigenous i.e., “the people who belong here, whose land this rightfully is – a political claim”, and autochthonous – “the people who were never anywhere else but here and have a natural right to this land” (in Braziel and Mannur 2010:104). They claim that the Jewish narrative insists on connection to the Land without myths of autochthony; the Bible describes the Hebrews as coming to Canaan from somewhere else. However, the Zionist narrative repressed the memory of this formative experience of immigration (ibid). This repression, in turn, has stimulated the creation of cultural memory that connects the newly arrived immigrants back to the land, constructing a sense of

indigenesness and nativeness. A major role of modernist Hebrew literature, especially in poetry, was to describe the pioneer project and strengthen the notion of organic ties to Palestine, while disregarding and suppressing the authors' and readers' ties to their country of origin, usually in Europe. This does not mean that Jewish narratives taking place in the Diaspora do not negotiate feelings of connection to place. But as I will demonstrate in the chapters dealing with Glatstein, they are suffused with a sense of displacement and offer symbolic and vicarious connections to place.

In my analysis of the novels I explore the dynamic relationship of each author's position to a national and/or diasporic culture. It is arguably necessary to leave behind a nationally oriented reading when approaching national literature as well, even if the author portrays his protagonist as returning to a homeland, as is the case in *AGN*. The diasporic option is important in order to counter the seeming inevitability of such a choice and to remind us that this choice means the rejection, sometimes the repression, of other options.

At the same time, Jewish Diaspora, as James Clifford notes, is an exception to his own theorization of the term as irreducible to the nation (1994: 307). This is because in a highly unusual and arguably problematic move, the modern State of Israel was established in 1948 as an alternative (at least a partial one) to the diasporic way of life. From 1881 and the beginnings of modern Zionism as a political movement, a national option was offered for Jewish thought and culture. This option was partly a response to the growing nationalist movements in Europe and later to fascist and racist trends that singled out the Jews as an undesirable element within each nation state. Thus, while it is important to understand the diasporic state of Jewish culture prior to the establishment of the State of Israel and the continuing existence of a Jewish Diaspora after it, it is also important to consider the national option and its interaction with the diasporic one. It is important to open the discussion of modernist Jewish literature to its diasporic dimension, but at the same time to note which view of Jewish relation to place the authors themselves hold. Agnon

struggles between the options of Diaspora and nation but eventually prefers the national one, while Glatstein, holding a diasporic conception of Jewish culture, is at the same time highly aware of the national option and laments its blind spots and its parochialism.

My reading of AGN and the Yash novels is based on the premise that in each case the return to Eastern Europe serves the author as an opportunity to think through his relationship with his old home, his new home, his ethnic and national affiliations, and his own place as an author vis-a-vis his literary tradition and culture. Each novel implicitly presents the personal journey as paradigmatic and the author presents himself as synecdochic of his people. Each author asks how to construct one's identity in the face of immigration, general international upheavals, and the demise of the old home as a result of World War I and growing anti-Semitism. The answer is presented as emblematic, even somewhat didactic in the case of Agnon. The journey back to interwar Poland is a way to come to terms with personal memories of the past but also with the question of Jewish history and collective memory, Jewish identity and subjectivity. Both novels explicitly present the question of memory as central to the future of Jewish existence and consider the relationships among memory, identity and place. They also implicitly offer alternative modes of commemoration (Glatstein) or an alternative historiography (Agnon) as ways to deal with the break from the past as it was experienced in their time.

At the same time, each author's relation to authorship and his conception of memory is informed by his relation to place, language, and the demand of a national vs. a diasporic canon. For Agnon, writing within a literary center that emerged in the historic homeland, the main challenge in relation to memory is to construct a convincing sense of indigenesness in Palestine in spite of ties to the diasporic home, and to offer a continuous narrative of Jewish history, which integrates Jewish diasporic life and the Zionist revolution. However, being raised in a traditional Jewish culture, his authorship wavers between the demands of tradition and modernity, and AGN raises the question whether the author can collaborate with a modern and antitraditional literary

and national project. Writing within a diasporic context, Glatstein's main challenge in relation to memory is to find means of commemoration that are not bound to place and to develop a connection to place that is symbolic rather than reifying. At the same time his authorship has to be subject to the gaze of the other, in a time that racializes and indexes people, and especially Jewish people.

The chapters below follow a thematic order to highlight the subjects I discuss in the dissertation. The first part (chapters 1 and 2) deals with memory, and the second part (chapters 3 and 4) deals with authorship. A brief summary of the chapters follows.

**Chapter 1, "A Guest for the Night, Memory, Narrative, and Nation Building,"** analyzes the construction of collective memory in AGN. The chapter deals specifically with Agnon's position towards the diasporic past, as an alternative to the mainstream Zionist view of memory. In the first section, "Nostalgia and Its Limits," the conventional reading of the novel, which focuses on nostalgia and its overcoming, is interrogated and revealed as problematic. Instead I offer an interpretation that highlights a struggle between organic, diasporic nativeness and constructed indigenesness in Palestine, and between a decentered concept of Jewish religious worship and a centralized one. Unlike the traditional reading, my reading identifies the author and narrator's decision in favor of the Zionist option as an *a priori* one. In the following section, "Minority and Canonicity," this reading is supported by an analysis of Agnon's position as a Galician-born author in relation to the norms of canonic, realist literature that were being defined in Palestine, mainly by Brenner and Berdichevsky. Support for this reading can also be found in Agnon's early novella "In Our Young and Our Old" and similar anti-diasporist statements that Agnon's narrator makes throughout AGN. "Constructing Collective Memory and National Utopia" follows the author's attempt to shake off his diasporic past. This effort arguably leads him to articulate his own vision of a life in Palestine, which is deeply connected to biblical and Talmudic texts, and to offer a utopian, semi-messianic picture of life there. He therefore

structures memory so that it bridges over gaps in historical continuity. His vision and its implicit reconstruction of the Jewish past are different from the one promoted by mainstream Zionism in key ways.

**Chapter 2**, “The Yash Novels and the Dynamics of Diasporic Memory,” explores how memory works in the diaspora. The first section, “Where is the ‘I’?, Displacing Subjectivity,” points to the elision of homecoming in the Yash novels, which has already been recognized by critics as reflecting a modernist world view. This chapter examines the implications of this elision for memory first by contextualizing the absence of homecoming in the novel within a much more general breakdown of the connections among subjectivity, place, and memory. These relationships are deconstructed by considering the location of subjectivity throughout the novel and by following the way Glatstein narrates acts of reminiscence. Exploring Glatstein’s dynamic model of memory in relation to subjectivity I suggest that he offers a “Diasporic memory” and discuss three specific aspects of it. In “Constructing the Place of Memory” I return to the elision of homecoming and discuss the construction of a vicarious place of memory in the novel through the narrator’s pilgrimage to a tourist site. Here commemoration is presented as already detached from the lost object, while at the same time offering symbolic ways to reconnect with it. In “Memory through Language,” I discuss Glatstein’s emphasis of the importance of oral communication and culture throughout the novels, and in the “Role of Folklore and Hasidism” I discuss his use of Hasidic folklore as a way to capture the oral aspect of culture and memory.

**Chapter 3**, “*A Guest for the Night* and the Anxiety of Modern Authorship,” deals with authorship in Agnon’s novel. The first section, “The Transformation of the Traditional Concept of Authorship: *A Guest for the Night* as a Turning Point,” begins with the premise that Agnon’s concept of authorship in *AGN* reflects his attempt to turn from using traditional Jewish genres to novel writing, and that this turn is laden with anxiety because of Agnon’s ambivalence towards secular ideologies. “The Model of Ideal Authorship” maps the two main conceptions of

authorship in the West: the classicist and the inspirational. I suggest that the difference between the two cannot explain Agnon's main authorial dilemma, because in both views the source of creativity is external. Of these two views, the romanticist model of authorship, which is both inspirational and ascribes the source of creativity to humankind rather than to God, is the one that arouses Agnon's unease. A similar anxiety is registered in the novel in the face of the secular project of nation building. The section then offers an analysis of ideal authorship as it is presented in *AGN*. From the ideal model of authorship I go on to describe its actual performance, noting the disparity between the two. "Pioneers, Authors, Dummies: the Construction of Authorship through the Male Body" analyzes the concept of modern authorship as it develops in the novel. In "Restoration vs. Creation" I identify Agnon's desired narrative product as no less than the construction of a new Jewish male body to replace the exilic one. In "Authorship and Masculinity: *AGN* and the Jewish Body," I argue that the author implicitly sets out to mend the national body, and that the narrator expresses his anxieties towards this project of creation. "Authorship, Freedom and Betrayal," and "Authorship, Dependence and Exploitation" place the relationship of the narrator with Yeruham Freeman at the center of the novel and through them reveal these anxieties as guilt over betrayal and fear of dependence. In "Creation and Procreation, The Author and the Golem," discussing the vision of creating a Golem, the horror of modern authorship is revealed through the appalling presentation of modern plastic surgery, showing its ability to mend the wounded body at the cost of creating a non-viable monstrosity.

Finally, **Chapter 4**, "The Drama of Authorship, Performance and Identification in the Yash Novels" discusses Jacob Glatstein's concept of authorship. The first section, "Where is the 'I'? Authorship and Autobiography," offers a reading of the novels as a modernist autobiography that destabilizes the conventions of the genre: the novels present subjectivity through a kaleidoscopic poetics and a credo indebted to the Inzikhist manifesto. Glatstein presents a fragmented subjectivity that unfolds through dialogue and does not always account for the

authorial acts it performs. This section offers a reading of the “I” as performative, defying any notion of essentialist, *a priori* being. “Staging Difference, the Drama of the Jewish Immigrant” discusses the way the narrator-author’s subjectivity is performed through his difference from his others. I analyze difference through the notion of the Freudian fetish and consider passing and mimicry as the two main performative strategies described in the novels.

Furthering the analysis of the trope of performance, “*Purim Shpil* and the Drama of Jewish Identity” describes the symbolic frame of *Purim-shpil* themes deployed throughout the Yash novels. These themes are taken from the two most popular Bible stories that were staged in Purim plays: the story of Esther and the story of Joseph. I suggest that these stories were chosen because of the way they reflect the main problems that plagued Jews in Glatstein’s time: persecution, the need to pass as a non-Jew, the question of Jewish continuity, and the status of the Jewish woman in relation to her persecuted nation. The stories also allow Glatstein to insert his protagonist, Yash, into different roles that reveal his personal dilemmas and at the same time present him as emblematic of the Jewish people. “Performing Authorship in a Dream Play” deals with an episode in the second novel that presents a play within a dream and is the culmination of the performative and theatrical theme in the novels. I provide a reading of the play through its Freudian symbolism and by considering the historical and sociological background of Yiddish theater. The reading reveals a rich and condensed discussion of all the themes presented throughout the Yash novels, including the narrator’s struggle with Jewish male impotence, his difficulty in assuming authorship, as well as the general sense of impotence of the Jewish male, the status of the Jewish woman in relation to this curtailed masculine agency, and the non-viability of conversion.

## Chapter 1

### A Guest for the Night: Memory, Narrative and nation Building

“A Guest for the Night” (AGN) examines Jewish memory and the continuity of Jewish life in light of Zionist ideology and its prescribed shift from diaspora to homeland. In this novel Agnon offers an extended discussion of memory and nostalgia and examines their relevance for the Zionist utopia. At the same time he also sorts out his own place as a writer in relation to a nascent national canon, so that his narrative choices and his conception of memory are informed by his place within the contemporary transnational field of Hebrew and Yiddish literature. In this chapter I will lay out the cultural context for Agnon’s authorship, discussed in chapter three. I will examine the implications of home and Diaspora for a changing cultural and literary milieu and the interrelationship between nationality, canon formation and the reconstruction of memory.

“A Guest for the Night” (AGN) is the story of a homecoming in midlife<sup>8</sup>. The first-person narrator, a Jewish middle-aged man, describes his arrival from Palestine in his Galician hometown, Szibucz, on the eve of *Yom Kippur*, in a very elegiac tone. Walking into town he notices the ravages caused by WWI; the city is half ruined and many of the buildings are damaged. Spending the holy day praying in the town’s old *beth midrash*, he notices the many changes that have occurred during his absence. A group of worshippers, with whom he shares his impressions, perceives him as critical. In response to his query the group leader, Elimelech Kaiser, expresses a bitter and sarcastic worldview, and shows no hope for a better future. Instead, Elimelech announces the group’s intention to leave the town after the holiday. Half seriously, half mockingly, Elimelech entrusts the guest with the key to the *beth midrash*. From now on the guest becomes responsible for the place where he used to spend his days as a youth, a responsibility he takes very seriously.

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<sup>8</sup> All the quotes refer to “A Guest for the Night”, Misha Louvish (trans.), Madison: the University of Wisconsin Press, 2004.

The rest of the novel is an account of the guest's visit in the town, which stretches from *Yom Kippur* (fall) to the *ninth of Av* (end of summer), i.e. around ten months. During this visit he tries to renew the ritual worship in the *beth midrash*. He soon finds out that he has lost the key to the house but is determined to fulfill his duty and makes himself a new one. Then, with the help of Hanoch, a poor traveling peddler, he cleans the house and renews regular prayer and Torah study. At first he seems to succeed in his restorative mission, as the cold winter drives poor people into the house to warm themselves in the only place in town that is well heated. Later, however, when winter ends and the temperatures rise, the house empties of its worshippers again, exposing the illusory aspect of the guest's hopes and the failure of the restoration.

During his visit the guest lodges at the Zommer family guesthouse and becomes acquainted with the owner. He secretly covets their youngest daughter, Rachel, but later finds out that she is betrothed to the young Yeruham Freeman and is expecting their child. Freeman, a day laborer, turns out to be a former Zionist pioneer who became a communist and was driven out of Palestine. The guest's complex relationship with Yeruham begins with tension and animosity but turns into friendship, not without secret envy on the part of the guest. During the visit the guest also meets Schuster, the proud tailor, and his wife, Sprintze, Rabbi Hayim, a former great Torah scholar, Daniel Bach and his family and many other people, some of whom are former friends and acquaintances. These people tell him about their present life and about their whereabouts during the war.

As it unfolds, the story also reveals the narrator's own biography: he was born and raised in Szibucz, left as a young man and emigrated to Palestine. Later he returned to Western Europe and finally returned to Palestine with his family and built his house in Jerusalem, only to witness its pillage in the 1929 Arab riots. His decision to go back to his hometown, as he presents it, is an attempt to take a break, rest and relax from the destruction of his new home, while his wife and children spend the time with his in-laws in Germany. Another key fact, only revealed at a

relatively late stage, is that the guest is an author. Thus, his first-person story turns out to be not only a (fictional) autobiographical account of his visit, but a self-conscious meditation on writing itself. As a consequence of positioning the narrator as an author, his narrative voice constantly wavers between the omniscient author writing in retrospect and the limited consciousness of the guest, experiencing and witnessing things as they unfold in real time.

Eventually, after almost one year, the guest decides to go back to Jerusalem and unite with his family. Clearly, in part his decision has to do with material and familial pressures. However, it is also determined by other, less explicit reasons. The guest waits for the birth of Yeruham and Rachel's baby and after the baby's circumcision celebration the guest packs his belongings and leaves town, this time escorted by many newly acquired friends as well as old ones. He reunites with his family and ends his story in Jerusalem with the discovery of the already obsolete old key to the house of study hiding in his suitcase.

### Nostalgia and its limits

Many scholars have treated AGN as a story of belated, nostalgic homecoming. The first to establish this line of interpretation was the critic Baruch Kurtzweil. He argued that many of Agnon's works are based on the notion that on the one hand the present is irrevocably flawed, and on the other hand, reviving past wholeness is impossible and delusional; time itself turns into a horrifying dimension. Therefore, every homecoming in Agnon's fiction is belated and tragic (1956:162). Arnold Band developed this argument in his 1968 book-length study "Nostalgia and Nightmare", which presented the most influential reading of the novel for many years. In this book Band gives AGN a Zionist, redemptive twist. According to his argument, AGN is a story of return to the old East European home, motivated by nostalgia and a desire to go back to the comforting world of childhood in the *shtetl*. This nostalgia is finally overcome by the realization that past life cannot be revived and that Israel is the future home, and by a gradual transfer of

libidinal energy from Szibucz to Israel. At the end of the novel the narrator experiences a spiritual death and is reborn through the birth of Rachel and Yeruham's son, named after him.

Stephen Katz offers another reading supporting the same argument. He suggests that the novel demonstrates the narrator's frustration in fulfilling his gustatory desires: it begins as the narrator is late for the last meal before the fast, and proceeds to describe numerous occasions in which culinary enjoyment is denied, spoiled or endlessly postponed. The repeated frustration of the sense of taste is somewhat compensated for by the sense of smell (1980: 103-4). This frustration helps the narrator gradually leave the *shtetl* behind in favor of life in Israel.

The line of interpretation suggested above has several limitations. First, it is based on a very selective and partial reading of the narrator's nostalgia and therefore it entails a considerable simplification of the novel. A careful reading of the whole text as related to memory and nostalgia shows a much more complicated and nuanced relationship of the narrator to his past. Reading all the parts dealing with nostalgia reveals different kinds of nostalgic attitudes, ranging from personal nostalgia for one's own home to philosophical, ars poetical reflections on the meaning of the past and the desired relation to it. Similar attitudes toward the past appear several times and different kinds of nostalgic reconnection reflect different, sometimes contradictory attitudes.

An examination of the entire range of nostalgic moments and attitudes of Agnon's narrator does not reveal a simple pattern. There is no gradual sobering or overcoming of nostalgia and a gradual reorientation towards the future. Instead, the narrator is thoroughly ambivalent toward the past and the need to choose between Szibucz and Palestine all the way through. One reason critics have interpreted a gradual overcoming of nostalgia is, of course, the guest's eventual decision to go back to Palestine. But this decision does not retroactively validate this interpretation, since it also stems from other, more implicit, reasons. As Katz notes, the guest's

nostalgia is sometimes conveyed through taste and smell. In fact, the sense of taste and the yearning for certain dishes or local products are repeatedly associated with the love of home, but not necessarily with the Zionist home. The notion of home is much more often related to the exilic one than to the Zionist one. Moreover, nostalgia for Szibucz's food always implicitly counters and challenges the love of the newly found home, i.e. Israel (see p. 63, 301). It is true that the narrator is repeatedly forced to postpone gratification and suffer physical deprivation when he returns to his hometown. However, while Israel is a distant source of attachment, sending to the Diaspora symbolic emissaries in the shape of Jaffa oranges, the old home town is a source of most intense sensual yearning, but also very real gratification.

Instead of seeing the decision to return to Palestine as motivated by a gradual overcoming of nostalgia and yearning for the past and for childhood, I suggest that it is the product of a constant struggle between attachment to home and longing for a homeland. The guest wavers between indigenous identity that revolves around personal memories from one's birthplace, and a narrated, invented, yet internalized indigenusness in one's chosen place. The home for which the guest longs is a diasporic rather than a national home and therefore the narrator's nostalgia for it is complicated by ambivalent feelings of attachment on the one hand, and estrangement on the other. Rather than being idiosyncratic, this ambivalence is a result of the Zionist negation of exile that was manifest in all aspects of Hebrew culture. This attitude demanded severing the ties with the old home and mother tongue, and relating to Palestine not just as a home country, but also as one's private home. This ideology dictated a complete erasure of the years spent in exile, and beginning one's life story from the day of immigration to Palestine perceived as a rebirth (Zerubavel 1995: XV).

As critic Michael Gluzman notes in relation to modernist Hebrew literature, "the negation of exile in Hebrew modernism involves a striking reversal of the home/exile binary." Contrary to others modernist movements which extolled exile and displacement as an artistic advantage, the

“exile” described in modernist Hebrew texts is Europe, the place where most Hebrew writers were born, whereas the home was Palestine, a new land with its harsh climate and foreign culture (2003:38). AGN presents the conflict, the difficulty and the ambivalence hidden behind the Zionist dogmatism. Thus, for the guest Palestine carries some good memories of former life there, as well as an abstract notion of home bolstered by textual traditions, but the old home carries the memories of childhood attachments. The point is that for most Jewish people at this time, i.e. for the ones who never immigrated to Palestine as he did, it is questionable whether it is a home that one can relate to physically, and it is precisely part of the novel’s mission to create and imagine this relation.

Literature played a major role in forming the relationship of Jews to Palestine in the first decades of the twentieth century. The relation between the Jewish subject and the object of nature in Eretz Israel was first imagined in literature. The problem was “how to bring the contemplation of an imagined nation, Eretz Israel, into a consideration of the land of Israel itself” (Eric Zakim, 2006: 3). To create this relation, Zionist thinkers, writers and poets constructed an indigenous ideal for the exilic Jew, who “returned home” to Palestine. This idea was based on ancient biblical models rather than on recent ones (see for example Zerubavel 2008: 319). The need to present the Jew as a native grew even stronger after the 1929 riots, in which Arabs started to openly contest Jewish people’s right to the land. The 1929 riots raised the question “whose right – Arab or Jewish – claimed greater validity on the soil. The Jew... came to be presented as “native” and “appropriate” to what the land could hold” (Zakim, 2006:9-10).

I argue that the Zionist mandate to construct a sense of Jewish nativeness or indigenusness in Palestine, especially after 1929, is the historical context for understanding Agnon’s relation to the past in the novel. Agnon visited his hometown of Buczacz in August 1930, a year after his house was pillaged in the Arab riots and he and his family were left temporarily homeless. When writing the novel around 1937, he chose to portray his narrator as

returning to his hometown in very similar circumstances. To offer a way of constructing a native Israeli identity in Palestine, he suggests that ties to the former home should be revisited. Agnon does not believe in the complete negation of Diaspora demanded by Zionist ideology because such negation will entail a deep rupture in the narrative of Jewish history. The price for such rupture will be a loss of almost two thousand years of Jewish diasporic history, yielding a watered down culture. Instead, what Agnon offers in *AGN* is an attempt, though not always successful, to tell Jewish history as a continuous narrative, while reading Zionist ideology critically.

The option of feeling “organic” ties to one’s birth place is offered through Sprintze Schuster, the tailor’s wife, with whom the narrator has a chance to converse every time he goes to the tailor to try on his new coat. Sprintze was born in Szibucz before the war and was persuaded by her husband to move to Berlin. In spite of all the benefits of the big city, she felt that life there was artificial and affected and developed a strong desire to return home. According to Sprintze, life in the modern city is corrupt, inauthentic and alienated, whereas the small town offers a sense of authenticity and connectedness. Sprintze attributes both her deteriorating health and the death of her two children to her prolonged exile from home, i.e. Szibusz. When her husband tells her that any attempt to return to Szibusz is not possible, as the town is in ruins, she says, “but the air of Szibucz is still there.” She ascribes her asthma to her exile, and argues that the only potent cure for it is to smoke herbs from one’s hometown (63). The definition that Sprintze offers of “home” is both highly organic, as it must be the place where you were born, and highly elusive, as it is not related to the physical existence of a certain house:

...although the house is in ruins and its dwellers have gone into exile... the grasses keep their grip and will not let go, and if you uproot them they sprout again, for it is natural for grasses, my friend, to love the source of their vitality. In this they are like human beings; only human beings abandon the source of their vitality, while grasses do not leave their place... (351)

Sprintze’s theory of home and nostalgia is peculiar, considering her circumstances. It might sound very natural in the context of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German

romanticism. In fact, it might reflect German nationalist ideas of the *Volk* as the “authentic” and “organic” inhabitants of the *Heimat*, or homeland. But Sprintze is a post-WWI Jewish woman, who, in spite of repeated catastrophes and persecutions, both against the population as a whole and against Jewish people in particular, insists that her home is the place where she was born. In doing this she implicitly rejects Zionist ideology that saw anti-Semitic persecution in Eastern Europe as an incentive to leave the diasporic home and construct an alternative one in Palestine. At the same time, her arguments for seeing her Eastern European home as the only place for her use organic imagery, and sound like Zionist rhetoric turned on its head. On the other hand, she counters the traditional rendering of Jewish diasporic identity and its suspicion towards rootedness in place. As Rebecca Kobrin explains, “a Jewish diasporic mentality was first created by the rabbis in the third century, as they reshaped exilic themes introduced in the Bible to emphasize the sacredness of time rather than place (Jerusalem) in their writings.” (2010:11). Diasporic Jewish identity is associated (though not always justly) to ritual rather than to rootedness in place. The diasporic home should be perceived as a temporary exile from Zion that will end with the coming of the messiah. Sprintze offers a kind of extreme indigenism that contrasts with the other meanings of home offered in the novel and with the pervasive impression that the Jewish experience is one of profound displacement (Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt and Alexandra Nocke 2008:1)<sup>9</sup>. She tells the narrator that he came back from Palestine to Szibucz to enjoy the taste of the fruits that grow in the place where he was born<sup>10</sup> and reverses the Zionist definition of home as based in the mythic homeland (p.63).

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<sup>9</sup> The authors note in their introduction to this volume: “The interrelated motifs of the “people of the book” and the book as the “portable homeland” – together with the stereotype of “the wandering Jew,” have conveyed the pervasive impression that the Jewish experience – except the Israeli one – is one of profound displacement, lacking not only a proper territory but also a substantial spatiality or attachment to place” (ibid: 1).

<sup>10</sup> The local fruit stand in the novel in opposition to the Jaffa oranges that the guest orders from Palestine. These oranges, though delicious, represent the modern, transnational world that transcends physical connections to place.

The narrator's ongoing struggle between attachment to the old home and love for the new one is also framed in the novel through the question of the uniqueness and stability of place versus its portability and "replaceability." The novel implicitly asks whether a place has an intrinsic value and meaning, or whether value and meaning stem from the human activities performed in the place and therefore can be carried from one place to another. This question becomes more acute and pressing in light of the Zionist project of transferring the center of Jewish culture from the Diaspora to Zion. The novel consistently presents the private home and the *beth midrash* as analogous. Thus, the question whether home is in the Diaspora or in Zion is equivalent to the question whether God is ubiquitous, and therefore His house is portable, or whether God dwells in a certain place and is exclusive to it. This dilemma is conveyed through the two Torah portions that the narrator mentions during his visit<sup>11</sup>. The first one, after he inaugurates the house of study, is *Va'Yetze*, unfolding the story of Jacob's journey to Haran to marry within his family (Genesis 28:11-32:3). The narrator comments on the famous story of Jacob's dream, in which God reveals himself to the patriarch and promises to bequeath to him and to his progeny the same land where he passed the night (Genesis 28:16)<sup>12</sup>. This part concludes with the building of a sacred memorial and the sanctification of the specific place by naming it Beit-El (the house of God). Significantly, the word "place" is repeated three times to reiterate the singularity of the location and its designation. The second (and last) Torah portion the narrator comments on (we learn that he gave a commentary every week, but he only talks in detail about the first and last sermons) is *Eleh Pekudei* (Exodus 38:21-40:38), the last portion of Exodus. This portion describes the building of the portable ark and the coming of the cloud of the Lord to dwell within it. The narrator chooses to expound on the last verse of the portion, which concludes the whole book.

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<sup>11</sup> The Torah is divided into 54 portions. Every Sabbath Jewish people read one portion until the end of the cycle, celebrated on the eighth day of Sukkot (Tabernacles).

<sup>12</sup> In some places the reading of the Torah portion is followed by a sermon, or commentary, i.e. interpretation of the portion and reflection on selected topics that it deals with. Sometimes the commentator relates the portion to contemporary events and issues.

The Torah portions the author chooses to highlight frame the discussion of place in the context of sanctity and add a religious aspect to the discussion of the meaning of home. Through these portions Agnon engages the debate between intrinsic versus extrinsic models of sanctity, i.e. between ascribing sanctity to place and ascribing it to ritual that can be performed anywhere. This debate is related to the difference between living and worshipping in a homeland, and doing the same in the Diaspora. At the time of Hebrew sovereignty in Eretz Israel, the temple in Jerusalem was the only place of worship, and its importance suggested that land can have intrinsic sanctity separate from people. The same conception is also evident today in the continuous worship and prayer near and around relics of sacred places. At the same time the Tora portion charts the move from a dynamic to a static model of the sacred place, i.e. from nomadic worship to worship in a fixed place. The dynamic form of centralized sacred space separates sacred space from particular places. The sacred space moves with the camp; the camp does not move to intrinsically sacred spaces. i.e., sanctity is created by the worshippers rather than by the place of worship. Finally, the Tora portion charts the move from a decentralized to a centralized place of worship, i.e. from multiple sanctuaries to one temple. Although decentralized sacred space does utilize particular locations, these places are not sacred in and of themselves. The synagogue and the home become sacred space through the presence of people and the performance of commandments. In decentralized sacred space, there is no intrinsic sanctity; sanctity is relative and temporary. (Seth Kunin, 1998: 137).

Since the patriarch Jacob first designates Beit-El as a place of worship, his act should be understood within an ancient decentralized model, in which there is more than one shrine. The building of the ark should be seen as a move towards the centralization of worship, though still within a portable paradigm, which matched the conditions of the Israelites wandering in the Desert. Agnon chose to end the regular prayers and torah commenting in the novel where the first portable, centralized place of worship is built, but before the Israelites go through the process of

becoming a nation based in its own land, a process that culminates with the building of the temple in Jerusalem. The parallel is clear: the historical point at which the novel is written is presented as analogous to the last portion of Exodus, and the implication is that, along with the building of the Jewish home, a centralization and a fixation of religious ritual is about to take place.

Ritual life in Szibucz as a diasporic Jewish location follows the decentralized fixed model. The fact that the house of study is not intrinsically holy is revealed by its gradual emptying out, a process that inevitably deprives it of its former significance. The guest, however, doesn't always realize this. He constantly wavers between ascribing intrinsic sanctity to the house of study, and a realization that, without the community of Torah learners, the place is no more than a monument to past times. Moreover, at times he even denies that the house has emptied, as is evident in the solitary prayers that he conducts there after the death of Rabbi Hayim (p. 440). Eventually the guest reconciles himself to reality, and the consolation he finds is expressed through the numerous repetitions on the midrashic saying that "synagogues and houses of study will be reestablished in Israel in the days of the messiah".

The holiness of place and its portability is related in the novel to the question of nostalgia and the way to deal with it. In other words, rather than seeing the novel as "nostalgic" it is more useful to read it as interrogating nostalgia as related to place on the one hand, and to narrative on the other. In AGN the guest tries to revive the *beth midrash*, but also has other, more successful ways to relate to the past. In this context, the canonical reading of the novel is problematic because it is premised on the assumption that the attempt to return to the past has completely failed. Critics tend to concentrate on the revival of religious worship as the only aspect of return to the past. But it is not entirely clear that the guest's return has been a complete failure. Some moments seem to bring the guest inner peace, intimacy and wholeness as when he stands in the *beth midrash*, in the same place he stood as a boy and experiences peace and serenity (11). Also,

there are other aspects of nostalgia in the novel that are not related to space. In other words, whether we deem the return as a failure or not depends on our definition of nostalgia.

Literally, nostalgia (from *nostos* – return, and *algia* – longing, pain) means a longing to return home. It was first diagnosed as a medical condition by Swiss doctors in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, among soldiers who were stationed for a long time away from their native country (Svetlana Boym 2001:3). Referring to home, the term has a spatial aspect. However, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the object of nostalgia became more elusive, therefore Boym notes, “modern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values; it could be a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual” (ibid:8).

Nostalgia also has a temporal aspect. It is related to the changing understanding of time and to the emergence of the idea of progress in the nineteenth century. Along with industrialization and the development of fast transportation people started to measure time by numbers, to manage it through schedules and grant it economical value. Nostalgia is a side effect of progress, and of the division of space to local and universal. The rapid pace of industrialization and modernization intensified people’s longing for the slower rhythms of the past, for continuity, social cohesion and tradition (ibid:6). Although the object of nostalgia became more elusive, it was co-opted by rising nationalism and turned from individual longing into national belonging. As urbanization triggered mass migration to big cities, the old, agrarian way of life in villages and small towns became an object for nostalgia. With the rise of nationalism, native peasant songs were rewritten as national hymns, and relics of the old way of life became part of national heritage (ibid: 15).

The distinction between the temporal and spatial aspect of nostalgia also translates to two different kinds of experience, restorative and reflective nostalgia:

Restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on the *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps. Reflective nostalgia dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance... Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history...(2001:41).

The guest has failed to fulfill his restorative dream in the old home. Renovating the old house of study has proved meaningless without the community of believers who are supposed to use it as their sanctuary. The attempt to turn the clock back to the days before the war has proved fruitless and absurd. At the same time, if the return to Szibucz was meant to provide opportunities for reflective nostalgia, it has been at least edifying. As long as the guest did not attempt to rebuild the past, the visit did allow him to come to terms with loss and with his own midlife crisis, which he sometimes hints at as the background of his decision to visit his old home.

Also, apart from the spatial aspect of nostalgia as return to a place, it also has a narrative aspect. Some scholars define nostalgia as “the search for continuity amid threats of discontinuity” (Fred Davis: 1979:35). Returning to the past, “the nostalgic author asserts a sense of continuity over and above her sense of separation, and from this continuity may be able to replenish a sense of self” (Stuart Tannock 1995: 456). In line with this definition Agnon’s novel is in itself a narrative that deals with the break in personal, as well as in national history as a result of immigration and the transfer of Jewish life from Eastern Europe to other places. Whether this narrative is successful in mending the rift is the question that will be discussed in chapter 3.

Finally, the reading of the novel as an overcoming of nostalgia does not account for the fact that the guest is not always nostalgic about the past; in between his highly nostalgic reveries and reflections he also sprinkles anecdotes, some quite long, that present the town’s past in a very negative light, which contradicts his own nostalgic, pre lapsarian worldview. According to this worldview, the Great War ruined the quiet, prosperous and pious Jewish shtetl. The war serves as a watershed separating the longed for past from the harsh realities of the present. However, the non-nostalgic accounts of the past add up to an unflattering picture of *shtetl* life, in which many

of the evils that the narrator laments in the narrative present actually developed gradually and were the result of internal processes combined with numerous external influences. They were not the result of one external historical event, cataclysmic though it was. No attention has been paid throughout the years to this aspect, which challenges the dominant reading of the novel as a thoroughly nostalgic work.

We learn, for example, that the house of study gradually emptied of its worshippers long before it was ravaged during the war. Torah study had slowly become meaningless, and people persisted in it simply for lack of anything better to do. In one of his remembrances the narrator tells us, “besides the books you find in the *beth midrash* a few idlers sitting before an open book and talking to each other. Men’s talk, it is said, is worth half as much as study, yet they talk about the rise in the price of meat” (104). Later on, we read the story of Yeruham Freeman’s father, the Lithuanian charlatan who tried to impress the town with his learnedness while twisting the verses of the Torah. The story is an indirect satire of a town full of people ignorant enough in Torah study to be duped and impressed by an imposter. And indeed, at the opening of the story the narrator tells us that “in that generation the honor of the Torah has deteriorated in our town, and there was no more respect paid to scholars because it was all paid to doctors.” (138) Modernity and enlightenment, then, rather than war, diminished the ranks of Torah scholars. In fact, the narrator recalls that he himself used to read non-religious literature hidden beneath his bench when he was supposedly studying the Torah in the *beth midrash* (12). From other passages we learn that the days before the war were indeed days of material abundance, but a feeling of ennui, idleness and lack of all purpose characterized the life of young people. Against this background the narrator very unflatteringly describes the rise of Zionism as just another way to fight boredom, as a way to find purpose in a world in which faith in God has declined and nothing else has yet replaced it (182). Aside from being boring, life in town before the war is described as parochial, and its people are described as petty, limited and mediocre. At some point the narrator

sums it up saying, “wherever you turn you find either boredom or weariness” (104). The fact that traditional Jewish society went through a process of disintegration prior to the war is incidentally referred to by comments about class disparity that eventually led to the rise of local socialist groups. Later these groups had to fight a newly established anarchist group, on the one hand, and a Zionist group, on the other, each group offering its own vision of social or national utopia (322). In other words, when ennui gave way to zealous ideology, local society deteriorated to strife, animosity and petty personal struggles.

When the narrator examines his own past he is sober and bereft of nostalgia, finding no fewer faults than merits in it; there was something in his old way of life that he was happy to shake off. I suggest that to a large extent these non-nostalgic passages are a way to criticize the *shtetl*'s parochial culture from which the narrator tries very hard to distance himself. In doing so he simultaneously tries to establish himself as an author of canonic literature, writing as part of the emerging canon of the nascent Hebrew nation in Palestine. This will eventually allow him to justify his choice to go back to Palestine, in spite of many undercurrents that sweep him back to the place he longs for until the very end of the novel. The guest is ambivalent toward life in the *shtetl*, but he is also critical toward the Zionist narrative. Still, on a meta-narrative level, the constant wavering between the old homeland and Palestine and the nostalgia for one's old homeland has a rhetorical function in (eventually) establishing the novel's overall Zionist agenda. In Svetlana Boym's terms, the failure of restorative nostalgia serves to illustrate the hopelessness of life in the diaspora. This failure gives way to reflective nostalgia and to the narrator's more important mission, i.e., keeping Jewish historical continuity.

### **Minority and Canonicity**

One key to understanding the narrator's attitude towards his own part in the culture that flourished around him in pre-World War I Szibusz is his first conversation with Yeruham Freeman. In it the young man tells the narrator that he has to take responsibility for past deeds, as

well as for the naïve poetry he wrote as a beginner, since both had repercussions well beyond his own personal life. Explaining to the narrator why the latter's immigration to Palestine influenced him negatively, Yeruham says:

Until you went up to the land of Israel, there was nothing real about the Land in our town. You know the Zionists, *with their young and their old*<sup>13</sup>. All the Land of Israel means to them is something to come together about, *to organize balls* and sell the shekel that makes you a member of their organization. But since the day you went up to the Land of Israel, it became something real for one of our boys had gone to settle there (87, my emphases).

In this part, Yeruham sharply distinguishes between the narrator and the other Zionists in town. According to Yeruham, the narrator was a pioneer in breaking through the passive attitude of local Zionist circles, and revolutionizing the cultural and ideological scene in town. Moreover, the expression “with their young and their old” as well as the reference to the practice of organizing balls are clear allusions to Agnon's early novella of this name (1923), which mocked the parochial Zionist culture that flourished in Szibusz before the war. The novella tells about the life of a diasporic Zionist group in a small, provincial town in Galicia. It satirizes the parochialism of this group and the corruption of its leaders.

Agnon's allusion to his earlier novella calls attention to the rich political context of Zionist politics of the time. Agnon himself had been involved in Zionist politics in Galicia before he emigrated to Palestine, and had been greatly disappointed by it. In a letter he wrote to a friend later in life he admitted that as a young man he was almost arrested for Zionist activity that was directed against local Polish Jews (Hever 2001: 111). In AGN we find very similar tones in the narrator's description of local Zionist culture before the war. When talking to the group of young people at the Gordonia group's house, he is very explicitly unwilling to lecture, or to talk about the Land of Israel. Instead, he speaks of the first Zionist Group founded in Szibusz. The opening of his scathing account is very similar to his critique in *With our Young and Our Old* as it

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<sup>13</sup> I modified the translation in several places, as it misses the literary allusion apparent in the Hebrew text, which is central to my discussion here.

lashes out at the same elements that were criticized in the earlier work. Here again he describes the idleness and lack of vision of Zionist activists in the Diaspora and the way they turn Zionism into an excuse for bourgeois pleasures and parties:

Noble and exalted was the Zionist ideal, *and far from the world of action*. The conquest of the communities, which Nordau demanded at the Congresses, was not needed at Szibucz, whose leaders showed no hostility to Zionism. On the contrary, some of them would come to the house of the Zion group to read the paper or play chess, like the other Zionists in the town. Once a year we would bring a speaker...we used to hold a Maccabee ball<sup>14</sup> in Hanukkah with speeches and recitations. Once a girl recited “Our Hope Is Not Yet Lost” by heart and the event was reported in the Hebrew papers. (103, my emphasis)

According to the narrator it is precisely the acceptance of the Zionist ideal by local leaders that was detrimental to the Zionist cause as he sees it. Precisely by accepting the ideal, they trivialized it into a cause for very mundane and insipid social activity instead of any significant action or sacrifice, at least in the narrator’s opinion. By preferring communal activity in the Diaspora they undermine the national ideal instead promoting minor, parochial activity. The narrator takes every opportunity to chastise those who only talk about Zionism and to extol those who practice it by emigrating to Zion (179,283,456).

Agnon published *In our Young and Our Old* in 1920. But AGN was written in the late thirties, when Palestine had already emerged as the new center of Hebrew culture and much of the historical justification for Zionist activity in the Diaspora had greatly diminished because of rising anti-Semitism and Nazi persecution in Europe. In this context the narrator’s unforgiving remarks about the parochialism of Diaspora Zionism before WWI are especially provocative. They raise the question why, after all these years, the author still feels an urgency to lash out at the same diasporic culture that he already excoriated very impressively twenty years earlier, even though circumstances had dramatically changed during the intervening years.

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<sup>14</sup> Again I have to part ways with the translation which trivializes the Hebrew word *Neshef*, translating it as “evening.” The word *Neshef* (ball) should be preferred, also because of its inter-textual value, alluding to the Zionist ball described in *In Our Young and Our Old*.

Two possible reasons for the enduring relevance of Agnon's critique of diasporic Zionism are relevant for the discussion below. The first reason is that Agnon, as the biographic author, sees the same evils of the past at the time of writing the novel. The second reason concerns the narrator's own writing career as described in the novel, and his mission as a Zionist. As such, the specter of minor *writing* (rather than the parochial, minor, Diasporic politics described above) haunts him to the very end of the novel. We can read AGN in relation to the attempt to construct a new literary Hebrew canon in Palestine in the first three decades of the twentieth century. In this context, the narrator's attitude towards Yeruham's complaints in the above mentioned conversation reflect his insistence on complying with the norms of the national canon, and his reluctance to be identified as an ethnic, local, parochial, and, therefore, minor writer.

Supporting the claim that the narrator wants to distance himself from minor writing and establish himself as an author of major literature is his reaction to Yeruham Freeman's declamation of the Zionist poem the narrator wrote when he was young, in the same meeting between the two referred to above. On this occasion the narrator expresses for the first time an explicitly negative rather than nostalgic attitude to his own past as a writer. When Yeruham insists on reciting the poem in its entirety, the narrator begs him several times to desist. At first it seems that responsibility for Yeruham's actions resulting from the poem weighs heavily on the guest's conscience, but soon we discover that he is embarrassed by his old style of writing. As Yeruham notes, "I know you don't like this poem... your taste has improved and you are sick of rhyming "God above" and "Jerusalem's love." (89) (The Hebrew rhyme is Yerushalaim-Shamaim, i.e. Jerusalem - heaven).

The dialog that develops between the narrator and Yeruham before and after the declamation reveals the difference between their respective conceptions of literature and its relation to nationality. Yeruham demands that the narrator take personal responsibility for the

poetic manifesto that changed his life. The narrator repeatedly refuses to do so and tries to establish his subjectivity as an author in universal rather than personal and parochial terms. His refusal reflects his desire to distance himself from local culture and establish himself as a writer of major literature. The dialog is a confrontation between two irreconcilable and antagonistic conceptions: Yeruham implicitly reads the poem as an instance of minor literature and sees the author as a minor writer, forming his interpretation and expectations accordingly. On the other hand, the author, though unsatisfied with his past literary achievement, still views it as an attempt to establish himself as a major writer and reads his work with a different code.

In their dialog Yeruham translates the narrator's poem into a political statement favoring emigration. From his own words we learn that when emigrating to Palestine he looked for the author, hoping to be welcomed to his own home and to be offered to share an orange, a symbolic act of brotherhood based on shared ethnic affiliation (87). The narrator, on the other hand, implicitly sees the poem as establishing a universal, archetypal subject (see introduction, p. 34), and is well aware of the fact that his poem relates to a certain established canon of Hebrew poems dedicated to the love of Zion. And indeed, major literature is expected to establish aesthetic expression, to transform private experience into a representative, universal and therefore canonical manifestation (Loyd 1987: 20). The narrator, using a long tradition of literary conventions, sees himself as representing the love of Zion on a universal, rather than on a particular level. Thus he tells Yeruham, "You condemn me because I praised the Land of Israel. Was I the first to do so? Was I the only one to do so? There is not a single generation that did not sing the praises of the Land of Israel..." (90).

The option of minor writing haunts the narrator on other occasions as well. The visit confronts him with his childhood and adolescent follies and with people who remember him from his youth, presenting a threat of regression to earlier phases of development. The most anxiety-ridden encounter in this context is the one between the narrator and Leibtche Bodenhaus in the

house of Schutzling's "aunt", Genedel. Leibtche is an old acquaintance who took it upon himself to rewrite the Torah from beginning to end in German rhymes. That this practice is especially ludicrous is metonymically conveyed by Schutzling's disparaging behavior towards Leibtche. The narrator seems as far as one can be from Leibtche's kind of rhyming and has no reason to worry about any confusion between his works and the latter's scribbling. However, in greeting the narrator, Genedel scathingly criticizes him and treats him as someone who has nothing to be proud of. After Leibtche reads one of his poems, the aunt asks the narrator: "what do you say to Leibtche's work? You're a bit of a scribbler too, aren't you?" (338). Later the narrator describes a long and detailed dream, in which a possible confusion with Leibtche haunts him. (384)

Leibtche's type of work relates to another characteristic of minor literature, i.e., its low esteem of originality (Hever 2007: 44-5). Leibtche, with his derivative act of copying, translating and rhyming, stands for the minor artist with whom the narrator is so afraid to be confused, especially since he and Leibtche are long-time acquaintances.

Another characteristic of minor literature is the de-territorialization of language, i.e. its extrication from the perfect, though always utopist, compatibility between territoriality, ethnicity and linguistic performance. In AGN the narrator silences the Yiddish language spoken by most interlocutors in favor of a Hebrew written text in an act that Schachter calls "fictional translation." (2012: 57). This is done on several levels. First, although it is clear that most, if not all the characters with whom the guest talks during his visit speak Yiddish, this fact is not highlighted. Yiddish words are mentioned occasionally (for example pp. 22, 105, 142) but very sparingly. The fact that the narrator translates the conversation for his readers is not highlighted. The result is that he is rendering diasporic culture in the words of the Hebrew language, though sometimes personalized by adding Yiddish intonations to it<sup>15</sup>. Agnon himself started his career as a bilingual author, writing several of his youth stories in Hebrew as well as in Yiddish. Shmuel

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<sup>15</sup> Dan Miron made this observation in a lecture given at the JTS (April 2012). .

Verses cites Sadan, who judged Agnon's early stories in Yiddish as better than his Hebrew stories at the time (2000: 106). When Agnon first emigrated to Palestine in 1908 he stopped writing in Yiddish, though cultural and linguistic ties to this language were reflected in some of his later works (ibid: 108). Agnon's choice in AGN to render the story of the diasporic home town in Hebrew, while eliding the fact of the fictional translation, was intentional and did not stem from a lack of awareness of language politics in the nascent Hebrew culture of Palestine. In other works Agnon dealt with the language wars that raged there, especially after the Czernowitz conference of 1908, which declared Yiddish one of Jewish national languages. Also, in his later novel *Only Yesterday*, language choice is foregrounded, and language wars between different factions in Jerusalem are clearly in the background of the main plot.

The fact that Yiddish is intentionally muted in AGN is most clearly evident in the only place in the novel where it is explicitly mentioned, when the guest goes to visit Reb Hayim on his deathbed on Sabbath eve. On the street, he imagines that a man is following and molesting him, to which he suddenly reacts in Yiddish:

*Vus hot ihr sich eppis in mir ungetchepit?* I said suddenly in the language the people of my town speak, and I was astonished. First, because there was no one there who was following me, and second, because I thought that when I talked to myself I spoke in the Holy Tongue, and now I was speaking in the language of every day. (431)

The suppression of Yiddish is effected on the most personal level, in the privacy of the guest's conversation with himself, but it is here that the suppressed language also resurfaces, most symptomatically in a moment of distress. The narrator implies that the half real-half imagined figure is the angel of death, since this strange man tells the narrator that he, too, is going to see Rabbi Hayim, and indeed, upon visiting him again a few minutes later, the guest witnesses Rabbi Hayim's death. Yiddish is, then, a language that resurfaces only when the line between life and death, phantasy and reality blurs, and the narrator's ability to control the narrative and author it, and to monitor his own responses – breaks for a short while. In all other cases Yiddish can only

serve as a spoken, but not as written language. The decision to mute Yiddish can be linked to the narrator's conscious decision to take part in a national canonic cultural production that has proclaimed Hebrew as its privileged language<sup>16</sup>.

The narrator struggles to establish himself as part of the Zionist canon, and for this purpose he has to suppress any manifestation of minor, diasporic, parochial or ethnic writing. He also has to sever his ties to the East European *Shtetl*. This does not mean that he is never nostalgic. Rather, I suggest that the dominant interpretation of the novel as a gradual overcoming of nostalgia should be turned on its head. Nostalgia and its vicissitudes (though not necessarily overcoming it) is a rhetorical device serving an author motivated to put the past behind him. In other words, nostalgia is a result of a conscious decision to relegate *shtetl* life to the past and build future ties to a constructed homeland in Palestine-Israel. Had the narrator been open to seeing a future in his hometown, Szibucz, he might have considered more seriously the new directions that the youth in his town had taken, and that he mentions only as temporary, frivolous fads: on the one hand, socialism and communism, and on the other, Zionist groups in the Diaspora. As Dafna Clifford notes in a discussion of other works, the nostalgic point of view of the belated home-comer to the *shtetl* inclines him to see his home town as already dead (2000: 121).<sup>17</sup> This, however, is only in the eyes of the beholder. This same town might be described as lively in spite of the aftermath of the war, by someone who has decided to build his future there

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<sup>16</sup> However, language itself was not an exclusive requirement within the norms of the nascent Hebrew canon. It should be noted that the group of Galician writers that Brenner and Berdyczewski attacked wrote in Hebrew, but their decision to use it in a diasporic context and their narrative norms precluded their acceptance to the canon.

<sup>17</sup> Clifford makes this comment in relation to the Yash novels by Jacob Glatstein, and I will return to it in chapter 4.

or by someone who can recognize diasporic culture as a viable alternative to Zionism. Returning to the *shtetl*, the guest tries to revive a religious tradition that has been gradually dying for years, even before his departure. He refuses to see the new directions of the town's youth as viable, not because they are inherently so, but because his ideology is primarily nationalist. He doesn't see any point in advocating Zionism in the Diaspora, and he implicitly rejects communism because of its anti-nationalist or trans-nationalist ideology. Seeing the national option as the only serious one predisposes him to insist on a nostalgic view of the *shtetl* that will inevitably lead to making it obsolete. At the same time, the *shtetl* will serve as a source of nostalgia and as the Other against which Zionism will establish Hebrew culture.

The narrator's Zionist agenda is a starting point presented as a conclusion in a rhetorical strategy meant to justify an a priori decision. Although nostalgic, the novel's main ideological thrust is toward the future and aimed at the construction of a collective memory and structured indigenusness that serves to substitute for the loss of organic ties to the old homeland. In doing this the novel is prototypical in more than one way: by presenting an individual protagonist whose choices can and should be universalized and by choosing a genre that is the quintessence of major, national and canonic writing. One of the questions challenging the author, then, is how to serve the needs of the Zionist view while coming to terms with the Jewish past in a way that does not reenact a break in Jewish collective memory.

### **Constructing Collective Memory and National Utopia**

AGN is the first in a series of works in which Agnon deals with historiosophic questions regarding the transformation of Jewish identity from its traditional, east European context to a new, secular and Zionist identity (Michal Arbel 2008:173). As Arbel notes, Agnon was always a Zionist writer, and even more so starting from the 1930s; during this period he dealt with national themes and expressed patriotic feelings in his works. At the same time he deviated from the mainstream tendency in modern Hebrew literature that rejected the traditional world in favor of a

non-religious and even anti religious identity in the spirit of the Haskalah, the Jewish enlightenment (ibid: 175). His utopist narrative in AGN is therefore ambivalent. It is similar to the second Aliyah Zionist pioneers' writings in some of its themes and conceptions, but it parts ways with Zionist historiography in trying to present a utopia of a new imagined nation that is not at odds with Jewish collective memory. Through this utopia he addresses the issue of continuity and crisis in Jewish history.

Agnon's commemorative mission in AGN is driven by the break in Jewish memory and an attempt, albeit not always successful, to heal it through narrative.<sup>18</sup> As Yerushalmi concedes, "the modern effort to reconstruct the Jewish past begins at a time that witnesses a sharp break in the continuity of Jewish living and hence also an ever-growing decay of Jewish group memory" (1996: 86). The attempt to heal collective memory, however, is problematic at a time during which the collective itself is being reformed. Yerushalmi's account succinctly summarizes the same problem that stands at the heart of AGN:

...Modern Jewish historiography cannot replace an eroded group memory which... never depended on historians in the first place. The collective memories of the Jewish people were a function of shared faith, cohesiveness and will of the group itself, transmitting and recreating its past through an entire complex of interlocking social and religious institutions that functioned organically to achieve this... ultimately Jewish memory cannot be "healed" unless the group itself finds healing, unless its wholeness is restored or rejuvenated. (ibid: 94)

The words of this modern Jewish historian are dramatized in the novel. The disintegration of the collective is described through the emptying out of the house of study, reenacted during the year that the guest spends in town. Thus the problem is not that the townspeople have no future, as the narrator attempts to present it, but that they are no longer connected by a common past. The new ideologies of the youth are largely divorced both from Jewish tradition and from Jewish culture, as the narrator himself notes (p.101).

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<sup>18</sup> The limits of the attempt to create a continuous narrative will be discussed in chapter 3, which deals with Agnon's authorship.

Jewish collective memory has a unique function in supporting the unusually long, almost unprecedented continuity of Jews as religious communities in the Diaspora. The Jewish nation as a modern state had been first imagined by intellectuals in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it developed after a long history of diasporic existence. As Anthony Smith argues, the fact that Jewish people were exiled and lived for a long time as ethnic minorities did not diminish their chances of survival as a group, as they possessed other traits that were more crucial than national autonomy. Most importantly, he points to religious traditions that were meticulously maintained by Jewish priesthoods (rabbinic institutions) for generations (1988: 119.) While many independent and powerful nations have disintegrated throughout history, Jews have existed for centuries as a distinct people thanks to a unique combination of factors: segregation, de-territorialization, persecution, the availability of a sacred language and an encompassing religious law (ibid, 117). Smith sees the role of collective memory as crucial in this regard: “Though Jews did not begin to write secular histories until the eighteenth century, their religious thought and literature was impregnated with a sense of temporal succession and linear purpose.” (118)

A continuous tradition and collective memory were maintained by different religious practices that were transmitted from generation to generation. Throughout the pre-modern period these practices served to commemorate past events, sometimes for many generations, and to keep post-biblical events alive in Jewish collective memory for hundreds of years.<sup>19</sup> However, all these practices were not the product of modern historical consciousness. As Yerushalmi notes, “what was ‘remembered’ had little or nothing to do with historical knowledge... the Jews who mourned in the synagogue over the loss of the temple all knew the date of the month, but I doubt if most knew or cared about the exact year that either the First or the Second temple were destroyed.”

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<sup>19</sup> Amos Funkenstein challenged Yerushalmi’s argument that from the rabbinic period until the Enlightenment Jews did not write history or have a historical consciousness. See Todd Hasak-Lowy, 2008: xix for an account of the debate. As Hasak-Lowy notes, however, even considering Funkenstein’s critique major changes in historical thinking did take place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: “first, in the nineteenth century significant clusters of Jewish thinkers began conceiving of history in a new light; second, well before the end of the century this new approach to history came to incorporate new ideas concerning the relationship between historical knowledge and political action.” (ibid: xx)

(43) What characterized this religious collective memory was “resistance to novelty in history. The pronounced tendency... to fit the recent catastrophe into the mold of past tragedies... for it is all one.” (ibid: 51). The traditional Jewish conception of history was based on two premises that made it inherently antagonistic to modern research: “the belief that divine providence is not only an ultimate but an active causal factor in Jewish history and the related belief in the uniqueness of Jewish history itself.” (Yerushalmi 1996: 89)

Eventually, a canon of liturgy, penitential prayers, fasts and other commemorative practices formed through centuries in the Diaspora has served as a firm vehicle for carrying Jewish collective memory. One of the main practices of commemoration in the middle ages and well into modern times was the commemorative fast. Apart from fasts, other vehicles of medieval Jewish memory included the writing of *Selihot*, penitential prayers composed after certain historical catastrophes, the keeping of community *memorbuecher* the celebration of “second Purims”<sup>20</sup>, as well as following the biblical commandments and celebrating the Jewish holidays.

Echoes of these practices are evident in AGN. We learn, for example, that the communities killed in the pogroms of 1648 are commemorated on a tablet lit by eternal light on a wall in the old house of study (134). We also learn that there are communal practices used in cases of distress and fear of calamity; when Hanoch, the poor peddler whose services the guest uses, disappears during a snow storm, the town’s rabbi announces a fast. The townspeople willingly follow despite the paradox pointed out by many that food is hardly available for most people on most days anyway (171-2).

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<sup>20</sup> In Second Purims communities celebrate the anniversary of their escape from destruction. These special communal Purims are also called 'Purim Katan.' This is a day of rejoicing, feasting and the distribution of gifts which Jewish communities, families, or even individuals set aside in commemoration of a miraculous event through which they were rescued from catastrophe or destruction or from evil and oppressive edicts. There are such festivities which are established for a definite period of years and others which are to continue through all the generations. In honor of the Second Purim special megillot were written and read in the synagogue on that day.

But the novel also registers a break in traditional collective memory. The house of study empties of its worshippers and regular prayers are no longer conducted there, so it is clear that liturgy can no longer serve as the most important means of preserving collective memory. Also, while the designation of WWI as the watershed for many social processes and as a cause for nostalgia for life before it is problematic, it is clearly presented in the novel as the cause of a major break in communal and personal memory. The trauma of the Great War is described as the cause of speechlessness on the one hand and endless talk on the other. Talk about the war is heard mainly from women, who are the sources for what the narrator tells his readers about it. Speechlessness is evident when Freide, the narrator's old governess, tries to tell the narrator the story of the cruel death of her two daughters, but the traumatic memory strikes her dumb (p. 81). The narrator, while pointing at the break in memory, also tries to heal it by offering his own unique version of Jewish utopian future, partly based on Jewish tradition and mythology.

Zionism offered a historical narrative that was radically different from the theological framework that had characterized traditional Jewish thought. In traditional thought exile was both a divine punishment and a condition that granted the Jews a sense of being the chosen people. In this context Zion became a metaphysical concept rather than a political reality. Zionism forced Jewish memory to recreate itself by offering a historical rather than a theological framework (ibid: 16). This turn was necessary for the creation of any kind of modern historiography, let alone a Zionist one.

Therefore it is paradoxical that the most notable element of Agnon's utopia is its avowed national character. On one hand, Agnon repeatedly emphasizes this character, while on the other hand, he departs from mainstream national utopianism and raises questions about the feasibility of such a utopia for the Jewish people. That the narrator's utopia can only be articulated in national terms is evident first from his remonstrations against the rabbi's description of the quarrels, feuds and slander common in the Land of Israel. (179) In the narrator's view, "although

there are numerous men of strife in Jerusalem, there are more men of peace.” The narrator repeatedly rejects any sectarian description of the Jewish settlers in Palestine: strife and petty quarrels only characterize people who stick to their exilic state of mind, such as the old people in Kibbutz Ramat-Rachel who constantly frustrate Rabbi Shlomo Bach’s attempts to live in peace as an observant Jew in Palestine. (96) On the other hand, the narrator explicitly rejects the supra-nationalist, communist vision of Yeruham Freeman, as can be seen in their conversation:

‘Let us be consoled, Yeruham, let us be consoled, that a group of young men has been found to give their lives for the Land of Israel.’ ‘For the sake of the Hebrew letters engraved on the Money of the Land,’ said Yeruham. ‘For the sake of the Hebrew letters, and for the sake of the Land, and for the sake of the nation,’ said the guest... (303)

The most important similarity between Agnon’s utopia and mainstream Zionist utopia is their main strategy, i.e., to construct a vision of the future based on an ideologically motivated picture of the past. The Zionist reconstruction of the past first emerged as a counter-memory to traditional Jewish memory, and it reshaped the past according to a different periodization (Ibid: 12). Focusing on secular Zionism (as opposed to religious factions) Yael Zerubavel notes: “while the religious Zionists grappled with the vision of the future, secular Zionists were more concerned with reshaping the past.” (Ibid: 15) This observation leaves Agnon hanging between the two groups since he shares both concerns, whereas his reconstruction of the past also points to a messianic future. The general techniques and tactics of reconstructing the past of Agnon and the Zionists are somewhat similar: the Zionist master commemorative narrative borrows its main heroes from historical knowledge, while at the same time manipulates historical evidence using narrative techniques to highlight important lessons and obliterate undesired parts.<sup>21</sup> Agnon’s fictional and commemorative narrative is also purposively selective.

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<sup>21</sup> Zerubavel defines commemorative narrative as “a story about a particular past that accounts for [ ] ritualized remembrance and provides a moral message for the group members. In creating this narrative, collective memory clearly draws upon historical sources. Yet it does so selectively and creatively.” (1995: 6) For a discussion of the narrative strategies that are used in constructing the commemorative narrative, see *ibid*, particularly pp. 222-232.

The first major difference between the narratives concerns Agnon's periodization and his choice to highlight specific epochs and heroes. The Zionist commemorative narrative highlighted the major turning points from antiquity to exile and from exile to national revival (Ibid: 23). Agnon's narrative does not focus on turning points. It shows an awareness of the changing nature of Jewish dispersion over time, but it primarily weaves threads of continuity, rather than emphasize the breaks. Whereas the Zionist narrative tries to skip over 1800 years of exile and minimize this epoch's historical importance, Agnon chooses mythical figures from medieval times as his main focal points. The first is Rabbi Amnon from Magenza, who lived in the 11<sup>th</sup> century in Ashkenaz<sup>22</sup> and the second is Rabbi Elazar Hakalir, who lived around the 6th-7th centuries. In the novel, as well as in Jewish tradition, Rabbi Amnon serves as the epitome of the sanctification of God's name through martyrdom, an ideal that Zionism completely rejected<sup>23</sup>. HaKalir, a Palestinian poet of the early middle ages, serves in the novel as the epitome of religious inspiration<sup>24</sup>.

Agnon's repeated use of midrashic legends and exegesis emphasizes the richness of Jewish thought in what Zionists considered the period of "exile." When Agnon makes use of heroes from antiquity in his narrative, his choices are not those of mainstream Zionism. Various biblical heroes appealed to the Zionist memory and imagination, among them Samson, Gideon, Saul and David (Ibid 23), indicating a preference for war heroes who were known for their acts of bravery. Agnon's favorites are different: Moses, especially in his role as the scribe of the Torah,<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ashkenaz is an area along the Rhine, from Alsace in the south to the Rhineland in the north that was inhabited by Jewish people during the early Middle-Ages. Later, Ashkenazi Jews dispersed throughout Eastern Europe.

<sup>23</sup> See Yael Feldman Bein Maftaekh LeMan'ul, *HaSifrut* 32, 1982 pp 148-154. Rabbi Amnon is the one, according to legend, who preferred to die than to convert to Christianity, in spite of the horrible tortures delivered to him by the local governor. According to legend Rabbi Amnon composed the most important main prayer for the Day of Atonement, *Unetaneh Tokef*, when he was dying as a result of the amputation of his limbs

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of HaKalir as a model for authorship see chapter 3.

<sup>25</sup> Moses' role in defining the narrator's authorship will be dealt in the next chapter.

and King David, as a shepherd and the author of Psalms rather than as a war hero and a king (see p. 112).

The most illuminating and fundamental difference between Agnon's portrayal of the past and that of Zionism is in respect to their conceptualization of history. Whereas Zionism offered a historical framework for Jewish memory instead of the traditional, theological one, Agnon is deeply concerned about the implications of such move. The secularization of Jewish historical consciousness was both one of the causes and one of the symptoms of the break in Jewish memory that Agnon seeks to mend. This might be one of the reasons that his narrative of the past does not fully adhere to a secular, historical rationale. His commemorative narrative is ambivalent: it is neither entirely modern and historical, nor completely theological. It is a negotiation of the two and a dramatization of the profound reluctance to perform the Zionist historicist move that Agnon explicitly presents as reductive. In a meta-historical passage he explains to his readers that the fine young people from the Gordonia group<sup>26</sup> do not share his understanding of modern history:

...they and I do not understand each other. The very words we use have different meanings. For instance, when I say 'Gordon' I mean our great poet, Yehuda Leib Gordon, while they mean Aaron David Gordon, the socialist ideologist and pioneer. My generation are men of thought, whose hands are short but whose thoughts are long, while they are men of deeds, who put doing before thinking. This Gordon of mine... was a man of thought, while their Gordon... came along and translated thought into deeds... on the face of it, I should be glad, but I am not glad... this may be explained by a parable, although a not very apt one. It is like an architect who asked for stone and they gave him brick; for he intended to build a temple, while they intended to build themselves a house to live in. (101)

This passage helps explain the difference between Agnon's meta-history and that of Zionism: both make use of the past, but for Agnon this should not preclude a utopian future but

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<sup>26</sup> Gordonia was a Zionist youth movement founded in 1925 in Poland. Its doctrines were based on the beliefs of Aharon David Gordon, i.e., the salvation of Eretz Yisrael and the Jewish People through manual labor and the revival of the Hebrew language. The movement promoted immigration to kibbutzim (communal settlements) in Mandate Palestine during the inter-war period.

rather enable and facilitate it. He points at the reductionism inherent in the realization of the Zionist dream and refuses to relinquish its spiritual and theological aspect.

The Zionist commemorative narrative conceptualized the transformation from the exilic past to the Zionist present. “Having constructed a profound tension between Hebrew and Jewish identities, the secular Zionist collective memory showed a clear preference for presenting the former as a transformation of the latter.” (Zerubavel 1995: 21) In AGN Agnon tries to construct the Zionist present as a metamorphosis of the Jewish past, but rather than concentrating on the metamorphosis and the legitimacy of the Zionist interpretation of Jewish history, he tries to minimize the difference between past and present, and render the new in terms of the old, apologetically at times. Whereas in the case of the Zionist narrative newness is emphasized, in Agnon’s case it is minimized. The narrator’s inclination to apologize for the new and secular aspects of Hebrew culture is evident, for example, when he describes the newly founded city of Tel-Aviv to the Jewish people of the nearby village he visits in *Shavu’ot*:

It is said in the Gemara: a man should always dwell in a city that has been newly settled, for since it has been newly settled its sins are few. The reason I mention this is that if anyone tells you that the men of Tel-Aviv are, heaven forbid, weak in obedience to the commandments, you should tell him that its sins are few (284).

The dialogue between the narrator, visiting the Bach family, and Erela Bach, the ardent Zionist, who keeps echoing Zionist propaganda, provides an illustration of the difference in rhetoric between the two. She attempts to stress all that is new and unprecedented in the Zionist settlement in Palestine, while condemning the passive, traditional world view of Jews in Szibucz. When her father talks about the book used as an amulet for women in labor, she accuses him of superstition. Later, when the guest talks about the conflict between Arabs and Jews in Palestine, she accuses him of belittling the achievements of the small, but active Jewish settlement in face of Arab attacks. The guest, on the other hand, attempts to frame the conflict within well established universal rules, as when he says, “the strong are always likely to attack the weak. And

so long as we are few and weak, we can expect any kind of trouble.” (250). Most symptomatic is his skepticism towards the idea of active heroism inherent in Zionist thought, when he comments “what is the use of heroism that destroys its heroes? If the hero must always be engaged in warfare, in the end he is weakened and falls.” (251)

A commemorative narrative is in many ways supported by an implicit conception of time. In addition to a linear, teleological concept of history, the Zionist narrative allows for a cyclical conception of time that is manifested in the holiday cycle, and “the tension between the linear and cyclical perceptions of history often underlies the construction of collective memory.” (Ibid: 7) Zionism changed the traditional holiday cycle by adding new commemorative foci, by granting a new meaning to existing holidays and by shifting the focus of commemoration from certain dates to others. The tension between the linear and cyclical conceptions of history is central to AGN. The novel unfolds with an acute awareness of the yearly cycle of Jewish holidays and weekly readings of the Torah portions. Here, too, Agnon’s ambivalence towards the Zionist project of renewal is evident. On the one hand, the most important holidays he mentions are Yom Kippur and the ninth of Av, and the novel unfolds between these two dates, highly emblematic of Jewish tradition and its emphasis on piety and on the commemoration of destruction. On a personal level, however, in the novel the ninth of Av turns into an emblem of rebirth, since it is also the narrator’s birthday. By mentioning this coincidence he implies that the day can also be transformed into a merry national holiday, should the nation be reborn.

Although the narrator fails to note the newly fashioned Zionist holidays such as *Hanukah* (in its Zionist version) and *Lag Ba’Omer*, he does focus on *Sukkot*, Passover, and *Shavu’ot*. These holidays commemorate three key points in the Israelite history, and chart the way from exile and slavery to becoming a Jewish nation. Passover commemorates the exodus from Egypt, *Sukkot* commemorates the temporary life style in the desert and *Shavu’ot* commemorates the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, the decisive moment in the inauguration of the Jewish nation.

Although these are major religious holidays, the narrator is mainly preoccupied with their symbolic relation to the agricultural cycle and to the land of Israel. These holidays are also related to the centralization of ritual life in Jerusalem, since in their function as *Regalim*, or pilgrimage festivals, they commemorate the times in which the temple was still active. At these times Jewish people in biblical Israel made pilgrimage to the temple to make sacrifices according to the commandments of the Torah.

Finally, it is instructive to observe the differing imaginary geographies of Zionism and Agnon's fictional world in AGN. Zionist imaginary geography might be seen as highly binary and ethnocentric, juxtaposing Zion and the rest of the world as homeland and exile or Diaspora. In Agnon's imaginary geography we find a third place: the legendary territory, beyond the Sambation River, where the ten lost tribes dwell, according to Jewish Midrash. The third place is both a place of radical impossibility and inaccessibility and the place of messianism and redemption. Here, again, Agnon insists on the place of utopia as irreducible to the realistic Zionist plan of the return to Zion.

In spite of these major differences, Zionist collective memory and Agnon's alternative narrative converge in terms of their end points and their main ideological objectives, namely a justification of the Zionist settlement of Palestine through a re-construction of the Jewish past. On top of this common agenda, Agnon also shares themes with second Aliyah writings and with pioneers' world view. Although their underlying historiosophic conception is different, Agnon and Second Aliyah Zionist narratives use the bible as a backdrop and context for Zionist revival. In other words, although Zionism historicized Jewish memory, it still used biblical past as a mythic background by constructing it as the foundation of a revised collective memory. Both Agnon and pioneers' writings show ahistoric conflation of past and present, and a tendency to structure local geography in Palestine in terms of its biblical past. In Agnon's novel, individuals can freely travel to past times by using their imagination. This is apparent, for example, when the

narrator seriously offers Hanoch the peddler to imagine himself as a shepherd in biblical times and describes the land of Israel in mythical terms (112). Similarly, as Boaz Neumann notes, for second aliyah pioneers “the Land’s past was, to a large extent, a past that still lived... the past, particularly the biblical past, continued as a presence” (2011:69). Neumann gives numerous examples of pioneer leaders who traveled in the Land and identified biblical sites, envisioning biblical stories coming to life in front of their eyes (*ibid*).

Another point of similarity between the narratives is their relation to the indigenous population. As Neumann notes, “when the *halutzim* [Hebrew for pioneers] constituted the connection between themselves and their land with currents of blood, no room remained for the Other. When Others appeared, they were generally experienced as an interference, literally an ecological hazard” (*ibid*: 83). Sometimes the pioneers described attacks by local population, usually Arab, on Hebrew settlements, in the same breath as public health dangers like malaria. Similarly, Agnon presents the indigenous Arab population as a mythical being, who wages war on the Zionist settlement for obscure reasons, not related to politics but to the fulfillment of God’s will. The Arabs are “the sword of the desert”, an object with an obscure agency, which strikes for unexplained reasons, unrelated to the settlers’ efforts to “revive” the land peacefully; the steps of the messiah are heard but he tarries, and the people of Israel are attacked and tormented, just as they were in biblical times, in Roman times, and in modern Europe. Different circumstances are interpreted as similar in a cyclical narrative in which Jewish suffering is endless and inexplicable.

One of the reasons for Agnon’s divergence from Zionist narrative is his great ambivalence towards the use of power. This ambivalence has several narrative consequences, one of which is the description of the indigenous population in Palestine in a-historical and a-political terms. This implies that the solution to the conflict in this land is passive waiting for the days of the Messiah. Agnon presents the Zionist settlement of Palestine as a religious rather than a political act that necessarily has implications in terms of power relations in the land. Thus, he

repeatedly presents idyllic scenes of shepherds, pasturing peacefully, in a Biblical-mythical landscape (112, 257). He describes his own settlement in Jerusalem and expresses his excitement and elation at seeing the young Zionists building the city and clearing the stones that “had lain there since the Destruction.” (207) He reacts to this by envisioning the imminent coming of the messiah: “and we already thought, in error, that the end of the exile had come and we were feasting on the years of the Messiah.” (ibid) The peaceful atmosphere did not last:

While we were living in tranquility, the judgment struck us. The enemy raised his sword against our holy city and the cities of our God, and the houses of Israel were plundered. Jews were killed and burned and grievously tormented, and all the fruits of our toil were pillaged. ‘Yet his anger has still not been appeased, and His hand – heaven forbid – is still outstretched.’

My wife and children and I emerged alive, and the sword from the desert did not strike at our persons... (ibid)

The biblical rhetoric that Agnon uses serves to emphasize the mythical aspect and the coalescence of different elements into a unified narrative. Agnon was acutely aware of the political reality of conflict in Palestine. In “Only Yesterday” he offered a much more realistic description of the conflict and explored its roots in the struggle for Hebrew labor that pushed Arab day workers out of the local job market in pre-WWI Palestine. Far from being naïve, the ahistorical presentation of a Zionist utopia in AGN is a rhetorical device that ties together mythical past, personal narrative and national hopes with one ideological thread. Eventually the personal, concrete and nostalgic attachment to the diasporic land is transformed, though certainly not unproblematically, into a well crafted, constructed indigenously in a new land.

## Conclusion

Examining Agnon’s novel in light of his place as an author within the emerging modern and national Hebrew literature of his time and his treatment of memory highlights a paradox: while the implicit agenda of the novel is nationalist and its meta-narrative thrust is towards constructing an exemplary work of major literature in line with the norms of the Hebrew canon, its treatment of memory resists the common Zionist idea of a break from the past and of leaving

behind the so-called “exilic” phase. On a personal-local level, Agnon implicitly scorns the narrow-mindedness, mediocrity and lack of historical perspective of many of the people of his town and relegates diasporic life to the past. However, on the general-historical level, he refuses to ignore the cultural legacy of 1800 years of life in the Diaspora. Drawing inspiration from luminaries throughout Jewish history he insists on a richer and more multi-layered account of the Jewish past than Zionist historiography offered. This ambivalence was not his alone, and was shared by other canonic writers.

On the narrative level he presents the transformation from Yiddish to Hebrew as natural, while at the same time he objects to the secularization of Jewish memory and to the main tenets of Zionist historiography. His sources are Talmudic and medieval no less than biblical and he refuses to relegate them to the Zionist abyss of oblivion. Also, at the same time that Agnon describes the break in Jewish history and memory, he is reluctant to recognize this break as incurable. Agnon wants to offer ways to preserve collective memory, while at the same time employ the aesthetic norms of a modern novel to achieve this goal. Chapter 3 explores Agnon’s authorship, looks at the same tension from the point of view of authorial subjectivity, and analyzes its implications. In the next chapter, dealing with Glatstein’s concept of memory, a different dynamics of the relation between memory and place will emerge, yielding a diasporic conception of memory.

## Chapter 2

### The Yash Novels and the Dynamics of Diasporic Memory

This chapter looks at the *Glatstein Chronicles* and the way they construct memory in relation to place, both in its geographical and in its political sense. Generically hybrid, these novels combine a travelogue, an autobiographic story of homecoming and a modernist reflection on memory. Like Agnon, Glatstein was born in pre-World War I Europe in an empire that collapsed at the end of the war. Immigrating to New York before the war, he became part of a vibrant, diasporic Jewish center. Returning to a largely transformed Eastern Europe twenty years later, he addressed the need to construct a picture of the former home for a diasporic community that had changed dramatically since it left Europe. Doing so, he addressed questions of commemoration within diasporic contexts. At the same time, he constructed his own subject position as a Yiddish author writing within a multi-centered and volatile cultural system.

The Yash novels consist of two works, *Ven yash iz geforn* (1938) (literally: when Yash traveled) and *Ven yash iz gekumen* (1940) (literally: when Yash arrived)<sup>27</sup>. The first begins on a ship sailing from New York to Paris, carrying a cosmopolitan crowd of tourists, businessmen, and immigrants who go to visit their old home in Europe. The first person narrator is Yash, which might be a nickname for Jacob, the biographic author's name. As Ruth Wisse notes, the name sounds Polish, and might be the name given to Glatstein while growing up as a child in Poland (2000:169). Naming his narrator Yash, Glatstein assumes a semi-autobiographic position; he signals to his reader that he stands behind his narrator, while at the same time, his autobiographic position does not hide any real person behind it, and can only point back to a persona.

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<sup>27</sup> The first novel was published in a bowdlerized English version as *Homeward Bound* (1969, trans Abraham Goldstain). The second novel was published as *Homecoming at Twilight* (1962, trans.: Norbert Guterman). A new edition of the two novels in one volume with a new translation of the first one, was published in 2010 by Yale University Press (New Haven and London) under the title "The Glatstein Chronicles" (Ruth Wisse, ed. Maier Dashell and Norbert Guterman trans.). The names of the two novels that this volume holds remained the same.

Yash is mainly a listener to the other travelers' talk but later one of the travelers identifies him as an author, adding a self reflective dimension to his narrative (93). Yash gradually reveals the purpose of his trip as a farewell to his dying mother, whom he hasn't seen since he left his hometown, Lublin, twenty years earlier. Through his conversations with the other travelers he presents a heterogeneous group of immigrants, businessmen and middle aged women, while in the background one can hear echoes of the historical moment and the rise of fascism. The trip is structured around the tension between complete detachment from the world, yielding a cosmopolitan, theatrical façade in which everyone can invent his/her identity and perform it, and a sense of the impending danger of fascism. When news arrives about the Night of Long Knives<sup>28</sup>, Yash feels his cosmopolitan spirit shaken, and goes to look for fellow Jewish passengers. The attempt to identify them and have them admit that they are Jewish reveals different reactions to racism, from denial of Jewish identity to flaunting it as an act of protest. When the ship arrives in France the passengers shed their cosmopolitan appearance as they are forced to identify as who they are at the customs, and then they disperse. After a short stay in Paris, Yash boards an eastbound train that crosses an increasingly fascist Europe and arrives at his aunt's home in Warsaw. The encounter with the decaying life of his aunt's family is depressing, and Yash faces the plight of Jews in Poland in the 1930s. Later he takes the local train to Lublin, and the first novel ends when the name of his destination is announced. Yash's memories and dreams are intertwined throughout the travel narrative and give a glimpse of his childhood, his immigration to the United States and his anxieties about the future of Jewish life in Europe.

The second part finds Yash in a resort for arteriosclerotic patients on the outskirts of Lublin. The book begins with the words of a respectable looking man, addressed to a group of people sitting at a table after dinner. Large parts of the novel follow this charismatic leader,

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<sup>28</sup> The Night of the Long Knives sometimes called Operation Hummingbird or, in Germany, the *Röhm-Putsch*, was a purge that took place in Nazi Germany between June 30 and July 2, 1934, when the Nazi regime carried out a series of political murders. Many of those killed were leaders of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA), the paramilitary brown-shirts.

named Steinman, an elderly historian and intellectual, and relate the stories he tells his group of admirers. Yash explains that the purpose of his stay at the resort is to rest after his mother's death, before his return to New York City. In this novel dreams and daydreams again play a central role in conveying Yash's thoughts and memories as well as his mourning the loss of his mother. Yash's friendships with Steinman, with a young Hasidic prodigy visiting the resort with his extended family, and with a middle-aged accountant named Neifeld, frame Yash's visit. These relationships allow him to understand the joys and suffering of Polish Jewry and position Yash as the record keeper of this community. Towards the end of the novel, and the end of Yash's visit, Steinman falls ill and is dying, as his admirers, including Yash, surround him and try to fulfill his last wish, to sing a happy Jewish melody, or nigun. Steinman's death scene illuminates the themes of Yash's visit: loss, mourning, memory and commemoration.

### **Where is the "I"? Displacing Subjectivity**

The Yash novels present a complex relationship among memory, subjectivity and place. Glatstein constructs personal identity as thoroughly dynamic and portable, and presents memory as itinerant. There is a constant interaction and tension between this dynamism and the teleological, uni-directional nature of Yash's trip to his former home. The fact that the concrete arrival at the destination is elided is one of the results of this interaction. The novel presents a tension between modernist cosmopolitanism and anti nationalism on the one hand, and the growing dominance of fascism and racism on the other. For modernist cosmopolitans, among them Yiddish writers, identity is not determined by relation to one place, whereas fascists and racists not only strive to fix identity and relate it to the body, they also struggle to stabilize its relation to place. In nationalist discourse the notion of home is frequently related to the national one, whereas in the Yash novels the meaning of home turns into an open question. It wavers between the individual and the national home, the concrete home and the cultural home. The contingency of place in the novels increases the narrator's sensitivity to it, and the question

whether he can own space, or be the master of his own home becomes crucial and ties up to his sense of authorship.

Critics have considered homelessness a key characteristic of the modernist experience. Home as a token of fullness and stability is missing in this experience, producing what Svetlana Boym calls “the impossibility of mythical return” (2001: 8). Boym sees modernism as a watershed, in which the object of nostalgia turns metaphysical, thus precluding any notion of homecoming. In terms of her distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia, modernism turns nostalgia thoroughly reflective, acknowledging the illusory nature of restoration. Similarly, Sanja Bahun argues that modernist art apprehends home as a void. Considering the historic origins of modernism, she writes: “The triumph of the new self-making individual [in the Renaissance] was not without its victims: now that God was relegated to the farthest sites in micro – and macrocosm, his absence was sensed emphatically. Hence, in the seventeenth and eighteenth century the human place was increasingly felt as the site of homelessness” (2006: 37). The logic of modernism was lack or gap: lack of definite origin, lack of metaphysical guarantees, lack of conscious control: “with the socio-political and internal loss of symbolic meta-guarantees (the absolute, God, King, the state, language)... modernist aesthetic production emphatically addresses and articulates this historical and ontological anxiety, circling and playing... compulsively around the question of the void” (ibid: 128 footnote). Moreover, modernist art does not describe loss, but also performs it through various literary strategies including elisions and caesuras, which is what Glastein does in the Yash novels (ibid: 129).

The reluctance to pin down identity to one place is apparent in the Yash novels on many levels. First, on the communal level, the Jewish relation to home is presented as problematic. There is only one place in the novel where Yash describes home in general and his own home in particular as a protective and containing space (p. 208). Most often, home is a shelter that protects Jews from raging pogromists. On a more personal level, the child Yash is typically locked out of

home or looks into inner spaces from the outside. In his most traumatic childhood memory, he is left out in the street during a threatening military parade; the Russian authorities decided “the time had come to show their full might, and scare [the Jews] into thinking twice before embarking on any further antigovernment ventures.” (62) Therefore, the Cossacks, the elite combatants of the Russian army, show off their might, parading through the town. When all the Jews quickly seek shelter indoors, Yash is the only one not quick enough to hide, leaving him as the target of the soldiers’ abuse. On another occasion, Yash remembers how every Sabbath “the same aura of Sabbath calm...descended over our house like a secret, when Mother and Father would shut their bedroom door for a nap” (25). When a homey atmosphere is finally described, Yash looks at the most coveted space in the house, his parents’ bedroom, from the outside<sup>29</sup>. This feeling of exclusion is the other side of the reluctance to anchor the self in a fixed place or to safely inhabit space.

Yash describes his birthplace in litotes:

Imagine a place with no dragons, no scorpions, no buffalo or bison, no lions or leopards, not even a ram or deer. Who can fathom the misery of a child in a town devoid of such fauna? Elsewhere the wide world holds many such blessings, but not Lublin, which contains nothing but a town clock and a fire warden who, every quarter-hour, sounds the hours until midnight, when everything slumbers but the flitting shadows of the dead around the synagogue. My Lublin didn’t appear on small maps, and on larger ones was only a faint, barely legible marking. (26, Yiddish: 40)

According to Yash, Lublin is so provincial that its river does not even pour directly into the great Vistula. This is a surprising description of one of the largest cities in Poland and a major Jewish center. It represents the hometown, the place that Yash is supposed to be tied to, as lacking and thus destabilizes the sense of geographic origin. The hometown is a place that lacks many things, and the things it has, i.e. flitting shadows of dead people, are signifiers of loss. Eventually, even the sign of the place on the map almost disappears, turning it virtual.

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<sup>29</sup> This feeling of exclusion and the wish to occupy the primal scene is worked out in Yash’s second dream, discussed in chapter 4.

The parts that deal with memory and unfold as reminiscing also reflect the dynamic relation between memory, personal identity and place. When Yash delves into long, ars-poetic meditations about memory in general and the structure of his own memory in particular, these meditations unfold while Yash is in motion. The first long meditation is envisioned in Yash's mind as taking place during a walk on the Lower East Side of New York (203-216), whereas the second is presented during a return trip in a carriage from Kazimierz to the guest house (363-364). Glatstein takes the metaphor of life as a journey literally and thoroughly examines its implications. Throughout the narrative description of his life cycle, Glatstein intertwines mind and motion, to the point that memory is embodied as a consciousness moving through space.

In the first long, narrated reminiscence identity splits and is embodied, and each embodiment stands for a different phase in Yash's memory and life journey. The ability to conjure the past in memory is taken ad absurdum, producing doubles that represent different stages in Yash's life. The reminiscence starts from Yash's mother's funeral. Yash experiences a complete halting of movement and as a reaction to this feeling of ending – both of motion and of life itself – he starts searching his mind for his first childhood memory, or for what he calls “the one”, or the single origin of the self (203). However, even the first childhood memory, that of the walk from home to the barracks accompanied by his aunt, finds Yash in transit from one place to another; his father serves in the army, and the purpose of the walk is to bring him kosher, home-made food, prepared by Yash's mother. Looking for the “one”, actually yields two, as the child's parents, the cornerstones of his identity, stay in two different places.

From this point in Yash's memories and on, memory is embodied as the different phases in Yash's life and it unfolds in a series of dialectic moves: at first a third element, the eye of the young man that Yash grew up to be, appears in Yash's vision and captures the scene of the young child and his aunt, traveling between the two points, in its memory (206). This consciousness, represented as an eye, turns into a young man who walks down the streets of the East Side:

In the midst of all the delights of the foreign city, the eye never lost sight of the little boy, kept track of mother at home and father in the barracks, and strained to glimpse again the earliest memory of father and mother, the little boy standing on some sort of precarious bridge between them. Had he ever allowed the little boy to fall out of his sight, the young man would have become no more than an eye that looks ahead, forward, forward, as he makes his way through the enormous bustling crowds – a man apart. (206-207)

But then, later, the consciousness of the young man and the consciousness of the little child that were presented as mutually dependent, change roles:

While the little boy walked about the streets of New-York, the grotesquely puny East Side youth...began to play tricks. At will, he could transport himself back to Lublin. Every recollection of which he would savor, collect, build into a monument. (210)

And again, a third consciousness representing a later stage in Yash's history, appears and ties the earlier two together (215). It is identifiable as separate from the other two by the fact that it remembers things that happened later than the memory of walking down the streets of the East side. This third consciousness is the consciousness of Yash who is riding a droshky from the railroad station to his father's house (216), closing the circle of life that started in childhood and ended just before arrival to his parents' home, except that arrival itself is not described.

Another key element in this long reminiscence is the deconstruction of the binary opposition of movement versus stasis. The mother's funeral procession, which begins this part, is brought to a halt in Yash's memory because of his attempt to pin down the absolute beginning of his life and of his memory. He tries to freeze motion and time and reach absolute stillness (203). The reminiscence ends when the narrator, sitting in a carriage that constantly moves, begs the driver in vain to stop, in order to freeze the moment of seeing the old home. Thus, at first, consciousness stops time, and stasis takes over motion, so that the narrator can go back at will. At the same time, however, movement is also unstoppable, thwarting any attempt to keep life from moving on. The dissolution of the difference between stasis and movement, the deep instability of place, the portability of the reminiscing consciousness, and the perception of memory as a

constructive faculty dissolve the distinction between place and time, to the point that they become almost interchangeable.

There is, however, one element that charts the limits of the dynamism and portability of identity and memory in the novel; the materiality of death. The dead body seeks to be buried in the ground, and its burial inevitably creates an organic relation to a certain territory. An example of this seamless connection can be found in the novel when the conductor of the train from Paris to Warsaw shows Yash and his newly acquired German friend the exact place where Albert, king of Belgium was killed in a rock climbing accident (154). The fuss that the conductor makes when the train passes by the gravesite and the small memorial erected at the place of death demonstrate the great significance that people normally grant to national symbols, to rootedness in one's land, and to the connection between death and place. This connection is foreign to Jewish diasporic world view. When his German friend points at certain stretches of land, crying in anguish, "It used to belong to us... they took it from us by force"(155), Yash can only admit his indifference to such feelings: "As a Jew, I said, I can't understand such personal attachment to a piece of ground, such fervent patriotism. I'd like to say that I appreciate and value all this, but even out of politeness I can't, because I simply don't grasp it. At most I can say that such feelings strike me as tragicomic.'" (155)

However, in saying this, Yash ignores the fact that he is going to bury his own mother in Polish soil. Indeed, the Torah portion that he alludes to when describing the purchase of the grave lot is The Life of Sarah (Genesis 22:30-23:1), which describes the first time that Abraham, the former immigrant from Aram, buries his kin in the Land of Canaan, thereby establishing a permanent, organic attachment to it. I suggest that Yash's relation to place, especially to his Polish homeland, wavers between the stability of place embodied in the gravesite and a more detached, diasporic and cosmopolitan relation to place. This complicated and ambivalent relation to place does not allow a simple attitude towards commemoration and even towards burial. Thus,

the only gravesite physically described in the novel is that of the Belgian king. Any other return or pilgrimage to a concrete gravesite is forestalled by Yash's diasporic relation to territory.

This relation to place also complicates the nature of Yash's return to Poland. Several critics have commented that the structure of the two-part novel is built around a caesura, a void or an absence; throughout the first part Yash makes a long trip back home, only to skip the moment of homecoming and reunion. As Leah Garrett writes, "the arrival is not portrayed in either book. The titles ironically focus on the moment of reunion, only to subvert this notion by leaving the reunion out of the books" (1998:209). Ruth Wisse notes, "Glatstein's emphasis falls on the caesura, on the empty space between the anticipation and the aftermath of homecoming. Home itself is missing" (2001: 155, see also Novershtern 2008: 284).

However, it would not be accurate to say that the novel does not represent any kind of homecoming. In describing return Glatstein employs a displacement, as part of what Avraham Novershtern aptly called "the decentering tendency of the novel" (2008: 285). By eliding and displacing the central, anticipated destination, we are left with multiple surrogate ones: return to Lublin is not explicitly described, but instead there is an emotionally laden visit to Warsaw. Later, Yash travels to Kazimierz, which serves as a vicarious site of return and of memory. Also, instead of representing an actual return, Yash represents a fictional one in his first long dream at the end of the first volume (161). By the same token, there is no rendering of the meeting with the mother or of the final parting with her before her death, but there is a detailed description of Steinman's death (as well as other death scenes, which I discuss below) and a mental processing of the mourning in the second detailed dream. This metonymic strategy is symptomatic of a broader sense of dis-placement that pervades the novel.

The fluid relations among subjectivity, place and memory in the novel have implications for the question of commemoration. While scholars have long established that the novel employs

no straightforward sense of place and of return, they have not offered a consideration of the implications of this fact for memory and its construction. Since Yash is reluctant to take part in the nationalist consecration of territory and describes a dynamic relation to place, there ensues what I term a dynamics of diasporic memory, i.e., memory that is not pinned down to place or to national signifiers or, in Boym's terms, does not attempt to restore the past. Instead, it is structured through metaphoric means of commemoration, and through the group's relations to non-material systems of signification such as language and folklore.

### Constructing the place of memory

Although Yash's homebound journey is strategically cut by a caesura, homecoming is not entirely missing. Rather, it is carried out through displacement, both metonymic and metaphoric. Yash's memory is structured through substitutions rather than by reification of place, or by pinning down identity to one location. Since memory is itinerant, homecoming is diverted in spite of a long, target-oriented journey. Just as in the inzikhist kaleidoscopic poetics, instead of one homecoming we get multiple subjective refractions of it through different narrative techniques. Instead of describing the return to his hometown, Lublin, Yash describes his stay at a guesthouse at the outskirts of town. While there, he visits Kazimierz Dolny, a Jewish *shtetl* and historic site.

The trip to Kazimierz is an unintended pilgrimage; Yash finds himself on a day trip to the town as the coachman mistakes him for another person. But although it is presented as coincidental, the visit is structured as the ultimate destination of the homebound journey and in a way exhausts its meaning and internal motivation, to mourn and commemorate the dead mother, and, by implication, past life in Poland as a whole. As a place, Kazimierz is a replacement and a metaphor; it stands for the missing home and signifies its lack at the same time. This replacement can also be conceived as the touristic turn in the novel. In visiting his former home Yash is not Ulisses, returning for good. The fact that his trip has a touristic aspect has received very little attention, although it is inherent to its meaning.

Yash's homebound journey constantly wavers between the personal narrative of homecoming and a narrative of tourism and recreation. The ship in the first part is full of tourists, at least on its upper deck, bound for Europe for recreational purposes. The hedonistic atmosphere is at one point interrupted by grim news from the continent, about the massacre of the SA people in the Night of Long Knives, but still the passengers are not too bothered by outside reality. After disembarking, Yash stays in Paris for a few days, again for purely touristic purposes. His last (narrated) stop before returning home, the Buchlerner resort on the outskirts of Lublin, is another touristic destination, a spa in the central European tradition that combines recreation and restoration. The clientele is comprised of arteriosclerotic patients and other guests who suffer from less concretely defined ailments, either physical or mental. They pass their time in the guesthouse quite pleasantly, while people outside struggle to keep their livelihoods. Indeed, it seems that one has to be somewhat out of one's mind to enjoy this resort, in the face of contemporary tragic events and rising anti-Semitism, but this does not change the fact that the main context for the second part is tourism and recreation.

As John Urry notes, the touristic gaze affects a phenomenological shift; as a tourist one adopts a certain mode of interpretation and a tendency to see objects and views as metonymic or metaphoric of local characteristics (1992: 172). Rather than looking at objects as trivial and mundane, the tourist seeks to ascribe meaning to them, or to find them unique and extraordinary. However, for the touristic gaze to function, one has to be away from one's habitual place of dwelling. The kind of tourism characteristic of the modern world is one that looks for truth and meaning, but tends to find them away from home (Dean MacCannell 1976: 3). The touristic gaze produces a whole discourse of truth and authenticity, as the search for the pure and the real is carried out in places that are either different, where the gaze seeks typical local characteristics, or pre-modern, where the gaze looks for the authentic or the exotic. Yash constructs Kazimierz as a

touristic site rather than simply return to his actual place of birth and experience the past directly and without mediation. From a homecomer he turns into a homeland or diaspora tourist.

The historical moment of Yash's return accounts for this phenomenological turn. This moment is characterized by two key changes: first, twenty years after immigrating to the new world, Yash and the pre-World War I Jewish immigrant generations had acquired enough economic stability and prosperity to allow them to go back to Europe as visitors. In the interwar period the difference in wealth between immigrants and their former communities in Eastern Europe grew considerably to the point that visitors to Eastern Europe sensed a sharp contrast between the standard of living on two sides of the Atlantic (Morawska 1993: 306). The amount of financial assistance sent from American *landsmanshaftn*<sup>30</sup> to their communities in Europe made the latter look "needy, hungry, barefoot, naked, and depressed" (305). At the same time, life in the USA appeared modern and advanced, while the former home acquired an image of backwardness and stagnation. While visiting Warsaw and his aunt's house Yash is appalled by the dirt and squalor of the place he used to frequent as a child and where he enjoyed vacations in the big city (172). At Buchlerner's resort he meets twelve delegates desperately begging for financial help from their well-to-do relatives in America, and in Kazimierz, despite the quaint touristic appearance, Jewish poverty is evident, and Yash and his companion easily pay the exorbitant prices set by a greedy restaurant owner especially for tourists (348). Indeed the growing gap between the standard of living in the old world and the new is a common theme in American Yiddish accounts of interwar trips to Poland<sup>31</sup>.

The second change is legal: in 1924 America closed its gates to mass immigration and cut the constant influx of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. By doing this, Europe and America were temporarily disconnected, and new arrivals could not bridge the gap between the

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<sup>30</sup> A Jewish benefit society or hometown society of immigrants from the same town or region.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Chune Gottesfeld's 1937 "Mein Reise iber Galizie" in which the financial gap between the former town dweller who returns from America for a home visit and his local friends is used to turn the plot into a comedy.

continents. With this restriction Eastern Europe started shifting permanently to the realm of memory. When the rift between the worlds was affected, the “old world” became a touristic destination for its former residents. An image of the remoteness of life in the home Country from America “was conveyed, in fact co-created, by the advertisements of immigrant travel agencies offering group tours to Eastern Europe as ‘exotic adventures’” (Morawska 1993:305). Truly, most American Jews still did not go to Poland as tourists at this period, but rather visited the old home to see family and to do relief work. However, an image of Eastern Europe as a touristic destination started to emerge as a result of its newly marketed image.

The significant affiliations between the immigrants in the USA and their former home in Eastern Europe were not created on a national but rather on a local level. The *Landsmanshaftn*, the societies for mutual help created in the new world, were organized according to the city or town of origin. As Rebacca Kobrin notes, “while states implicitly shaped immigrant Jews’ lives, loyalty to these political entities did not figure so large for East European Jews in the early twentieth century.” Instead, identity was designated by local loyalties (2010:9). The tendency, also reflected in the novel itself, to associate diasporism, and especially the Jewish Diaspora, with complete detachment from place is, therefore, misleading. While Jews as a frequently discriminated minority did not always feel allegiance to their country, they did form local communities and developed attachment to certain cities and geographic areas, that later served as a source of nostalgia. Moreover, these attachments served as an organizing code for associations for mutual help in the USA that also offered philanthropic aid to the Eastern European cities of origin. The diasporic relation to place is, therefore, complicated; diaspora does not necessarily represent the opposite pole to autochthonousness, although it is at odds with national affiliations.

Therefore, when Yash returns “home”, one question that is always implicit in the novel is whether this home should be seen on the private, the local-municipal or the national level, especially as Poland as a modern nation did not exist when Yash left it. Another reasonable

option is transnational, as in “eastern Europe”, and indeed Yash informs one of his interlocutors of his intention to visit the Soviet Union at some point in his trip. Another reason why the identification of home is important is because failing to recognize the relevant level of attachment obscures the fact that it exists at all. In visiting Kazimierz Yash may not be visiting his private or national home, but he does visit a place that stands for home in both a synecdochic and symbolic way.

Yash’s trip to Kazimierz can be examined through the Jewish ambivalence towards attachment to place. On the one hand, during his visit to Kazimierz, Yash attempts to represent loss metaphorically, in a decentered and symbolic way, in a place that is remote from his mother’s actual gravesite, and in a *shtetl* rather than his hometown, Lublin. On the other hand, his trip to Kazimierz should be seen in relation to the attempt of contemporary Polish-Jewish movements to assert Jewish rootedness in Poland by establishing an organic connection between the mostly urban Jews and the rural landscape.

The *landkentenish* movement, founded in 1926 was a Jewish society for exploring the countryside, established in response to the restriction of Jewish membership in the Polish Nature Society, the *Krajoznawstwo*. The latter was established during a period in which tourism all over the developed world was becoming democratized. At the same time in many countries there were attempts to lend significance to tourism that went beyond mere leisure. The Polish movement had a role in strengthening Polish nationalism after Poland regained its independence in 1918 (Samuel Kassov, in Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt and Alexandra Nocke, 2008:245). However, the Poles made no effort to preserve Jewish landmarks. Jewish intellectuals therefore realized that they should take the task on themselves. The Jewish Society brought together intellectuals and laypeople in an effort to study Jewish history, material culture, architecture and folklore through tourism, lectures, photography and recreation. Moreover, the society “sought to foster *doikayt* (hereness), a deep sense of rootedness to the Polish lands where Jews lived for hundreds of years”

(ibid:243) In the 1930s the novelist Michal Bursztyn became the society's main spokesman and argued that "studying and touring the Polish *shtetlekh* would bring urban Jews back to nature, would close the gap between the intellectuals and the folk, would counteract the geographical fragmentation of the Jews, and would even offer a secular alternative to the old religious faith" (Roskies 1999:55).

Much in the spirit of the *landkentenish* movement, by the mid 1930s, Kazimierz Dolny became a popular tourist destination for Poles and Polish Jews. It is therefore not surprising that Yash finds himself in a carriage going to the town, taking the place of other vacationers who were supposed to go and did not show up. After the carriage driver wakes him up by mistake, confusing him with someone else, Yash is introduced to Neifeld. Significantly, when they start a conversation, Yash introduces himself to Neifeld as a foreigner (338), and from this moment willingly accepts the status of a tourist, while Neifeld, a native Polish Jew who had been to Kazimierz many times, serves as a self-appointed guide. Visiting the old town Yash simultaneously feels foreignness and familiarity: the touristic gaze in his former home country is new to him, while at the same time, familiarity with Polish landscapes stems both from his unmediated gaze as a child growing up in Poland, and, at the same time, from his familiarity with tourism in his new home in the USA. It is evident from the start that Yash views Kazimierz as a symbolic, rather than a concrete landscape. Upon arriving he describes the town's houses, with a well in the middle, as familiar and iconic at the same time:

I looked at the old houses lining a very ordinary main street, a street that could have been somewhere in the Catskills. Our smiles, I hoped, would provide the necessary light to illuminate the odd shape of each house separately. They all looked as though they were holding each other up, the centripetal stresses all converging toward the pump which stood in the middle of them like some old weathered sundial – *though whether it was recording twelve forty five, or thirteen hundred years, who could say or possibly care?* (347, my emphasis)

Yash and Neifeld are two sophisticated urban intellectuals, visiting a quaint Jewish *shtetl* that is, at the same time, somewhat too naively and rustically touristic for their learned tastes. The

way they describe the town to the reader wavers, therefore, between fascination and irony.

Neifeld's analysis of the landscape is no less than a sophisticated ethnographic reading of the symbolic meanings of this place, much in line with the *landkentenish* attempt to find meaning in traditional Jewish life. This attempt to get close to the folk is deconstructed by the intellectual sophistication of the ethnographer, that only accentuates the gap between him/her and his/her object of inquiry. According to Neifeld's reading, the town's mythical timelessness is complemented by a symbolic geography that distinguishes between the earthly part of the town and its heavenly counterpart up the hill:

This grimy street, with its little shops and its few just men, embodies the longing for the top of the hill where the legend itself stands naked, as though shivering from the cold. I'll try to say it differently: up there it is always Sabbath, while down here it is a perpetual Friday evening, and the dark holiness is always just about to fall across the shutters of the shops, the lighted windows, the eyes of frightened little boys... Let me suggest a banal allegory: up there stand the ruins of the Realized Ideal, while down here a dark yearning wanders about. (354)

Typical for a tourist, one aspect of Yash's tour is a search for authenticity. But this authenticity is also complicated and problematized. The main heritage attraction visited by Yash and Neifeld offers relics related to a local legend. It tells the story of Esterke, a Jewish girl, who was either abducted or went willingly to live with the fourteenth century king Casimir the Great as either his lawful wife, or his mistress, depending on the version<sup>32</sup>. When Yash and Neifeld first see "Esterke's castle" across the Vistula, Yash expounds the legend of the Polish king who "carried the Jewish girl up the hill in his own arms," while "below stood Mordecai<sup>33</sup> scratching his head in helplessness" (349). Saying this, Yash refers us back to the biblical tale related in the scroll of Esther, and conflates the Polish and Jewish stories through the figure of Mordecai. The latter stands here as Esther's relative, but also for Kazimierz Jews as a whole. Later, when living in the palace, the Jewish girl can only look longingly at the Jewish town from afar. One night she

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<sup>32</sup> Because I will be discussing the meaning of this legend for the novel at length in chapter 4, I will only touch here upon its relevance to Yash's tour of the town.

<sup>33</sup> According to the Scroll of Esther, Mordecai is Esther's uncle. He raises her as she is an orphan.

writes a letter to the Jewish people, and ties it to the tail of a golden peacock. “But the king’s magician conjures up a terrible storm ... in the bad weather the golden peacock could not find its way to the Jewish people, and the letter got detached from its tail and was lost” (350).

The letter allegedly survived in a dark apartment, along with old Torah-scroll adornments that Esterke sent to her people in the town. When Yash and Neifeld visit this apartment, the keeper of the objects ushers them into a synagogue frequented by King Casimir. It is hard to miss Yash’s skeptical tone when he relates the keeper’s claims for the objects’ and the synagogue’s authenticity (350). By the same token, when later the keeper’s beautiful daughter interrupts the visit, the keeper informs the visitors that her own hand-made embroideries are more beautiful than the authentic objects, again downplaying the importance of authenticity (351).

The next stop of the tour further complicates the notion of authenticity that began to unfold in the old keeper’s house. Here Yash and Neifeld visit a local cobbler who has acquired a reputation as an amateur painter of scenes from the Jewish past. Yash is greatly moved by the pictures, since “the cobbler had seen and painted all this, but he had not lost the wonder of childhood vision” (352). The cobbler-painter’s works arouse in Yash reflections on “art and childhood, on the value of preserving one’s childhood vision as long as possible, and on art as the essence of the living present – anchored in memory” (ibid). It is clear that for Yash the ability of the real artist to recreate the past at every given moment in the present is much more meaningful than the ability of a historical, “authentic” relic to preserve it.

The limitations of authenticity and durability are reflected in human relations as well, as it turns out that closeness and friendship are a product of contemporary conditions rather than nostalgia and shared personal history. Yash’s encounter with his childhood friend, Farshtand, when visiting Kazimierz is an example of a failed attempt to revive the past. Yash recognizes his old friend while eating at a local family restaurant and invites him to join the table with Neifeld.

But his attempts to remind Farshtand of their old times and friendship in Lublin before the war are in vain. Farshtand is much more interested in selling his artworks to Yash, whom he perceives as an affluent American. Even when he finally remembers the old friendship and approaches Yash to apologize for his forgetfulness, it is still clear that his motivation is at least partly financial (361). This failed attempt to revive past friendship is sharply contrasted with the genuine and deep connection that Yash develops with Neifeld, although it is clear to both that very soon they will part ways. The friendship is not only genuine but also a unique celebration of childhood at middle age, a successful attempt to recreate one's childhood in the present rather than to cling nostalgically to past memories. At a certain point the two middle-aged men frolic like children (357). The emotional attachment that this sudden mischievous spirit creates is unmistakable, as Yash notes, "I felt as close to him as to a brother" (ibid).

The tour in Kazimierz culminates in a visit to Esterke's castle that concludes the spontaneous pilgrimage. Considered in light of the legend with which the castle is associated, it epitomizes the meaning of Yash's journey to Poland. In the legend the Jewish princess is exiled from her people to the palace and her attempt to reconnect with them is thwarted by supernatural forces. Similarly, before visiting the ruins of the palace, Neifeld tells Yash of the awful flooding of the Vistula that occurred the previous winter, the terrible signs of which are still visible (356). The castle is physically detached from the town by a water barrier that is sometimes unbridgeable, like a modern Sambation. It is first described as "a large house whose entire interior had been burned out" (349). It is hollow, with only its outside walls remaining. It is a historical relic but also a memorial and a witness to the antiquity of Jewish presence in the town. Being empty of its interior and of its former inhabitants it acquires a metaphoric quality and becomes what Handelman and Shamgar-Handelman termed "the presence of absence". As they suggest, there is "an inverse correlation between the presence of the dead within the land and the

absence of their symbolic representation on the surface of the land. The less the degree of presence the more elaborate the representation” (in Ben-Ari and Bilu 1997:110).

The empty castle stands for the absence of Esterke, who is not buried in the site. But the more emblematic absence signified here is the absence of Yash’s mother, and of any other Jewish body since within a diasporic memory Jewish presence, detached from a specific place or ground, can only be signified by a hollow memorial. It is ironic, then, that the *lankentenish*-style touristic exploration meant to find Jewish roots in Polish soil, encounters the limits of Jewish rootedness in the emptiness of the castle. At the same time, this emptiness allows the visitors to inhabit the castle and fill it with their own presence and meaning.

When the two men enter this empty space, Neifeld “touched and caressed the walls” (360) as if relating to a human body. The experience of occupying the interior of the castle is described as taking the point of view of the Jewish princess, and as symbolically occupying her body. It also means adopting her point of view, as Yash describes it:

We went inside. Through the apertures that had once been windows we could see the whole town below, with the tranquil Vistula, which looked so much smaller and more sluggish, almost ice-bound from up here... “*It was here every morning that Esther delighted in the Vistula,*” Neifeld observed, still caressing the peeling walls (361, my emphasis).

Throughout the novel Glatstein establishes an analogy between Yash’s mother and the biblical queen Esther, through their similar name. The analogy weaves his mother both into the story of the scroll, and into a modern rendition of a *Purim Shpil*, staged in a dream<sup>34</sup>. By adopting the princess’ point of view, Yash dons the figure of his dead mother and merges her perspective with his: they both look at the Jewish *shtetl* from afar and across an unbridgeable barrier. Yash is a returning immigrant who can touch his Eastern European past only from afar. The physical exile marked by dwelling in the palace is symbolic of the state of the immigrant, who is detached from

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<sup>34</sup> This analogy, which is established in more complicated ways than I could explain here, is analyzed in chapter 4.

the Jewish *shtetl* both spatially and temporally since the *shtetl*, though still living, is already marked as past.

While Yash does not describe the actual meeting with his mother and his departure from her deathbed, the visit to Kazimierz provides him with a rich opportunity to work through his relationship to his past and to his dead mother. He builds a place of memory by weaving personal memories into the collective memories of his people and by endowing local artifacts and places with meaning. This way the meaning of home stretches and includes not only the private home but Jewish Poland as well. However, apart from the vicarious return to the place of memory, the novel considers other, less material aspects of memory and commemoration which I discuss below.

### Memory through language

Language assumes central importance in the novel's consideration of alternatives to national, territorially based memory. Glatstein discusses the meaning of language as a carrier of memory in other genres he wrote at the same time. In all three genres he highlights the significance of orality and constantly attempts to dig through the written and formal language and trace its oral aspects. These aspects can be perceived as the carriers of memory.

Some meditations on the relationship between language and memory already appear in Glatstein's 1929 book, *Credos*, most famously in his poem "Turtledoves" (*Tirtle-toyben*). This short poem revolves around the sound of a pair of words, as a key to a whole world of childhood memories and associations. As in his later work, the phonetic aspect of the words is paramount, and the way the speaker listens to their sounds resembles the way a young child ponders a word heard for the first time. The same attempt to go back to the infantile fascination with language

and to record its acquisition characterizes the poems of the first section of “Exegyiddish”<sup>35</sup> (*Yidishtaytshn*), published around the time that the first Yash novel was published. The verb *taytshn*, meaning to translate, explain or interpret, alludes to the function of Yiddish as the vehicle of translating the biblical Hebrew to children in the *kheder*. However, the choice of *Yidishtaytsh* as opposed to *Ivri-taytsh* “points to Yiddish as a self-reliant modern language containing a variety of well-integrated components” (Zutra 2011: 50). The opening poems of *Yidishtaytshn* can be read as a description of maturation reflected through a psycho-linguistic process. This is a poet’s interpretation of infancy, rendered in a seemingly childish key (ibid: 59). In these poems Glatstein traces “the roots of human speech, exposing the arbitrary nature of the connection between sound and content, sign and signifier.” The book begins “with the primal stage of linguistic competence and it locates this stage in early childhood memories” (ibid: 57).

The attempt to record personal maturation through language, especially through its early stages of development, should be seen as an attempt not only to describe the maturation of the individual but also of the language itself, as a product of interpersonal relations. The relationship between language and memory here is dynamic: the most basic, phonetic aspect of language, the sound of single syllables, is a key to the earliest memories, and, at the same time, the deconstruction of language into its basic elements makes it memorable in the most intimate way, preceding conventional meaning.

In the novels Glatstein emphasizes the oral and auditory aspects of language. He also offers a thorough, if implicit, meditation on the relationship between orality and cultural memory. Moreover, the first part, especially the chapters that take place on the ship, is an attempt to represent and simulate spoken language and characterize people by their use of language. The first, and sometimes the only characterization that Yash gives of the people he meets is the way

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<sup>35</sup> The translators, Benjamin and Barbara Harshav, note that “Yiddishtaytshn” “means roughly explications in (or of) Yiddish”. Therefore in their translation they combined the word ‘exegesis’ and the word ‘Yiddish’.

they speak. These characterizations are sometimes very detailed, to the point that the person's way of speaking is almost more important than the meaning of his/her words. For example, of a Danish-American traveler from Schenectady he says:

My neighbor spoke a meticulous English, but substituted an *s* for the *sh* sound, like one of those fully baked Lithuanian Jews whose speech was also marked by the same transposition... He looked like a laborer and talked like an intellectual, choosing his words as if he were sorting chickpeas and rejecting the inferior ones. He would settle on the precise noun and then deck it out with an exact adjective and an elegant verb. His raspy voice seemed to emerge not from his throat but from some region of the heart. (p. 9).

The novel's first part is replete with such examples (see p. 29, 46, 85, 95, 97, among others). While the tone of voice and linguistic style serve to characterize specific individuals, they also serve to identify them as members of specific ethnic groups. The tendency to identify people by their speech is so marked that eventually we get the sense that, in Glatstein's worldview, language is the primary ethnic and national marker rather than territory. But this does not lead to a purist, semi-racist conception of ethnicity. In a world in which most people do not live where they were born, Glatstein traces the linguistic anxiety of the immigrant, of the Jew who would rather pass as non-Jew, of the successful Jewish-American doctor's garbled language or of a rising class of young Soviet workers who come to America for professional training.

The primacy given to oral language and its simulation links Glatstein to the long tradition of Yiddish literature. When, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Hebrew and Yiddish started to develop modern literatures, Yiddish had an advantage over Hebrew in simulating the spoken language of dialogues because of its historic function as language of daily conversation (Ken Frieden, 1995:7). Because life in the traditional Jewish town was hardly capable of supplying dramatic plots on the individual level, Yiddish writers resorted to character types who lay out their inner world in their own language. Monologue and dialogue therefore took center stage. In listening to people's monologues while simulating their lively talk Glatstein joins the tradition of Mendele and Shalom Aleichem who invented a fictional authorial representative in the text, a narrator,

whose task was “not only to introduce the scenes to the reader but, first of all, *to listen* to his characters’ dialogical monologues”. At the same time this narrator “assumed the persona of a semi-intellectual, semi-folksy storyteller, as the names of these narrator-authors suggest: “Mendele the Bookseller” (Mendele Moykher Sforim) and “How-Do-You-Do” (Sholem Aleichem)” (Benjamin Harshav, 1990:154, emphasis in text).

In contrast to Agnon, who renders the spoken language of all his interlocutors, i.e., Yiddish in his own language, Hebrew, Glatstein tries to simulate orality as much as possible rather than render it in a literary, formal style. The language of representation is Yiddish, which is not the native language of all speakers, but Glatstein does not hesitate to plant English, Hebrew, Russian and other foreign words, sometimes heavily and comically mispronounced, into his characters’ speech. This he does after he usually also notes what language the speaker himself preferred to use. He therefore takes the typical technique of nineteenth century authors a step further, to represent a polyglot Jewish culture that is not tied to the narrow world of the Jewish *shtetl*.

Glatstein’s foregrounding of conversation is most notable in the first part that describes the travel to Europe by ship. Although he has several conversations with non-Jewish people from the very first chapter, the second chapter presents his intentional search for Jewish interlocutors after hearing the news about the Night of Long Knives. Ruth Wisse highlights the centrality of dialogue, especially between two Jews, in modern Yiddish literature. This kind of dialog has the role of assuaging disjunction, uprootedness and Jewish suffering as a result of anti-Semitic onslaughts through the intimacy and identification between two Jewish strangers. As Wisse notes, dialogue is the Jewish way to come to terms with events that happen outside the Jewish realm, and give them a “controlled reinterpretation.” Moreover, the Jewish dialog continues the Talmudic tradition of debate between the two paradigmatic conversant, Reuben and Simon. This way, “the occurrence that triggered the arguments – pogroms, expulsions, new political and

ideological pressures – remain the background while the Jews assault one another on how these challenges had best be met”. (1984: 38). Indeed most of the conversations that follow on board the ship are between Yash and Jewish interlocutors. They address the difficulties of being Jewish in an increasingly anti-Semitic world, and the proper way to deal with them.

In the second novel orality is a central theme and is referred to explicitly through Steinman, a Jewish historian devoted to the preservation of Jewish, mainly Hasidic tales and oral tradition. Steinman’s life project should also be seen in light of the cultural project of the collection and preservation of Jewish folklore. This project was not unique to Yiddish culture. An all-European revival of folklore studies was rooted in nineteenth century romantic nationalism and the ideas of J.G. Herder on the *volk*. However, the Jewish case was unique in the sense that Jews had almost no peasantry and were mostly urban. This fact determined the kind of materials that Yiddish folklorists would collect and turn the emphasis from custom and ritual to oral folklore that would reflect the beauty of the Yiddish language (Itzik Nakhmen Gottesman 2003:xiii-xiv).

The intellectual roots of Jewish folklore studies and the cultural revolution it fostered are to be found in the activity of three Yiddish cultural leaders: the Yiddish writer Y.L. Peretz, the writer and folklorist S. Ansky and the historian Simon Dubnow (Kassov in Brauch, Lipphardt and Nocke 2008:251-252). When looking at the cultural legacy of each of these people, one can say that Steinman has something of each of them. Like Peretz he believes in the importance of popular culture as a source of modern, secular, national pride. His preoccupation with the collection of Hasidic tales resembles Peretz’s use of the Hasidic heritage to create a new, modernist and secular Jewish culture. Like Ansky he recognizes the enormous reservoir of spiritual energy that lay in Jewish *shtetlekh*. Like the historian Simon Dubnow he believes in the importance of history for national identity, and in the uniqueness of Jewish history. Like all three of them, he sees no contradiction between the Jewish and the universal.

While serving as the recorder of oral tradition in his professional life, in his leisure time Steinman acts as a secular leader, and master story-teller, who mesmerizes his listeners in the guest house with stories from his life. Moreover, in one of these stories, he presents himself as a modern male Scheherazade: eking out a living as a young rabbi in Germany, he manages to make an arrangement with an old Jewish widow. For a bedtime story, he can board in her attic and eat a thin warm dish. However, the stories he makes up do not always please the meticulous widow, and she sometimes deprives him of his daily meal. Later the same rationale for storytelling as a way to survive dominates Steinman's life: in the fictional present he manages to stay young and lively only as long as he tells his stories, keeping his vitality through the admiring attention of his listeners.

Steinman's professional commitment to recording Jewish oral tradition, rather than enjoying his reputation as a scholar of Polish history, is also a case in point. While talking to Yash during one of their walks in the woods he says, "I am a very ambitious man, but I never became a real writer – at best a teller of little stories about Hasidic courts and dynasties of rabbis" (323). Much like Walter Benjamin in "The Storyteller," Steinman associates oral storytelling with the continuity of human memory through the pedagogical value of the tales. He explains that Jewish people do not need pretentious and detached works of art written by individuals who are alienated from the lot of the common people, but "a warm, popular literature, full of moral tales, like in olden times. Because the moment we turn an illiterate into a reader, he moves on to Gentile culture. Those who come to us are starved for popular literature; what they need is a word to warm their bones, to move them to tears." (324).

Walter Benjamin associated the rise of the novel with the break in memory. The same sense of crisis of memory and tradition resulting from the break in oral storytelling or teaching plagues Glatstein in the novels, as is evident in a peculiar story, in the second part, about two

moribund people. The first, Reb<sup>36</sup> Levi, is the son of a wealthy and pious merchant. When his disease proves incurable, he returns from the little town where he served as a rabbi<sup>37</sup> to his parents' house in Lublin. There, from his sickbed, he teaches young Yash the great (oral) art of biblical commentary and exegesis. While Reb Levi interacts with famous rabbis, gentile scholars and prominent writers come to town for the purpose of conversing with the great sage and learning from him. At the same time (Glatstein makes the comparison very explicit) a wretched, crippled outcast is discovered in a wooden shed in the courtyard of the apartment house in which Yash lives. The man is named Zelig, and the children mockingly call him 'Reb Zelig.' This animal-like human being is not only paralyzed, but also mute, uttering horrible screams to express his great misery. Eventually the two men's simultaneous deaths make them analogous.

Describing their deaths, Yash says:

Reb Levi died the same day as Reb Zelig was found dead. It was clear to me that there was some connection between the mute animal body that had suffered all the tortures of the damned in the dark, stench-filled shed, and the soul which passed on in immaculate surroundings, with words on his lips that were repeated over and over in our city for a long time thereafter (315).

The sharp contrast between the two men, seemingly complete opposites in every respect, naturally arouses the expectation that Reb Levi will leave a great legacy after his death, while the wretched Reb Zelig will leave nothing at all. But Reb Levi's teachings cannot be rendered in a written form, and therefore his sagacity cannot be recovered from his writing. When an essay by Reb Levi is discovered in tiny handwriting several rabbis try to decipher it. But then

they declared with a sigh that instead of illuminating dark caverns, the essay only made the darkness thicker. They feared that Reb Levi had taken with him to his grave the radiance of his spoken words. His writings were no more

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<sup>36</sup> Reb or rebbe is the term used by Hasidim to refer to the leader of a Hasidic movement. A Rebbe is sometimes distinct from a 'Rav' who is an authoritative Halachic decider and leader of a Jewish, often Hasidic, community, in that a significant function of a Rav is to answer questions of Halacha (Jewish law). A Hasid has a Rebbe as a spiritual guide and sometimes an additional Rav for a ruling on an issue of Halacha, Jewish law.

<sup>37</sup> Rabbi (from the Hebrew *Rav*, meaning, great) is a teacher and a master of the Torah.

than the intellectual body of his words; they failed to convey his spirit and his light (315).

The difference between the two men is erased in death because, as it turns out, without a living body, the dead letter cannot convey any secret. The only thing remaining of Reb Levi is the memory of the words he uttered while still alive. Here it seems that for Glatstein, when a word is not spoken by living, breathing people, it dies, leaving no real memory behind. It is the sound of the word, as in the early childhood poems, that triggers memory, not a written sign. But the fact that Reb Levi is a Torah scholar and not a storyteller adds an important Jewish nuance to the question of orality vs. written texts. Both Benjamin's thesis in "The Storyteller" and Benedict Anderson's argument in "Imagined Communities" are premised on the assumption that the pre-modern tradition is mainly oral, i.e., that, because most people were illiterate, folk tradition could not circulate in written form. Since in the case of Jewish people this was not true, we can see through the story of Reb Levi that the case of Jewish folklore is partly a case of the consolidation of oral traditions that were never written, and partly an example of an on-going commentary and oral exegesis of a canonic written text. The relationship between orality and writing is more fluid. However, Glatstein assumes primacy to spoken language.

When considering language as a vehicle of diasporic memory, we finally have to account for the unique situation of the Yiddish language at the time the novels were written and its implications for the memory of the culture it conveys. Toward the end of part one, when visiting the bohemian Café Dome in Paris, Yash has a telling experience when a painter who lives in Palestine informs him that Bialik, the canonical Hebrew poet, has died. When Yash tries to commiserate and express his sorrow, the painter makes it clear that his own grief as someone who knew the poet personally and who lives in mandatory Palestine is incomparably deeper. Yash notes, "I was vanquished and capitulated completely, especially when the painter informed me that he owned considerable property in the Land of Israel" (141). The sarcastic tone is apparent here: through Yash, Glatstein is mocking the idea that the possession of real estate is the most

important aspect in constructing a national culture. The painter implies that, having no part in “the Land”, Yash’s diasporic memories of the national poet are naturally displaced and less authentic. Therefore, Yash has no choice but to dwell in them alone. Yet these memories are themselves memories of displacement. Yash recalls the banquet held to honor the great Hebrew poet at which Bialik, through careful and oblique argumentation, explained to the Yiddish writers that Hebrew should be the national language spoken in Palestine (141). When the Yiddish writers loudly protested, “he threatened us with the cruel inevitability of history on the march, as if to say: ‘Poor, little calves, you tremble. Alas, you don’t want to be led to slaughter. Nevertheless, slaughtered you will be’” (143).

In articles he published after the Holocaust, Glatstein made comments that further articulated his conception of spoken language as a vehicle of diasporic memory. In the article “On a Philologist Expedition,” written between 1945 and 1947, he lamented the fact that in America Yiddish had lost its liveliness, as evidenced by the language of the Jewish American newspapers. This is because “the people who once wanted to speak Yiddish, now want to forget Yiddish” (1947: 213). The result was that Yiddish had turned into a synthetic written language devoid of colloquial elements, full of anglicized words and structured by English syntax. This was part of a vicious cycle, since people who liked to speak Yiddish were influenced by the same newspaper language and started using it, too (ibid: 214). In other words, when a language develops only in print form, its death as a spoken language may be imminent. On the other hand, in an article from 1955, Glatstein was much more optimistic about the future of Yiddish culture in America and explicitly presented spoken language as a diasporic alternative to territory, or, rather, as a vehicle to transfer culture from one territory to the other. In the article Glatstein presented one Yiddish novelist’s claim that Yiddish literature was too obsessed with the memory of the *shtetl* to the point that it had no contemporary agenda. To this Glatstein answered:

[T]he Yiddish writer holds great loyalty to the town of his birth simply because this town is his refuge in an alien Jewish world that has started to forget the Yiddish language. Writing is language, human speech. The writer lives with the rhythm of his language. It is clear, then, that the Yiddish writer who holds deep within himself the treasures of language has to mine it together with people ... who have spoken the same language. (21-22)

In this article Glatstein argued that Yiddish culture had been in some cases successfully replanted in America. He mentioned Philip Rubin's memoir of his childhood in Burlington, Vermont. This town, according to the memoir, was no less Jewish than the *shtetlekh* in the Old World, simply because people in it spoke Yiddish, lulled their children to sleep by singing Yiddish lullabies, and ate Jewish food. Even new authentic folklore was created in this place – again, in Yiddish. Burlington, then, was not only a commemoration of a dead culture, a living museum. It was an authentic continuation of culture through language.

Glatstein's treatment of orality, language and memory in the Yash novels reflects the unique situation of Yiddish at the time of writing: it is a language that only started to be standardized for formal use towards the end of the nineteenth century, and already faced the danger of decline as a result of mass emigration to the new world and acculturation in Europe in the 1930s. The author's challenge in keeping the memory of the language is, therefore, augmented by the fact that oral language has such a large part in cultural heritage. At the same time, due to the diasporic condition of most Jews, Yiddish is still an important vehicle of cultural identity and cohesion. However, because of its diasporic connotations it is rejected by the Zionist movement as the new national language in Palestine. One of the main questions that the novels deal with is, therefore, how to remember oral aspects of language and culture and whether a language that was oral for most of its history can survive modernity and immigration.

### **The Role of Folklore and Hasidism in the Construction of Memory**

Glatstein elaborates his discussion of memory through his treatment of Hasidism, which takes center stage in the second part. In his use of Hasidism Glatstein reflects on his own personal

and artistic dilemmas, and in doing this he follows the tradition of earlier Jewish writers. By referring to Hasidism he also comments on the place of folk tradition and its salient oral aspect in structuring cultural memory. The desire to remember oral tradition, just like the desire to interrogate language as the basic constituent of subjectivity, resonates with Glatstein's modernist poetic. At the same time it involves him in a mission of witnessing and recording Jewish life in Poland. The role of Hasidism is complexly intertwined with the issues that I discussed in relation to language as well as with questions of authorship that I will discuss in chapter 4.

The second of the Yash novels was published in 1940, and three years later Glatstein published his fifth book of poems, "Songs of Remembrance" (*Gedenklider*), in which he included a five-poem cycle entitled "Nakhman of Bratslav to His Scribe" (*Der bratzlaver zu zein soifer*). Written around the same time as the novels, it succinctly reflects similar concerns and ideas about Hasidism. Janet Hadda argues that the figure of the Bratzlaver allowed Glatstein to deal with the longstanding conflict between the need to nurture his personal, aesthetic, poetical concerns and the need to respond to the urgent public matters during a time of national catastrophe (1980: 73). While I accept Hadda's observation, I also point out how Glatstein's use of Hasidism in the novel stresses its importance for the construction of Jewish diasporic memory. This memory is based, as Hadda suggested, on treating Hasidism as a way to deal with Jewish past while still maintaining poetic freedom.

Glatstein's portrayal of Hasidism should be understood in its historical contexts. One is the role that religion played in modernism. Despite the common idea that modernism reflected a crisis of religious faith, more recent work has acknowledged the importance of religiosity to modernist European and American literature (Shachar Pinsker 2011: 308). The modernist preoccupation with religion emphasized the private and personal character of the "religious experience" and a detachment from specific traditions and institutionalized religions (ibid: 311, 313).

A more specific context for Glatstein's use of Hasidic themes was the earlier turn of modernist Jewish writers towards folklore in general and Hasidism in particular. In fin-de-siècle Europe Jewish authors began to collect, re-write and compile rabbinic, mystical and Hasidic texts in an attempt to record Jewish oral traditions. This effort was typical of fin-de-siècle culture and emanated from various sources: national romanticism, the attempt of the Jewish intelligentsia to harness the folk and "folklore" to their ideologies, a new interest in the world of myth and occult, Nietzschean ideologies, as well as symbolist and decadent sensibilities (ibid: 276). Part of a general reinvention of tradition, the Jewish effort was marked by a unique sense of urgency and "the ever-present tension between a desire to break away from traditional religious Jewish identity altogether, and the impulse to create new Jewish culture that would serve a kind of 'substitute' for it" (ibid).

Authors' attraction to Hasidism was only obliquely related to its unique ideas and practices. The Hasidic tradition provided the symbolist and neo-romantic elements sought by contemporary Jewish writers as well as alternative paths for mainstream, orthodox Judaism (ibid: 290). Hasidism was portrayed "as a humanistic, philosophical movement that rejoiced in worship of God and at the same time as a force within Judaism that connected with the mystical and the antinomian" (290). Another important reason for the attraction to Hasidism was the centrality of storytelling and narrative to the movement. Its founder, Rabbi Yisroel Ben Eliezer, known as the Ba'al Shem Tov, and his great-grandson, Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav, were known as master storytellers. In 1908, at the Chernowitz conference, Y. L. Peretz identified Hasidic tales as the origin of Yiddish literature and Reb Nachman of Bratzlav as its first poet (ibid: 298). This descent was accepted and is reflected in anthologies of Yiddish literature to this day<sup>38</sup>. But when Hasidic tales were published in a revised and renewed form, the new versions often reflected the author's

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Roskies 1995.

poetics and authorial persona as well as his aesthetic and religious concerns rather than Hasidic credo. (ibid: 303).

Glatstein presents Hasidism in the second part through two characters Yash meets in Buchlerner's resort: the elderly historian, Steinman, and the young Hasid, never mentioned by name. This young Hasid is presented as the youngest companion in the Hasidic rabbi's retinue, which frequents the resort annually. The two characters are opposites: Steinman is a recorder of Hasidic tradition. He retells Hasidic stories, which the young Hasid describes as "stories of no great consequence" (284). The young Hasid, on the other hand, is full of original ideas about how to transform and return Hasidism to its roots as a creative and lively force in Judaism. Despite his incessant stream of creative suggestions, Steinman finds him "a terrible bore" (194).

Steinman is a secular rebbe. He is revered by a group of people who see him as their spiritual leader. He is also, as noted above, a master storyteller. This fact is important not only in the context of language and oral culture, but also in the context of Hasidism as a movement that uses storytelling as one of its main methods of teaching (Elior 1999: 36,88, 100). Steinman describes himself as a heterodox Hasid. He says to Yash: "I have a Hasidic soul myself, I am a hundred percent Hasid. But there is no saintly rabbi for me to make my pilgrimage to" (196). His life story is somewhat similar to the hagiography of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism (ibid: 91,92): he describes himself as the descendant of prominent rabbis, and as someone who grew up in the woods, close to nature and away from the communal Jewish school system. But Steinman chose not to fulfill his religious scholarly potential, and instead became a Zionist delegate, a folklorist, and a servant of the community. Steinman embodies the conflict between the need to record the past (and the need of the author himself to preserve it) and the inability to record the most important parts of the past – those which are ephemeral and only can be passed

down by word of mouth<sup>39</sup>. In this context Hasidism serves as a link to the personal as well as to the communal past, as a mystical way to reconnect with both, and as a way to reflect on Glatstein's own modernist aesthetics.

In addition to telling stories, Steinman constantly hums a tune or a wordless melody, a *nigun*. When we first meet him, at the beginning of the second part, he is presiding over a secular version of a Hasidic *tish*<sup>40</sup> and vows to sing praise to the Lord even when in the utmost distress (185). At a certain point he starts humming to himself a melody that soon puts all the guests sitting at the table into a spiritual trance (187).<sup>41</sup> When Yash later meets Steinman on top of the nearby mountain and has a long talk with him, Steinman again closes his eyes and hums a little tune, and later comments, "Ah, a tune. A tune solves everything, even the toughest problems. There were among the rabbis inarticulate souls who couldn't speak to God through the Torah, so they spoke to Him through melody" (218). Glatstein, through Steinman, refers here to well-known Hasidic lore. But what is important is that he again associates true piety with the most oral, wordless expression – the melody.

Later, when Yash goes to Kazimierz with his companion, Neifeld, for the day, he makes another comment on the *nigun* motif, from a different perspective. When the carriage enters the woods, Neifeld alerts Yash to the singing of the nightingale, and the passengers and the driver stop to hear this wonder. The long description of this birdsong shows its special significance for the author, and I only quote part of a longer passage:

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<sup>39</sup> Hasidism has its own practice of recording the teachings of the great rabbis, and part of the rabbis also put their own teachings in writing. However, storytelling is one important aspect of Hasidic lore, and was also associated with the personality of the Ba'al Shem Tov (Rachel Elijor 1999: 88, 100). It was only in later generations that legends ascribed to him were put in writing.

<sup>40</sup> A *tish* (literally, "table") is a gathering of Hasidim around their Rebbe. It may consist of speeches on Torah subjects, singing of melodies known as *niggunim* (singular *niggun*) and *zemirot* ("hymns"), with refreshments being served.

<sup>41</sup> The translation alternately uses the words tune, melody and singing, while in the Yiddish text we find *nigun*, *gezang* and *zemer'l*.

Crisply it gave us a few short trills, repeated as though the singer wanted to stress the theme, but soon it went on to elaborate on the theme in lengthy embellishments. I was struck by the utterly unsentimental quality of the song. How did so cerebral an artist ever come to be praised by sentimental poets? The song of this nightingale was a recitative with many rests; each phrase was longer and more complicated than the previous one, and after each phrase the singer stopped to catch its musical breath or, perhaps, to study the impression it had just made. (343)

The long, accurate description and Yash's keen awareness of it, suggests an ars-poetic meditation on the desired qualities of poetry in general. The search for a pure, unsentimental expression reads like an artistic credo<sup>42</sup>. After the bird finishes, the driver gives the melody a pietistic interpretation, saying: "It was a nice song of praise to the Creator of the world", (344) and later compares the bird to an exceptional cantor named Slowik (Polish for nightingale) who impressed him greatly as a child. The driver then sings quietly to himself the Rosh Hashana pieces the cantor used to sing, a nostalgic moment that brings him to tears and connects modernist poetics, Jewish art and memory (345). The explicit association of the nightingale's song with Hasidic tradition occurs on the way back from Kazimierz, when the same driver starts singing a Hasidic song and Yash comments, "The driver had heard the song from his father, who literally bought it for hard cash from the Rabbi of Radzin." (364). The story of the melody purchased for money is a common motif in Hasidic tales. This tale also shows that a wordless melody is the oral gist of authentic Jewish culture. The fact that Yash finds great beauty in a similar wordless tune, sung by a bird, weaves his own poetry into the fabric of Hasidic lore. It refers us back to his modernist poetic attempt to explore the auditory aspects of language, and his fascination with the oral and its live performance.

Finally, the centrality of oral, Hasidic folklore is demonstrated when Steinman, on his deathbed in Buchlerner's resort, asks his friends who stand around his bed, to sing a nigun (370). By making this request, he brings the plot a full circle, since the book opens with the group

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<sup>42</sup> Dan Miron makes a similar observation in his afterword to the translation of the second volume (2006:285-6).

chanting a *nigun* around the Sabbath table. The historian's choice of farewell is significant; the same person who earlier lectured Yash about the legacy he wanted to bequeath to the coming generations now wants to chant a nigun. He can hardly talk, and moves his lips to utter the one last, almost nonexistent sound of a dying person, which is also the "languishing trace of a forgotten language". When Yash conveys his wish to the rest, he says "I transmitted the message to the others, as if what I had to say was beyond comprehension, some text laboriously translated from a long-forgotten language (370). Comparing this scene of dying to that of Rabbi Levi we realize that a legacy cannot be conveyed in writing, but only through the lively, vibrant expressions of living people.

Through the other Hasidic character in the novel, the young son of the Hasidic rabbi, Glatstein deals with the future-oriented, messianic aspect of Jewish history. Like Steinman, the young Hasid is the descendant of a respectable Hasidic family, and he follows the model of the legendary tzadik, the Ba'al Shem Tov, as he is described in hagiographic literature: he walks alone in the woods and meditates (285), he fasts and tries to tame his corporeal needs (287) and, above all, he wants to innovate and revive Jewish thought (286). When his older brother suggests reciting Psalms as a way to help the dying Steinman, the young Hasid expresses his incredulity in the power of canonic prayer books and instead demands to recite a personal prayer that will express his own, individual plight (367). The young Hasid illuminates the messianic aspect of Hasidism through his visions as well as his belief that he is the chosen one. He tells Yash about meeting the two false messiahs, Sabbatai Zvi<sup>43</sup> and Jacob Frank<sup>44</sup>, on his way home one evening in the dusk of the woods. His conversation with the two figures reflects his doubts about

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<sup>43</sup> Sabbatai Zvi, 1626-1676 was a Sephardic Rabbi and kabbalist, who claimed to be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. He was the founder of the Jewish Sabbatian movement.

<sup>44</sup> Jacob Frank, 1726-1791, an 18<sup>th</sup> century Jewish religious leader, who claimed to be the re-incarnation of Sabbatai Zvi and of the biblical patriarch, Jacob. The Jewish authorities in Poland excommunicated Frank and his followers due to his heretical doctrines.

questions of belief and redemption and his acknowledgement that false messiahs are such only in the eyes of the beholder (289-291)<sup>45</sup>.

The young Hasid, who perceives himself as a future redeemer, presents himself as the biblical Joseph. The plight of local Polish Jews and their need for some kind of redemption is very clearly conveyed in the novel by the twelve delegates who approach Yash during his stay at the guesthouse. After the long dream that Yash dreamed when lying on top of the hill in the resort town, he remembered the twelve people who came and asked him to plead with their relatives in America for help. In this capacity, Yash serves as a Joseph figure himself, a messenger from the land of plenty who is perceived to be able to redeem his brothers. In this sense, Yash and the young Hasid are also analogous. The Hasid is the youngest brother in his family, and he feels greatly envied by his older brother. But, as he tells Yash on the day before Yash leaves Poland, “if you ever come back here in later years [...] the Jewish world will resound with my fame.” In a clear reference to the biblical Joseph he says: “Yes, even my grudging brother... even he will have to come and bow to me. Sweet, sweet, is the dream of Joseph – all the others will cross my threshold with their heads held high, but he will have to bow and pay homage before me” (374).

As Avraham Noverstern notes, Glatstein’s attitude towards the messianic in Yiddish literature was very sober, ironic and cynical, a stance that is also manifest in some of his poems (2003: 264). In the Yash novels, Yash is impressed by the young Hasid’s will to live (289) but otherwise doesn’t register his impression or evaluation of the boy’s many ideas and allegedly original contributions. But the character appears, just like Steinman, to be the other half of the

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<sup>45</sup> As Avraham Noverstern notes, messianic figures of Jewish history were very popular in all genres of Yiddish culture, especially during the 1920s, and Sabbatai Zvi and Jacob Frank were the most popular of all. They featured both in high brow literature and in popular novels that were serialized in newspapers (2003: 253). The young Hasid’s reference to Sabbatai Zvi and his preoccupation with questions of holiness and sexuality echoes the main male character in Ansky’s play, *The Dybbuk*. There, Khonen reveals his Sabbatian agenda when touching upon the issue of sexuality (Petrovsky-Shtern in Safran and Zipperstein 2006:100). Khonen’s dybbuk is imbued with a Sabbatian worldview, reflecting the ambivalent, suspicious attitude toward Kabbalism and Hasidism at the time the play was written. Glatstein, on the other hand, credits false messiahs with good intentions, and is very much aware that their popularity is the result of Jewish plight.

dilemma facing Yash, or another aspect of Yash's personality: like Steinman, Yash has to accept public responsibility and write the story of his people but, like the young Hasid, he wants to be a young, brilliant innovator and artist, at least partly free of the burden of tradition. The young Hasid is the fresh, lively voice of a vibrant culture, while Steinman acknowledges that he can only render this culture in written form as a witness, rather than as an actor. In his position as author Yash wants to juggle both roles.

In the Yash novels Glatstein reflects the unique place that folklore and Hasidism took in the first decades of the twentieth century: They served as an alternative way to construct Jewish past at a time that modernity pushes away traditional culture. Hasidism served as a source of inspiration and as an emblem of the more creative and heterodox parts of Jewish tradition. It was perceived as the most genuine expression of the people at a time that Jewish intellectuals sought ways to reclaim their Jewish identity. As such, it served as a source for modernist Jewish art.

## Conclusion

The Yash novels present the question of Jewish memory in a time of historical upheavals, crisis and breakdown of culture and tradition. In the face of fascism and racism on the one hand, and Zionist nationalism on the other, Glatstein offers a fluid relation between memory and place, and explores ways to commemorate a diasporic culture. In this context he asks how memory can produce a record of a folk culture that is, itself, largely oral. His emphasis on orality and live performance and his destabilization of place and origin run against the grain of national definition of home and of heritage. Eventually, home is displaced, but representations of home proliferate as a result of the many meanings given to it, part of which are non material. Home is family, town and country, but it is also language and culture, and therefore it is not necessarily tied to place.

Glatstein asks the question of the relation of Jewish memory to place. While doing this he explores old and new ways of relating to place, from traditional grave sites, to symbolic

memorials, to tourism. In the absence of a fixed relation to place, and in the absence of inherently sacred spaces, Glatstein stresses the constructed, narrated and historic meaning of different places for a diasporic culture that is dynamic and is animated by repeated migrations. Using Jewish folklore, especially hasidic traditions, Glatstein looks at the ways that culture can be remembered in the transition from the traditional world to modernity.

## Chapter 3

### A Guest for the Night and the Anxiety of Modern Authorship

S. Y. Agnon's "A Guest for the Night" is both a novel dealing with homecoming and a detailed ars-poetic meditation on authorship that unfolds during a home visit. Agnon sees this mid-life journey to his hometown as an opportunity to reflect on his role as an author in relation to both literary traditions and broader contemporary political-national questions. The novel presents several models of authorship and implicitly evaluates the act of writing a novel against them. This evaluation reveals the tensions and anxieties of an author, who stands between the traditional and the modern world, between the diasporic Jewish world and Zionist national revival. Unfolding the narrative techniques that Agnon uses, this chapter explores how he examines the psychological dilemmas of the modern Jewish author and the roots of his authorial anxiety.

Scholars have recognized the ars-poetic aspect of Agnon's fiction<sup>46</sup>. Questions of authorship in his writing have also been discussed, but mostly in relation to other ars-poetic works rather than AGN<sup>47</sup>. My focus on Agnon's discussion of authorship in this chapter will modify the hitherto general statements that apply to his oeuvre. My analysis starts from the ideal model of authorship presented in the novel and goes on to deal with authorship in the real, post-WWI world; within the latter the analysis follows the process of creation from the psychological difficulties entailed in being a secular author to a discussion of the end product, examining the problematic nature of this product. I argue that Agnon constructs nation building and secular authorship as analogous and examine the repercussions of this analogy.

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<sup>46</sup> See, e.g., Michal Arbel, 2006 and Malkah Shaked, 1994.

<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., Hagby, Yaniv 2007 and Cohen Uri, 2006.

## The traditional concept of authorship: A Guest for the Night as a turning point

Agnon's concept of authorship in AGN is related to its place in his entire oeuvre. Many critics see AGN as a turning point in Agnon's career. Most notably, Dan Miron contextualized AGN within Agnon's decision to turn from different minor genres to novel writing (1995 pp. 307-343). In his discussion of Agnon's struggle with novelistic writing, Miron argues that this genre was initially alien and problematic for the writer. Agnon turned to novel-writing relatively late in his career, struggled with concluding at least two of his major novels and wrote one long epic narrative as a sequence of chronicles, i.e., as a semi-documentary narrative<sup>48</sup>. Agnon began his career using more traditional Jewish genres such as the chronicle, the community account (*Pinkas*), and the *midrash*, a Jewish biblical exegesis that takes the form of a short story. Initially he saw the novel as alien to his writing and foreign to Jewish tradition, since it epitomized the secular, humanistic, European culture. The modern novel presents a self-directed protagonist who looks for personal meaning and uses erotic love as a way to find happiness and self-fulfillment. Agnon, with his more traditional Jewish world-view, was suspicious of these values. He did not share the novel's optimism and belief in self-fashioned lives and in man's ability to transform history independent of God's will (*ibid*).

Agnon's recoil from novelistic writing was also informed by the turn-of-the-century crisis of the novel in Western literature and the decline of the genre in Hebrew literature. His eventual decision to employ this genre after World War I was related, in turn, to this genre's renewed flourishing at the time of consolidation of a literary center in Palestine, in the days of the third *alyiah* (*ibid*: 327). The renewed popularity of the genre was related to the emerging project of nation building which, with its forward-looking, active and optimistic aspects, was

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<sup>48</sup> Miron refers here to *Bitzror Ha'Chayim*, a work that was completely destroyed in the burning of Agnon's house in Bad Homburg.

congruent with and conducive to novel writing. Agnon's adoption of the genre became a constant struggle to adapt it to Jewish literary traditions as well as to transform these traditions to accommodate the genre. Thus, as Miron notes, Agnon's first major work, "The Bridal Canopy" (1931), a picaresque novel, contradicts many of the conventions of the genre, and is closer to early modern novelistic writing, such as "Don Quixote".

AGN is Agnon's second novel. I suggest that AGN, and more specifically the drama of authorship that it unfolds, are part of Agnon's move from traditional Jewish genres to purely novelistic writing. It can be viewed as the drama of authorial transformation in Agnon's work: from writing chronicles and *pinkasim* to novelistic writing, from writing about the past to writing about the present and the future, and from traditional Jewish writing to integration into the Zionist national canon, with all the anxieties and deep doubts that this involved. The fact that Agnon wrote AGN while struggling with "Only Yesterday" (1945) is significant for reading the former. "Only Yesterday" describes the immigration of a Jewish Galician young man, Isaac Kummer, to Palestine in the days of the second *Alyiah*, his failure to become a pioneer, and his eventual settlement in Jerusalem after a period of soul searching. It ends with Isaac's horrendous, inexplicable death after being bitten by a rabid dog. Isaac Kummer's death expresses Agnon's disbelief in the feasibility of man-made redemption and his fear of the horror it might yield (ibid: 334). However, this disbelief is not revealed for the first time in "Only Yesterday" but is clearly anticipated in AGN. In a way AGN is a literary account of the authorial difficulties that were involved in writing "Only Yesterday", the author's first Zionist, future-oriented novel. AGN is also Agnon's farewell to his old home, as well as a consideration, from a safe distance, of the risks, difficulties, and personal toll of writing the Zionist epos.

AGN reflects Agnon's ambivalence toward the Zionist movement because of its secular nature. However, any attempt to narrate this revolution, especially by writing a novel,

inevitably implicates its author in a no less secular endeavor. Thus, the main authorial question presented in the novel is whether the author can complete his artistic mission without turning to God or to pietistic literature; whether he can be, or wants to be, the secular author who writes the story of the same national project about which he is so ambivalent. The novel presents an author who, on the one hand shares Zionist ideologies, and on the other hand feels a deep chasm between the traditional world of the Jewish Diaspora and the Zionist project of modern nation building. This feeling translates into an authorial position that is self contradictory.

### **The Model of Ideal Authorship**

Agnon's ambivalence towards novelistic writing has its roots in literary and social developments at the turn of the century: the growing secularism within the Jewish world and the general cultural transition from romanticism to modernism (Arbel 2006: 9). At the beginning of his career, Agnon was influenced by romantic models that reflected a secular worldview. However, unlike other writers of the same period, who formed a relatively clear secular position toward contemporary questions and debates, Agnon refused to alienate himself from his traditional roots. In *AGN* he presents his critique of romantic ideas of authorship, a critique that stems from tradition but paradoxically points forward toward modernist notions.

In her seminal work on Agnon's authorship, Malkah Shaked discusses two models of authorship in two of Agnon's early short stories, *Agunot* ("Forsaken Wives") and *Agadat HaSofer* ("The Legend of the Scribe"), both ars poetic pieces that present traditionally religious artisans as their protagonists. According to Shaked, the classic model of authorship presents writing as a reiteration, even a straight reproduction, of sacred writings. In this model the writer is a scribe, who toils to produce a perfect copy of the sacred original, while effacing his own idiosyncratic contribution (1994: 296). The romantic/modernist model, views writing as the expression of the

author's personality and as the result of artistic inspiration. Shaked chooses to conflate romanticism and modernism in a way that I find problematic, especially with regard to Agnon. Moreover, in applying Shaked's observations to AGN they have to be nuanced. In this novel the ars poetic discussion deals with more than one kind of writing and dissolves the initial theoretical dichotomy between classic and romantic.

In his survey of conceptions of authorship in Western history, Sean Burke, like Shaked, offers the initial distinction between the imitative (mimetic) and the inspirational model of authorship but reminds us that both deny the author any agency. The mimetic model sees the artist as "an entirely receptive subject through whom impersonal truth is registered" (1995: 6); the artist is a copyist, working within convention and is sometimes seen as a craftsperson. The inspirational model, on the other hand, can be traced back to Hellenic culture and to the idea of the Muse, a source of artistic inspiration for whom the poet "was merely messenger, avatar or mouthpiece" (ibid: 5). Both models originate in ancient cultures, thus both are literally classic. Romanticism appears as the watershed in the history of authorship due to its new conception of the source of inspiration; although the classic inspirational model did not exclude artistic inspiration, this inspiration was ascribed either to God or to another kind of alterity. In Romanticism, "the author is no longer a privileged reader of the Divine script in nature, nor an elect who inspirationally mimes the Divine discourse, but is now seen as *imitating the act of creation itself*" (ibid: xxii, my emphasis). Romanticism was especially audacious in its insistence on keeping the idea of inspiration while at the same time ascribing its source to the artist himself/herself.

In AGN Agnon problematizes the difference between the classic and romantic models of writing, and between art and craft in their modern senses. Agnon writes very clearly about inspiration precisely when he is using a pre-modern model of authorship: He highlights divine inspiration and the role of the writer as a godly messenger. Rather than concentrate on the

difference between art and craftsmanship, between copying and original creation, he is concerned, sometimes to the point of obsession, with the question of the source of authority (and authorship). The romantic model arouses his anxiety with its conception of creation revolving around the artist's ability to imitate the act of God, or at least with his presumption to do so. The gender of the artist/creator is male, as this model is inherently limited to male authorship.

The blurring of distinctions between romantic and classic models of writing is discernible in the narrator of AGN's comments on the book "The Hands of Moses". This book, presented to the narrator as an original manuscript by a great Torah scholar, turns out to be the work of an amanuensis (397). Still, taking the book in his hands, the narrator admires its penmanship, which in turn reminds him of the way his father taught him how to write by dictating to him verses from the Torah that start with letters that spell his given name, Shmuel (398). The remembered scene is that of a young disciple, a son, following the directions of his father. Yet, out of this filial obedience emerges his first, given name, the name that makes him an individual (see also Anne Golomb-Hoffman 1991:94).

In AGN the narrator famously apologizes for the audacity of calling himself a writer, saying: "Unintentionally, I have mentioned that I am a writer. Originally, the word denoted the scribe, who wrote the words of the Torah. But since everyone who engages in the craft of writing is called a writer, I am not afraid of arrogance in calling myself a writer." (448) The art of the Torah scribe is implicitly superior to the art of the modern writer. Or, perhaps, the former can give birth to the latter. The sacredness of penmanship stems from the unique status of Hebrew letters in Kabbalist thought, in which they are considered a part of divine creation, as the narrator of AGN points out: "The Holy One, blessed be He, made a covenant with all that had been created since the first six days, that it should not change its function... and the forms of the letters and the writing of God on the Tablets were among the things that were

created in the beginning.” (449) Penmanship is a prime example of the classic-mimetic conception of authorship, with the writer attempting to imitate the godly model while completely erasing his individual style, yet still his individuality emerges through spelling his first name. The same Kabbalist notions motivate Agnon to put more value on traditional authorship than on the modern one. In many cases he adopted the Kabbalist idea that the Hebrew language was the tool used by God to create the world (Hagby 2007: 31). The epitome of sacred writing, according to this model, is Torah writing and the art of the Jewish scribe.

The narrator’s self-concept as an artist emerges in his constant evaluation of his profession, proficiency and position compared to different kinds of artisans, in line with the classic-mimetic model. Although it is not explicitly stated, when considering the good craftsman, the narrator envies his proficiency (see, for example p. 59). In one place he describes the art of the locksmith in a way that is analogous to the creation of man. He says:

The locksmith kept his promise and made me a key. I took the key and said: Yesterday you were a lump of iron; the craftsman cast his eyes upon you and made you into a precious thing. Similarly, I said to myself: Yesterday you were a lump of flesh; now the *Beit Midrash* has been opened to you, and you have become a man. (108)

Anne Golomb Hoffman highlights the fact that in this novel craftsmanship is metaphorically related to self-fashioning rather than simply to an act of physical creation (1991: 90). Moreover, the objects created – whether an overcoat, in the case of the tailor, or a lock in the case of the locksmith – have symbolic significance and are judged by their wholeness. Similarly, through the discussion of craftsmanship, the narrator as author evaluates his ability to author anything worthy, whole and viable.

Ideal authorship is related in this novel to the divine source. Agnon implicitly points to the key paradox inherent in this conception: if the only possible ideal source is the Torah, then the only possible writing of real worth is exegetical and religious. On the other hand, direct

contact with God clearly means death. Therefore, the only possible good work of art is referential and exegetical. The formative event of traditional Jewish culture, the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai – an ecstatic, singular event – cannot and must not be replicated. This event does not allow any innovation or new interpretation and thus produces a tension between the need to expand and interpret tradition, which necessarily involves some innovation, and the need to preserve it.

Eventually, since innovation is deliberately discouraged in the traditional worldview that Agnon shares, we get a concept of the work of art as revolving around canonical texts, using them, alluding to them, citing them, etc. This is a thoroughly inter-textual view of art inherently embedded within discourse. For Agnon the goal of the artist is the good imitation, while the bad imitation is the lot of the plagiarist. He explicitly writes in the novel that the artist is like “a child who dips his pen in ink and writes what his master dictates. So long as his master’s writing lies before him, his writing is beautiful, but when his master’s writing is taken away, or when he changes it, it is not beautiful.” (AGN 449)

Agnon reconciles the contradictions and disparities in his own concept of authorship by repeatedly using the figure of Moses, especially in his role as the author/first scribe of the Torah. Moses is the epitome of the ideal author because he is both devout and “original”, i.e., he can communicate directly with the only origin; God. As Anne Golomb Hoffman notes regarding AGN, “Moses constitutes something of a meeting ground for the human and the divine, uniting an ideal of creativity and of tradition in a writing that is no longer just writing.” (1991: 98) For Agnon, Moses is the supreme artist, since his writing reconciles the contradiction that lesser artists face, given that God is the supreme source of inspiration and direct contact with Him is impossible. This contradiction necessarily renders all other writers plagiarists and/or interpreters.

The novel offers a clear dichotomy between the work of art that has an identifiable source or origin within Jewish traditional discourse (and is, thus, not “original”) and the work of art that has no identifiable source or its origin is not identifiable, but develops, at least seemingly, out of nothing. For Agnon, the romantic model is deeply suspect and ridden with anxiety, both because it depicts the work of art as emerging from individual consciousness rather than within cultural discourse, and because it traces its origin to the artist’s psyche and not to divine inspiration. This is a dangerous aberration. At the same time, other projects that involve new creations, even if they are not artistic, are judged by the same criteria.

Analogous to his attitude toward artistic creation is the narrator’s deep suspicion toward the Zionist movement, and especially toward the third wave of immigration to Palestine, represented in the novel by Yeruham Freeman, a former pioneer. The unacceptable or suspect aspect of Yeruham’s generation for the narrator is its different, nontraditional relation to the world of Jewish texts. In their first meeting Yeruham Freeman reminds the narrator of his youthful “Devotion Faithful unto Death,” an eloquent Zionist poem. He then blames the influence of this poem and its author for his failed attempt to establish a new life in Palestine. In his response to Yeruham the narrator defends himself:

You condemn me because I praised the Land of Israel. Was I the first to do so? Was I the only one to do so? There is not a single generation that did not sing the praises of the Land of Israel... But all the generations that lived before us found in the Land what they found in the school books; so they loved the Land and loved the books that sang its praises. But you and your comrades sought in the Land not what your forefathers sought, and not what the books tell of it, and not the Land as it is, but a Land such as you demand, and that is why the Land did not tolerate you. “A land which the Lord thy God demandeth always,” say the Scriptures – not as you demand it, and not as your comrades demand it, but as the Lord your God demands it. (90)

The demand to relate to the divine source and the condemnation of the secular, romantic concept of originality tie together authorship and nationalism, as Agnon’s relation to both is similar. Just as the work of art that is not embedded in discourse is an aberration, the Zionist audacity to immigrate to Palestine without relating to earlier Jewish texts and traditions

is no less than outrageous. Not the Zionist idea itself is objectionable, but the way it is carried out without sufficient regard to Jewish tradition and to the Jewish God, as discussed in chapter 1.

The disparity between ideal authorship according to Agnon and the actual authorship that he performs in the novel is precisely the heart of the personal dilemma of authorship in AGN. Turning from the description of the ideal model to the actual performance of authorship, and its product, will further illuminate this dilemma.

## **Pioneers, Authors, Dummies: the construction of Authorship through the male body**

### **Restoration vs. Creation**

Agnon presents a model of ideal authorship in the novel through different kinds of artisans, Talmudic legends, as well as personal memories and statements of the narrator. At the same time, Agnon performs a different kind of authorship in writing a modern novel. The narrator's account of this performance and of the contradiction inherent in it is much more implicit. The answers to most questions about the actual authorial persona can be gleaned through indirect means of textual analysis.

The first question about authorship in this novel concerns the authorial purpose of the guest's visit. If the guest is a writer, what kind of narrative or product does he wish to produce as a result of his visit and for what purposes? Most Agnon scholarship has long maintained that the main purpose of the visit, whether pre-meditated or unfolding during the visit, is restoration, or *tikkun*, a Kabbalistic term with deeper resonance. The term first appeared in the *Zohar* but was fully developed as part of a comprehensive myth of creation in the Lurianic *Kabbalah* of 16<sup>th</sup> century Safed. According to the cosmogony of the Safed circle, the world was created by pouring the divine essence into vessels (*sefirot*). This intensive action broke the vessels, causing their shards to fall down and the inner essence to ascend and return to its divine source. Since then, the

purpose of creation and the mission of human beings has been *tikkun*, or restoration, which will release the captive divine sparks remaining in the world and lift them back up to their divine source (Dan 2007: 78-80).

In interpreting the novel, critics have used the term *tikkun* to refer to the guest's attempt to restore life in the *shtetl*, thus implicitly pointing to the visit's restorative nature. The kabbalist myth of restoration was created after the destruction of the great Jewish center in the Iberian Peninsula in 1492 and from the start it was imbued with nationalist meaning as it helped explain the exile in this hard time. It also offered a way to achieve national and individual redemption (Dan 2006:81). Therefore, *tikkun* came to signify an act of re-unification of God, people and, implicitly, territory, i.e., the return of the Jewish people to Zion. However, in AGN the guest attempts to restore life in a diasporic site. Golomb-Hoffman writes: "the project of restoration organizes the text on a number of levels... restoring the House of Study..., restoring the self, restoring the town, restoring the Jewish community, and, even, restoring the text as a life giving instrument" (1991: 77-78).

According to this rationale, restoring the fictional world brings with it the rebirth of the writing subject, i.e., the author, and thus the story's optimistic end emerges from the option of self-rebirth. This rebirth is symbolically implied in the novel by calling the first baby born in town after the war by the guest's first name. In this interpretation the *shtetl* people are left behind relegating them to oblivion, as explicitly stated at the end of the novel: "There is a covenant made for the Land of Israel that whoever does not settle in the Land is forgotten in the end, but everyone who has the privilege will be remembered and written of in the Land, as it is said (Isaiah, chapter 4), 'Everyone who is written for life in Jerusalem.'" (477). Michal Arbel further argues that the guest attempts to complete two different creative projects during his visit: first, he attempts to revive the old House of Study and preserve, through this act of reconstruction and mimesis, the memory of a lost world. When the house of study gradually empties and the

reconstruction effort has clearly failed, the guest turns to composing a myth, in which the Old World does not disappear but metamorphoses into the new national Jewish life in Eretz Israel. (2006: 59) These two readings, focusing on the notion of restoration (*tikkun*), highlight the problem standing at the heart of the novel, which can be described as forming continuity in the midst of major historical break.

However, the narrator attempts not only to weave a continuous narrative, but also to engender a new male body and new national identity, as part of the cultural discourse on the male body that was prominent at least since the inception of the Zionist movement. Beyond the mending, restoring and straightening of the crooked<sup>49</sup> that are central to Agnon's writing is the attempt to create something *ex-nihilo*, to engender a body beyond the text, and the extreme anxiety it produces. Readings of the novel have also neglected two central aspects of its discussion of authorship: the gendered character of the act and the examination of national revival as an embodied rather than simply narrative project<sup>50</sup>. The reading I offer still sees Agnon's project as maintaining continuity between past and future, however, rather than seeing the project as harmonizing, this reading points at a void at its center, a gap between textuality and actuality that produces extreme anxiety.<sup>51</sup> This gap prefigures the horror apparent in Agnon's later works, such as "Only Yesterday".

### **Authorship and masculinity: AGN and the Jewish Body**

The relationship between authorship and masculinity has been discussed mainly, though not exclusively, by feminist critics, who have argued that authorship is embedded in gendered power relations. They interpret the pen as a phallus, and allow us to see the great power in wielding the pen, and the allocation of this power according to gender. Sandra Gilbert and Susan

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<sup>49</sup> *And the Crooked shall be Made Straight* is Agnon's first famous novella.

<sup>50</sup> The bodily and material aspect should be considered especially since, as Shachar Pinsker notes, the Zionist ideology represented the idea of the national revival in terms of sexual awakening (2010: 189).

<sup>51</sup> In this matter I very much agree with Sidra HaEzrahi's reading in which she presents the Zionist project as confronting Jewish diaporic existence that was anchored in texts with the Real of the referent (2000: 3).

Gubar maintain that authorship in Western society is premised on the metaphor of paternity, mediated through the idea of divine creation: “the patriarchal notion that the writer ‘fathers’ his text just as God fathered the world is and has been all-pervasive in Western literary civilization, so much so that... the metaphor is built into the very word, *author*, with which writer, deity, and *pater familias* are identified.” (Quoted in Burke 1995: 151)

Authorship in AGN is gendered masculine and is articulated in relation to two other conceptual clusters. One cluster contains various images of femininity: The Jewish body as it was imagined in anti-Semitic discourses, the maternal body that has to be cast aside in order to gain artistic autonomy and independence, and, metaphorically, the Land that is imagined as female and that the author envisions as a wife and a beloved. The other cluster consists of images of paternity and the obvious though ambivalent relation of the author to his father and to God.

Gilbert and Gubar present authorship very much as it appears in the Romantic tradition, granting the author possession, agency and creative power. They describe it as taking the position of the father and of God in relation to the text. While this aspect of masculine authorship is relevant to the novel, it has to be nuanced to account for the authorial drama in AGN. Gilbert and Gubar’s approach obscures this novel’s main conflict of authorship, which emerges between religious and non-religious writing or between classical and romantic authorship. This conflict is between two men, but of different status. Classical models place the author in the position of the son, while the romantic model places him in the position of the father, and even of the divine Father.

Agnon never completely embraced the romantic model in its pure version, but, as Golomb Hoffman notes, AGN presents the emergence of the narrator as a young author as a youthful rebellion against paternal as well as divine authority and as a transition from traditional to non-traditional models of writing (1991: 77, 94). The male author emerges not only from an

oedipal struggle with former great authors, but also from a rebellion against Jewish traditional writing. The narrator's rebellion is driven not only by "the anxiety of influence", as Harold Bloom named it, but also by the anxiety resulting from the transformation from an emblematic, eternal son (as the author is in the classicist models) to an author/father (as he is in the romantic one): The author's filial position, as his father's disciple and as a student of the *Torah*, gives way to the writing of texts having nothing to do with the Jewish canon. The novel purposely conflates the emergence of the individual and author with the emergence of secularism. Therefore, as much as the narrator might want to weave a continuous narrative, his attempt is precluded at a certain point because the work is simultaneously a novel about a physical and cultural move from the *shtetl* to the Land of Israel, and an ars-poetic novel about transforming authorship. The novel presents a transformation of the author's position that cannot be contained within a continuous narrative.

Agnon's discussion of authorship is premised on the idea that Jewish life has to be embodied in order for Jews to make the transition from Diaspora to homeland. Therefore the author's role is to engender a body which is metaphoric both for the nation and for the body of writing, i.e., for the text. Along with a transformation of Jewish authorship, the author has to engender a new, Zionist body, an act that intertwines his position as father and as author. The new Zionist body is envisioned as male: it is whole, independent, free and organic, that is, it must physically work the land. Its engendering presents male procreation (opposed to both heterosexual paternity and divine creation) and artistic creation *ex nihilo*, as in the Romantic myth of authorship, equally disturbing and ridden with anxiety.

The discourse of the Jewish body that Agnon inherited emerged in Europe in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a reaction to anti-Semitic rhetoric. Michael Gluzman traces different aspects of the discourse in Hebrew literature that emerged simultaneously with Jewish nationalism:

With the rise of Jewish nationalism at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and particularly with the consolidation of the Zionist ideology at the turn of the century, Hebrew culture narrated its own story in bodily terms and asserted time and again the need to construct a new Jewish body. Already in the 1870s Hebrew literature started to produce a wide-ranging discourse on the faults of the Jewish body. This literature... described the Jewish man as someone who is exiled not only from his country but also from his body and his masculinity. Many literary and journalistic texts described this faulty masculinity, etched on the body, and at the same time imagined an alternative body: anti-exilic, Zionist, manly. (2007: 13 my translation)

As Hebrew literature started to imagine the new Jewish body as strong and manly, it relied on metaphors of the exilic Jewish nation as unnatural and faulty, for example as a living-dead or as a soul without a body (ibid: 15-17). Pinsker writes in his *Auto-emancipation*:

Among the nations now living on earth, there are the Jews who exist as the sons of a nation long dead. With the loss of their homeland they lost their free existence and they split in a way that does not fit the state of a unified living organism. The Jewish state that was ruined by the Roman Empire disappeared from among the nations, but the Jewish people, even after it ceased to exist as a body politic, could not accept complete extinction and did not cease to exist as a nation in spirit. Thus, the world has seen in this nation the horrid picture of a *dead walking among the living*. This [is] a picture of a nation that is not unified in a body that has limbs. (in ibid: 17; my emphasis).

*AGN* complicates and problematizes the Zionist call for the revival of the Jewish body through different male characters. Yeruham Freeman's whole, handsome and tanned body, with the beautiful forelock, exemplifies the new Zionist man. In contrast, the sick child, Raphael, is an emblem of the old Jewish body as ageless, completely dependent, living a spiritual life. As Arbel noted, Raphael's similarity to the horrifying image of the decapitated head of the legendary, medieval Rabbi Amnon from Magenza, evokes the image of a body without organs (2006: 78).

The novel is replete with additional characters with amputated limbs and missing body parts. The amputated limbs of maimed bodies also appear in *AGN* in the form of the Freudian uncanny. In his 1919 essay *The Uncanny* Freud wrote: "among instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which *recurs*. This uncanny is something which is familiar and old established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (1990: 363, emphasis in text).

The trauma of the uncanny is revealed through the story that Daniel Bach, the narrator's most pleasant companion during his visit, tells the narrator. The story relates to the latter's experience during World War I in the trenches, where he served as a soldier in the ranks of the army (probably the German army, but this is not specified in the novel). After describing the horrid reality of the trenches and his own stubborn allegiance to Jewish commandments during battle, Daniel relates his experiences in one particular day when he was looking for his *tefillin*, small leather boxes containing slips inscribed with scriptural passages, worn on the left arm and on the head during Morning Prayer. Seeing a leather strap in the trench, he grabbed it, but it turned out to be tied to the detached hand of a dead soldier (36). The horrid realization that a Jewish soldier was blown to pieces while performing one of the basic rituals of Jewish tradition shattered Daniel's faith in God's providence. This traumatic memory resurfaces several times in the novel, most notably in the narrator's dream toward the end of the novel (383).

The story and its reverberations demonstrate the merging of the individual, physical body and the national body. This merging requires that the body be whole for obeying the most basic commandments, in this case, putting on *tefillin*. In the narrator's dream, the maimed physical body of the sick child, Raphael, is a metaphor for the spiritual devastation of the Jewish people and for the state of Jewish belief. The dead arm becomes a grotesque object through its endless replaceability: the father (Daniel), armless, puts on *tefillin* with the arm of a dead soldier and Raphael, also armless, is promised new rubber arms by his father in order to be ready for his bar mitzvah celebration, which requires putting on *tefillin* (ibid). Raphael, who cannot put on *tefillin*, is a condensation of three characters in the novel: himself, his father and Rubberowich, the conductor with the rubber arm. The latter two have artificial limbs, while Raphael himself is completely handicapped from birth, in a way that no artificial limb can compensate for. The dream reflects the wish that Raphael's crippled body (standing for the exilic Jewish body) could be mended.

The novel presents the Jewish nation, like the individual, as the equivalent of a modular and collapsible body, given to disassembling and reassembling. It has been dismantled as a consequence of historic circumstances, as Pinsker described it, and reassembling the whole body is possible only at the end of days, with the coming of the messiah. The narrator addresses this point upon rekindling the eternal light in front of the tablet commemorating the victims of the 1648 pogroms in the Beth Midrash:

I have heard that it is stated in the *Midrash* that every single righteous man outside the Land who is killed by the Gentiles enters into the Land of Israel and does not wait until the end of days, when all those who die abroad will have to roll their way under the ground to the Land. But he who was killed for the love of God enters the Land of Israel whole in body, while he, who was killed through fear enters only with the limb or organ through which he died, and the rest of his limbs look out and gaze at the one that has been privileged to be interred in the Holy Land. When we light a candle for them, we help them to see the happiness of that limb and the happiness that is in store for them in the future. (134-5)

This picture complements the description of the amputated bodies. In this ironically consoling prophesy the *midrash* dissects the dead body posthumously, promising immediate redemption to the parts that were injured when the body was still alive.

Agnon presents the Zionist vision of the nation, returning to life through the gathering of the scattered limbs of the dead body. However, lingering on the point of death preceding rebirth, he concretizes the national metaphor of revival and presents its horrifying bodily aspect. A close reading of Agnon's references to the body reveals that not only the diasporic existence but also the immigration to the new country inflicts death on the body. The perception of the body as collapsible reflects the anxiety around the transformation of national life from the Diaspora to the land of Israel. This transformation is envisioned more than once in the novel as both physically and symbolically related to death.

Immigration is perilous both to the national body and to authorial project. After his first conversation with Yeruham Freeman the narrator dreams that he dies in Jerusalem in a burial vault offered to him by a mysterious old man. Still in his dream, he later comes back to life in a

scene of rebirth.<sup>52</sup> (94) Thinking about this dream the next day, and remembering the book that the old man in Jerusalem gave him, the narrator enigmatically says: “I found there a commentary on the words of the *Gemara* [commentary of the Mishna] in which the sages said: ‘From then onward, the Holy One, blessed be He, speaks and Moses writes in tears.’” (95) This line is key to understanding the image of the disintegrated body as related to the anxiety of immigration: it is taken from Talmudic *Bava Batra* tractate discussing the way Moses wrote the last verses of the Torah that describe his own death. The explanation that the tractate gives of this paradox is that Moses wrote to a certain point with ink and from there on he wrote with his tears. Thus, the transformation of life from the Diaspora to Israel is not only physically dangerous (for the narrator, in this case), it is also dangerous to the narrative itself, since the narrator should die upon reaching the borders of the Land, just as the biblical story has Moses die after seeing the Land from afar. The anxiety related to immigration suddenly reveals a most personal aspect, with the narrator implicitly dreading his own death upon moving to his biblical homeland.

The cut off limbs scattered throughout the novel are the dark side of constructing the new, whole and proper Zionist body: Agnon uncovers the horrifying aspect of national revival that requires breathing new life into dead bodies. The handsome former pioneer, Yeruham Freeman, is presented as the attractive young face of the new Jew, but the attempt to mend the broken Jewish body leads to a horrid grotesque of artificial limbs. Agnon associates physical death and disintegration not only with exile, but with immigration and with the Zionist revival. This does not allow the narrator to weave a continuous narrative: the narrative might seemingly continue, but the national body itself falls apart. The impediment of the Zionist narrative is already hinted at through the image of the national body as dead coming back to life. This impediment undermines the overall Zionist agenda of the novel and intentionally subverts any harmonious conception of Zionist revival.

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<sup>52</sup> See Yael Feldman 1982:151.

### Authorship, freedom and betrayal

A significant part of the novel implicitly deals with the emotional difficulties and complexes involved in turning from a traditional Jewish author, figured as a son, to a modern author, conceptualized as a father. Agnon indirectly presents authorship as ridden with guilt and anxiety. These themes are implicitly presented in the novel through the relationship between the author and Yeruham Freeman and the analogies made between the latter and other minor characters. Very little was written about this loaded relationship. However, it is crucial to understanding the dilemmas of authorship that are presented in the novel in relation to gender and nationality.

As Gershon Shaked noted, AGN's plot structure appears very loose, with many sub-plots interwoven through associative logic and chance meetings with characters, whose relation to the main plot is not clear. In place of a coherent, unilinear plot, Agnon constructs meaning through two main techniques: analogy and "the technique of summoning" (*hatechnika hazimunit*). The second technique refers to advancing the plot through seemingly chance meetings between characters that point to hidden connections between the two acquaintances (1966: 308, 320). The technique of chance meetings is a way to reflect and project the contents of the narrator-protagonist's psyche. Thus, "the character that the protagonist meets is internalized, so to speak, to the point that the character's relation to the protagonist is similar to the protagonist's relation to his own mental content." (ibid: 321) According to Shaked, the reader can make sense of the many seemingly unrelated sub-plots and chance meetings by looking for analogies between the plots and the characters who meet each other. (ibid: 311)

Following Shaked's reading strategy, I suggest that Yeruham Freeman's main role in the novel is to reflect and project all of the narrator's main issues and conflicts regarding his own authorship. Also, a web of analogies between Freeman and other minor characters supports my argument that the narrator-as-author's two main anxieties are guilt over his betrayals and fear of

dependence and lack of clear origin. He feels that he betrayed his family, his professional mission, his romantic partner and his nation, and on the other hand fears that loyalty would lead to dependence. These issues define the way he perceives himself as a man and an author and are, in turn, related to the authorial project of independently engendering a new male body, analogous to engendering a new nation.

The first time Yeruham Freeman is presented to the reader, his salient features are masculine strength and physical beauty, and he is explicitly compared to the Zionists working in the Land of Israel. He is busy doing physical labor, which sets him apart from other people in town, who make their living from peddling and small business: “Yeruham was sitting by the roadside near the King’s Well, cutting a drain to prevent the water’s flooding the road. You find fellows like him in the Land of Israel in every town and village, and you pay no heed to them. Here, in Szibucz, he was something new.” (54)

The narrator makes it a point to note that he likes Yeruham, apparently for being the emblematic Zionist pioneer. Also, when later the young man ignores him, the narrator is clearly disturbed and offended. (ibid) This affection for Yeruham is accompanied by a nagging question that the narrator keeps asking himself: “Why do I like Yeruham?” (217). After discovering that Yeruham is engaged to the attractive Rachel Zommer, and that the two are planning to get married quickly because of her pregnancy, the narrator says:

Why do I like Yeruham? Is it because he lived in the Land of Israel? But then he has left the Land and speaks evil of it. Or is it because he speaks Hebrew? But then Erel and her pupils also speak Hebrew. But when you hear their language, you feel as if you had been served with mealy potatoes, in which only the worms are alive, for their language is intermingled with words that all the tasteless people have made up out of their own heads. Not so with Yeruham. When he speaks, you feel as if a man were plowing and the fragrance of the pure earth were rising all around you. (217, modified translation).

The first avowed reason for liking Yeruham is his organic ties to the land that are metaphorically conveyed through his use of the Hebrew language. Considering the discourse on

the male body, we might say that, for the narrator, a viable way to generate a new Jewish body is by physically fulfilling the Zionist dream rather than by just talking about it; any other way will leave the Jewish body a corpse. Language is a metonym for the nation, and the horrible picture of the mealy potato eaten by worms applies to both.

But the fact that the narrator has to convince himself several times that he likes Yeruham is suspicious. Baruch Kurtzweil, in a seminal discussion of AGN, offers an interesting account of the relationship between the narrator and Yeruham. Kurtzweil argues that in coming to his hometown, the narrator tries in vain to revive the lost world of childhood and of Jewish tradition. Yeruham Freeman is the narrator's opposite, since he is free from the past. Therefore, "in Yeruham the guest loves and hates at the same time the desires that are hidden in his own heart – to release the burden of the past and of tradition." (1970: 61-2). Kurtzweil's focus on the issue of freedom is crucial. However, I suggest that love and hate are closely enmeshed in the two characters' relationship, precisely because the guest sees himself mirrored in Yeruham; the two characters are analogous rather than opposite.

The apparent freedom of Yeruham Freeman<sup>53</sup> is precisely what the narrator consistently questions and problematizes, both on the physical and the symbolic levels. On the physical level, the narrator initially perceives Yeruham as a free working man who has no relationships with other people and no obligations, romantic or otherwise. (84) However, he soon discovers that Yeruham is not free but shares his life with Rachel Zommer. It was only the narrator's own blindness that made him miss the signs of this relationship. Not only is Yeruham not free to do as he wishes, he is going to be a father.

On the symbolic level, the issue of freedom is problematized by intricately intertwining it with death and disease. Gershon Shaked observed that, before talking to Yeruham, the narrator

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<sup>53</sup> In the Hebrew text this character is called Yeruham Hofshy, which means "Yeruham the free man".

associates him with death by noting that he is repairing the road from the graveyard to the town. (1973: 238. See p. 84 in AGN). The character Yeruham Freeman is not directly associated with death anywhere else. However, his last name, *Hofshy*, appears in the novel twice as part of a telling quote from Psalms 88,5 that says “Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave.”<sup>54</sup> The two contexts in which this verse appears reveal the semantic web in which the term ‘freedom’ is enmeshed. The verse appears in the narrator’s first, spontaneous sermon, when he offers the men in the *beit midrash* a commentary on the Torah portion *VaYetse* (Genesis 28:10-32:3). The narrator expounds on the story of Jacob’s ladder by offering a short history of the Jewish nation as divided into three eras, symbolized by the three patriarchs and three parallel kinds of spaces associated with them – all eventually examined through the idea of freedom. Through this brief historical analysis, the sermon questions the value of freedom and considers the price that should be paid for it.

In the first era, that of Abraham, freedom is valorized. Abraham, the first patriarch, said “the lord shall appear on a hill” (132) and is therefore identified with hill dwelling, i.e., with a temporary and non-binding way of life. Freedom was valorized in his time, because houses and fields were considered constraining and unreliable: “there is no support for a man in a house, as it is said, ‘And he went into the house, and supported his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.’”<sup>55</sup> (132-3, my emphasis) In Abraham’s time “there [was] no quality better than freedom.” (ibid)

In the second era, the disadvantages and limitations of freedom are fully exposed. This era is symbolized by Isaac, and the paradigmatic space is the field, as Isaac is the one who “went out to meditate in the field.” (132):

In the second era... the benefits of freedom are outweighed by its disadvantages, for it leads to extinction and destruction, as it is said, ‘*Free among the dead, like the slain*

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<sup>54</sup> “*BaMetim Hofshi kemo halalim*”.

<sup>55</sup> Amos 5, 19.

[that lie in the grave].’ And similarly, we are told that when Uzziah became a leper, he ‘dwelt in the house of the free one.’ Rabbi Jonah the son of Jannah explains that it was called ‘free’ because the lepers isolated themselves there from all men. (133, my emphasis)

Freedom is associated in the second era with death, disease and isolation. The “house of the free” is a secluded place for lepers, ironizing the idea of freedom and implying that it can be attained only at the price of complete banishment from society, hence, freedom equals ostracism.<sup>56</sup>

In the third era freedom is relinquished in favor of permanent settlement, symbolized by the patriarch Jacob. As related in the weekly Torah portion, Jacob awakens from his dream, to realize that “this is none other than the house of God,” marking the future territory of his progeny’s homeland. The third era is also marked by the biblical call, later adopted by the first groups of Zionist pioneers, ‘O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord.’<sup>57</sup> (134)

This succinct history leads to the novel’s fictional present, charting the Jewish nation’s path from a life of nomads to the present pursuit of settlement in a home, and implicitly, a homeland. The path begins with a deep distrust of home, but later freedom is perceived as perilous, whereas permanent settlement becomes more desirable. It is also clear that this is the stage in which both narrator and nation stand in the fictional present. On both the individual-artistic and the national levels, the narrator is concerned with the value of freedom and the need to compromise it for safety, family life, and ultimately fulfilling the commands of God. For both the individual and the nation, total freedom can be attained only through death, while life entails bonds and dependence.

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<sup>56</sup> Beit HaHofshit” is a real house standing in Jerusalem to this very day. Until about 50 years ago it served as a clinic and a retirement place for lepers. After the cause of the disease was discovered and a cure was found, the house emptied of its inhabitants and is now converted into a museum dedicated to the history of the place. The fact that Agnon was attracted to the idea of seclusion associated with leprosy is well evident in his last novel, *Shirah*.

<sup>57</sup> Beit Ya’akov Lechu Venelcha was the biblical verse that served as the slogan for the first Zionist group that immigrated to Palestine, as well as the acronym for their name, BILU.

The phrase “free among the dead” has an additional meaning in Hebrew: *Bametim Hofshy* might also mean, Freeman is among the dead. The narrator repeatedly wishes Yeruham were dead and tries to curb his sexual desire for Rachel. (see p. 369) Here the association of Yeruham Freeman with death might reflect the narrator’s own semi-conscious wish to physically get rid of his competitor. The narrator envies Yeruham not only because he impregnated Rachel, but also because, as a true pioneer, he fertilized the land by tilling the “pure ground” (85). When the narrator describes Yeruham doing this, the narrator implies that he himself was never a “true” pioneer: coming to the Land of Israel, he was not a farmer but a writer.

The second time the citation from Psalms 88:5 is mentioned is in the narrator’s detailed dream (chapter 62, p.383), in which the narrator relates the traumatic incident of Daniel Bach during the war, when he tried to put on *tefillin* and found the same object on a dead soldier’s detached arm. In the dream the narrator is surprised to hear that, according to Raphael, his father puts *tefillin* on a dead man’s arm, and explains that “the dead are free,” explaining: “when a man becomes dead, he is exempt from religious precepts.” (383) In this case, the original simile in the verse is concretized, and the dead are free precisely because they are slain soldiers in the grave. The narrator’s description of freedom from obeying religious precepts turns Kurtzweil’s view of Yeruham’s coveted freedom on its head. Yeruham’s freedom from the past and from Jewish tradition is not to be envied; it results from the spiritual and physical destruction of the old world and of religious tradition.

Freedom acquires further, deeper meaning through its relations with other terms. Here, too, Yeruham Freeman and his relationships with the narrator are instructive. Freeman is not only the “free man” of this novel but also the paradigmatic traitor. His betrayal is mentioned repeatedly (see 149, 217, 216, 279, 304, 368, 456) and described as personal, familial, romantic, and national. Yeruham’s life story began when his father, a wandering charlatan from Lithuania, came to preach in the town and made a great impression on the town’s people. They wished to

make him their rabbi and establish a *yeshiva*, i.e., a traditional, Jewish educational institution for him. His host, a rich Jewish man, hastened to marry his young daughter to him. However, throughout the traditional seven days of the newlyweds' celebration, women came from neighboring towns and identified the fraud as their own husband. The charlatan ran away, leaving his bride pregnant, and she then died in childbirth. Her father died penniless soon thereafter and left nothing to the newborn, the deserted son of a fraud.

The baby was named Yeruham, after his late grandfather, meaning "the one who will be pitied" in Hebrew. Indeed, when no money was found to hire a wet nurse for him, "Mrs. Bach had pity on him, so she took him and nursed him with her own milk, for Yeruham was born in the same month as her Aniela, that is, Erela. So Mrs. Bach took from the milk of Erela... and gave to Yeruham. Even in his childhood he showed strength and vigor, and drank double. That is why he is tall and handsome". (142) Mrs. Bach raised him as her own son. Later she sent him, along with her nephew, to the Land of Israel, after Yeruham Freeman and Erela were betrothed, "and it was agreed between them, namely between Yeruham the Lithuanian's son and Aniela, that is Erela, that he would bring her there." (149)

Yeruham's first betrayal happened when, in the Land of Israel, he became a pioneer but soon turned into a communist and "cast out his love [of the Land] from his heart and became hardened against it." (224) After being arrested and deported for his illegal political activities, he returned to his hometown and slandered the Land of Israel. This was only his first betrayal, for he did not keep his promise to his betrothed, and did not return the great favor of the Bach family. Instead, "he came back from [the Land of Israel] and began to court another girl: "As he had betrayed the Land, so he betrayed his betrothed." (149) Yeruham's life story reveals that his tall and handsome body is the result of having lived at others' expense. Worse, his independence is the result of his physical betrayal of the breast that suckled him and in the adopted sister who gave up some of her mother's milk (and implicitly, her physical vigor and beauty; Erela is

described as an unattractive, pale woman). The image of the Land as a beloved woman and as a wife is common in writings of second Alyia pioneers. As Boaz Neumann notes, the pioneers loved and were in love with the Land of Israel and its soil. “In their writings the Land is always female: virgin, beloved, Mother Earth. Male halutzim [pioneers] seek to pierce that virginity and cause their beloved to fall in love and even wed them.” (2011:53)

But the most condemning and powerful comment on Yeruham’s betrayal is made implicitly in a different context. The narrator meets several times with the town’s rabbi, and each time they have fierce disagreements about the Zionist project unfolding in the Land of Israel. In his last visit, when the narrator comes to take leave of the rabbi before leaving the town for good, the same argument resumes, and the rabbi asserts that he does not disparage the holy soil but only its inhabitants, as they prematurely hasten the coming of the messiah (456). The narrator responds at length, eulogizing all the Jewish people living in Israel, with one exception:

To which of its inhabitants do you refer, sir?... ‘Is it to those who dedicate their lives to its soil, who revive its desolation, plow and sow, and plant life for its inhabitants? Or perhaps you refer to its guardians, who are ready to sacrifice themselves for every little piece of it, or to those who study the *Torah* in poverty and do not feel their sufferings... But no doubt your honor was referring to those whom the Land suckles with its milk and they impregnate it with their venom, *as when a woman suckles her son, and a serpent comes and sucks with him and impregnates her with its venom.* (456 my emphasis)

Yeruham is implicitly likened to a serpent, and his betrayal is likened to the impregnation of the mother’s body with venom. His betrayal of the Land of Israel is linked to the ingratitude toward the mother who suckled him, and toward the young woman who waited for him to marry her and bring her to the Land of Israel; the Land and the woman’s body are symbolically related. Using the image of the land as a suckling mother is not unique to Agnon, and in doing this he, again, resembles second Alyia pioneers who portrayed the land as a human mother. They pictured the soil as having breasts from which children suckle (ibid:53). Moreover, some pioneers described the greatest sin that a pioneer can commit, i.e. desertion of the land, as a desertion of a suckling mother. Neumann quotes Eliezer Yaffe, a pionner, who wrote “the greatest sin on this

earth is that man does not cling to the bosom of Mother Earth in order to drink the bounty that will turn bitter if she has no one to suckle” (ibid:54).

The theme of betrayal is related to the serpent motif, to the homeland and to Yeruham Freeman in a variety of ways. We should note that the Hebrew word for venom (*eres*) and the Hebrew word for land (*eretz*) sound very similar. Moreover, the root E R S also means ‘to betroth’, possibly associating betrayal and romantic love again. This phonetic similarity is brought up when the narrator first meets Yeruham Freeman, who accuses the narrator of not living up to the words of his own poem and for leaving Israel to live in Europe:

‘You were living in Berlin,’ said Yeruham, ‘enjoying all the pleasures of the big cities, and in our hearts you had instilled the poison (*eres*) of the Land (*eretz*) of Israel.’ I turned on Yeruham and cried, ‘Poison (*eres*) you call the love of the Land (*eretz*)?’ (88)

The narrator is the first to be accused of betrayal in the novel, not Yeruham. The narrator is the one who allegedly instilled poison in other people’s hearts. Moreover, he betrayed the people he so eloquently convinced to immigrate to Palestine and betrayed the land itself by preferring to live in the modern European metropolis. That the narrator consciously sees himself, at least as a deserter, if not as a traitor, becomes clear during his conversation with Mrs. Bach. He says “I ran away from there? And perhaps I really did run away, for anyone who leaves the Land of Israel, even for a while, is regarded as one who runs away.” (253) Looking at the narrator’s sense of guilt in light of second Alyia values it seems that he constructs this sense retroactively. As Boaz Neumann notes, immigration to Palestine and emigration from it were associated with value judgement only after World War I. Immigration was described as Alyia (ascent) and emigration was termed yerida (descent). After World War I the relatively indifferent attitude to the “leavers” and “departers” vanished. Those who left were described as weak, as “slackers”, irresponsible, disobedient, frail, moral failure, or as a stab in the heart of the settlement (2011: 81-82).

The narrator loves Yeruham not for his merits but for his flaws and shortcomings. He has sympathy for Yeruham because he himself committed similar offences. On a deeper level, he betrayed his father, and deserted the traditional way of life in the *shtetl*. Above all, he became an author rather than a scribe, breaking the chain of traditional pietistic writing that he was supposed to continue. The narrator's love for Yeruham and his tomanic rivalry with him frame their relationship as part of a romantic triangle. As Shachar Pinsker shows in his study of modernist Hebrew fiction in Europe, the triangulation of romantic desire by presenting two men competing for the same woman is highly characteristic of modernist Hebrew fiction in Europe. As Pinsker notes, this triangulation often masks a homosocial desire between the two men (2010:185).

Moreover, in Yeruham the narrator sees his *alter ego*. We see this in the narrator's first conversation with Yeruham. That conversation was difficult and full of accusations by Yeruham, who also declaimed the narrator's early poem, "Devotion Faithful unto Death," as a nagging reminder of the narrator's old vows. Several critics have noted that, after the meeting, the narrator dreams that he buys himself a grave in Jerusalem, as a guilty response to Yeruham's demand that he die (Feldman 1982: 151). However, before describing the dream of Jerusalem the narrator remembers something quite different: his old home in *Neveh Zedek*, a neighborhood near Jaffa, on the way to Tel-Aviv, and his old love, Ruhama:

The Land of Israel that shows itself to me in dreams is not the Land as it is today, but as it was years ago, when I lived in *Neveh Zedek*... little Ruhama lived there with her mother. I do not know whether Ruhama is alive or dead, nor – if she is alive – whether she is a violinist. In any case, her violin is dead, for she burned it herself, to roast a little fish for a certain young man.

Let us leave the young man who left Ruhama and return to Ruhama. Whenever she comes to me in a dream, she comes with her violin. Sometimes she covers her face with her violin and calls me by name and the violin echoes her; sometimes she plays my name with the violin and echoes it with her voice. So long as she behaved like this I said nothing to her, but when she began to play 'Devotion Faithful unto Death,' I rebuked her. First, because I am tired of rhymes like 'love' and 'God above.' And second, because I have no mind for musical matters. (92)

Agnon refers here to his early story, *Leilot* (1913), part of a group of four stories written roughly in the same period.<sup>58</sup> The story concerns an agonized young man, Hemdat<sup>59</sup>, who yearns for the love of an imaginary woman, while cruelly playing a game of luring and rejection with a real girl named Ruhama, who is desperately in love with him and willing to sacrifice anything for his love. The story ends when Ruhama fries fish pinned on her tie pin for Hemdat, using her violin as firewood. The names Yeruham and Ruhama derive from the same root, RHM, and Ruhama is Yeruham's feminine counterpart. She reminds the narrator of both his betrayals: his romantic betrayal of her, and his betrayal of the Land of Israel.<sup>60</sup> Ruhama sings to the narrator his old and nagging Zion poem, as Yeruham did in their recent conversation, and the narrator silences her in the same way he silenced Yeruham during the day thus establishing Yeruham and Ruhama as equivalent. The analogy between Yeruham and Ruhama adds to the narrator's list of betrayals a romantic one, thus making the narrator analogous to Yeruham in betraying both his love and his country. National and individual matters are analogous, as the individual is synecdochic to the nation.

My reading thus far established the argument that Yeruham serves to reflect the narrator's sense of guilt over his numerous betrayals. The analogy among the different betrayals positions the personal, national and artistic realms as equivalent, as the narrator betrayed the expectations of others in all three of them. The fact that land and woman are analogous is a well known theme in Western literature as a whole and more specifically in writings of second Aliya pioneers. The analogy between the sexual act and male authorship is already established in feminist literature since Gilbert and Gubar.

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<sup>58</sup> The other stories are *Ahot* (1910), *Tishre* (1911), and *Be'era shel Mityam* (1909).

<sup>59</sup> This is the name that Agnon gave to his autobiographic protagonist in the early period of his writing.

<sup>60</sup> It is worth noting that the Enlightenment poets used to describe the Land of Israel as a woman called by different names, and one of them, used by Yehuda Leib Gordon, was Ruhama, referring to Hosea 2:3 (Gluzman 2007: 15).

Through the figure of Yeruham Freeman Agnon creates a complex semantic field that problematizes the notion of freedom and associates it with betrayal. Agnon ironizes the idea of freedom, implicitly criticizing the ideal of the solitary romantic author as a sham. The fact that creation is associated with biological procreation is an implicit critique of the romantic ideal, but at the same time it takes part in the male-centered discourse of nationalism in which women are the object rather than the subject. In pointing at the problematic nature of solitary male authorship in AGN Agnon continues his discussion of the same theme he dealt with in earlier ars poetic works, especially *Agadat Ha-Sofer* (The Legend of the Scribe).

### **Authorship, Dependence and Exploitation**

A complementary, if less obvious theme of Yeruham's life story is dependence. The handsome young Yeruham is actually a waif who prospered through parasitism on a foreign woman's body and the exploitation of her resources. Dependence and parasitism are central themes of the novel. Ignatz, the beggar, shares Yeruham's dubious origins as an adopted, illegitimate son.<sup>61</sup> This beggar presents the opposite appearance of Yeruham: He has a hole in place of a nose, as it was blown off in the war (25,66), and he walks around begging for money, cynically using his deformed face to extort it. But Ignatz's life story has some similarities to Yeruham's. The townspeople tell two stories about his birth: one is that he was conceived as result of a rape, and the other is that Ignatz is a waif adopted at birth after a careless father deserted him, (121-2). The second is also the case with Yeruham. Moreover, the novel suggests that life in the *shtetl* is parasitic, as people take from one another, and exploit other people's resources, if only for lack of options. After the war, this tendency turns into the rule of life, as the survivors of the war live from the devastation and misery that the war inflicted on most people. Ignatz, for example, wears "insignia of honor... some that he won by his deeds and some that he took from his comrades who fell in the war." (121). Ignatz also steals the narrator's newly made

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<sup>61</sup> His parents' marriage was void, of course, because his father was already married to other women.

coat, after the latter defended him against humiliation. But when the narrator demands to have it back, Ignatz rebukes him for his cruelty with the same words that the narrator himself used before. (122) In an extreme case, Ignatz caused Schutzling's wife's death by stealing her shoes on a snowy night (339). Potentially, this could happen to the narrator too without his coat.

Extorting other people's livelihood or sustenance is the rule of life in the town. This is most clearly illustrated in chapter fifty-nine, entitled "My Meals Grow Meager," which intricately explores the theme of parasitism, exploitation and dependence through two parallel stories. Here for the first time the narrator explicitly accounts for his own place in this economy. The chapter begins with the narrator's bitter complaint that, since Mrs. Zommer has been taking care of her pregnant daughter, Rachel, his meals have grown meager. (361) The narrator's apparently reasonable complaint later turns into a growing grievance, which pictures the fetus in Rachel's womb as robbing him of everything he had and everything he needed during his visit to town (369). The same chapter explains how the gentile Anton Jacobowitz, a former pork butcher, became the richest person in town. During the war Jacobowitz befriended Russian officers and helped them loot the town, while at the same time he secretly supported the Polish and Austrian officials, in case they won the war. Later, when the Jews returned, he gave them some small monetary gifts, bought their half-ruined houses for minute sums of money, and took over the whole real estate market.<sup>62</sup> As a rich landlord he supports his sons and sons-in-law, as well as other former notables, inviting them to feast on rich, heavy meals.

The two stories focus on the flow of resources among people in town. The analogy puts the fetus in the same position as the gentile speculator who prospered from everyone else's misery, especially that of the Jews. The analogy also invokes the trope of infantile dependence noted above in the context of deserted and adopted babies and shows that dependence and extortion are two sides of the same coin, especially in the post-war *shtetl*: the parvenu became

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<sup>62</sup> The part describing the takeover was omitted in the English translation for unknown reasons.

rich by speculating during the war and emptying the Jews' assets into his own pockets. Similarly, the fetus "robs" the narrator of all he loves, including his food, turning him into a kind of homeless. Extortion and dependence are combined in the character of Ignatz, who depends on the townspeople for bread, and therefore has developed many cynical means of extortion. And the epitome of dependence, bordering on extortion, is baby Yeruham, suckling on his adoptive mother's breast and taking the lion's share.

The theme of dependence also unfolds through Leibtche Bodenhaus, a minor character in the novel. The narrator invests significant energy in differentiating himself from Leibtche, because he represents the same artistic dependence that the narrator wants to expunge. Leibtche was once dependent on his wife and now relies on his prosperous aunt, Genedel, who patronizes him in a way that compromises his masculinity. Leibtche's character adds two complementary dimensions to the theme of dependence, one sexual, and the other artistic. Leibtche links sexual and artistic dependence in the long dream the narrator dreams towards the end of the novel (chapter sixty two). In it Agnon uses the *succah* as a central metaphor and links the issue of dependence with place, nationality and religious practice. This part of the dream starts before the Festival of Tabernacles, *Succot*. In the dream, Leibtche expresses his wish to build a *succah* on top of the narrator's and the narrator agrees reluctantly. Still, the narrator is concerned about a potential confusion between his *succah* and Leibtche's (384). Leibtche's request is linked to his inferior artistic project: he works on a rhymed translation of the Torah to German. This project is inferior because it is dependent on a source text for its existence. This dependence, however, is not a legitimate but an extortive, "bastard" one; it is a bad, inferior rendition, rather than a worthy work of art. Moreover, elsewhere the narrator presents Leibtche's rhyming as ludicrous, and implicitly blasphemous (337-8). By building his *succah* on top of the narrator's, Leibtche commits similar sins. Leibtche also threatens the narrator because he is dependent and unmanly; he does not have his own home. The narrator, for his part, is a guest dependent on his hosts. This

status threatens him and manifests itself through the image of the *succah*. His temporary status as a tenant jeopardizes both his authorship and his masculinity and Leibtche serves as a reminder for these faults. Also, Leibtche does not have children, which links his masculine deficiency, his infertility, with artistic ones, i.e., not being able to produce an original work of art.

However, the dream implicates the narrator in Leibtche's deficiencies. The narrator engages with a dependent person, but in the dream the two change positions, and the narrator must rely on Leibtche in building the *succah*. The narrator's dependence ends with disappointment when he discovers that Leibtche covered the *succah* with a perforated sheet instead of branches as the Jewish law prescribes. When he remonstrates, Leibtche remains indifferent (385). The narrator's realization that his collaborative project with Leibtche led to religious violation implies that true and appropriate Jewish piety cannot be sustained in the temporary home of the *shtetl*. At the same time, Leibtche's writing – flawed, irreligious and dependent – is symbolized here, as evident in the narrator's comment about the impropriety of the covering. His assertion that the covering should be made of something that grows in the soil and later picked up, rather than from something that is fastened and therefore unclean refers to the precepts of the *halachic*, Jewish law, for building a *succah*. But it also refers us back to the narrator's own dependence: anything fastened to something else is unclean: a non kosher *succah* covering, the dependent life in the Diaspora, or a work of art.

The image of the *succah* ties together home and homeland, the primary space, i.e., the womb, and the work of art. The *succah* scene summarizes the way authorship and paternity are presented in the novel: both are unstable constructs that arouse anxiety in the father and in the author regarding his exclusiveness. However, exclusiveness is impossible in the economy of life in the *shtetl*, since it is structured around competition and dependence on scarce resources. Dependence stems from illegal birth, which ends with an image of the most primary dependence of the infant on a (surrogate) mother's body. Conversely, each child has two competing fathers, or

sometimes two stories about the father's identity. The most paradigmatic example is the competition between the narrator and Yeruham Freeman over Rachel's womb. The child eventually born to Rachel and Yeruham is symbolically also the narrator's son, and thus he is named after him. The narrator, who wished the death of the fetus, symbolically serves as the child's second father. This male rivalry is not only over the woman's body, it is also over the Land.

As a symbol for home it arouses anxiety over its temporariness and over its ownership. The implicit question that emerges from this dream is whether a guest for the night can be an author: is writing the fruit of wandering or of home ownership and rootedness? And where should the proper home stand: in the land of Israel or in the Diaspora? As a symbol for the woman's body, the *succah* and the negotiations over its construction between the two men recapitulate the state of dual paternity in the novel. As a symbol for the work of art, it reflects the anxieties related to the individualist, romantic model of authorship as a solitary exclusive project as opposed to the traditional model, in which uniqueness and originality are subdued.

The two options arising from the underlying semantic structure of the novel are either dependence or betrayal. The narrator feels guilt over his betrayal of the Land, of his past and of his original mission as a traditional writer. At the same time, he fears any kind of dependence, whether sexual, filial, artistic or national. In order to become an author, Agnon implies, one must betray his/her past and roots, since the other option is continued dependence, which eventually means impotence and lack of creativity. Betrayal is a moral evil but an artistic necessity, and the ones who prosper in the novel are those who depend on others, take advantage of them and betray them.

### **Creation and Procreation: the author and the Golem**

Given the anxiety caused by the authorial project, the last question to ask addresses the desired outcome of this project. Critics almost unanimously argued that in AGN, Agnon, through

his narrator, strives to offer *tikkun*, or repair of the break in Jewish history caused as a result of the war and the Zionist revolution. But in addition to restoration of the old world, the novel explores the vision of creating or siring a human body. This body is not the author's (i.e., the issue is not only self birth as was already suggested by critics). Nor is this vision of creation divorced from the theme of repair, but rather builds on it, complicates it and explores its limits.

The creation of a human body as presented in the novel juxtaposes biological procreation and artificial, prosthetic creation, which is implicitly compared to modernist, non-classicist and non-traditional authorship. Regarding authorship, the novel poses the question of creation *ex nihilo*; can one be an "independent," "original," and non-traditional author as the romantic conception suggests? The same question on the national level is, can one independently establish a modern nation and return to one's historic homeland, or must one stick with the interdependent lifestyle characteristic of the *Shtetl*? Modern authorship (i.e., novel writing) and nation building are analogous therefore the same transition from the traditional world to the modern world applies to both, and creates a similar crisis. This crisis stems from the need to create *ex nihilo*, i.e. without the help of God, outside traditional discourse, and, at least seemingly, without a legitimate and identifiable origin.

The model of biological procreation is manifested in the author's life, described in the novel from (spiritual) to symbolic rebirth. In this model the author is an object: he is subjected to other people's craftsmanship and is eventually reborn by acts only partially under his control. This subjection is equivalent to that of the traditional artist or artisan, except that here the author himself is the product.<sup>63</sup> The second model, i.e., that of prosthetic creation, presents a vision of physical repair through prostheses culminating in Leibtche Bodenhaus' description of a soldier who is literally rebuilt by his doctor (408). This soldier is reborn as a horrifying prosthetic

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<sup>63</sup> Anne Golomb Hoffman 1991: 94. Note that here I return to questions I dealt with in the second sub-chapter on models of authorship, but from a different perspective.

masterpiece, only to die later, due to the cruelty of a German officer. The author's rebirth and the soldier's temporary revival, both described toward the end of the novel, are thematically analogous.

In the first model, which follows the narrator's life, the narrator's father initiates him to the Hebrew language, as well as to the sacred text, by teaching him Hebrew penmanship (398). This initiation can be read as a reference to the kabbalistic tradition of creation through language, in which the creation of a human being is made possible through magic use of the Hebrew alphabet. The second creative act is the one in which Schuster the tailor makes a new overcoat for the narrator at his request. This act implicitly refashions the narrator's personality. The story of the coat's production begins with a creative license given to the craftsman (49). The tailor responds to this license most enthusiastically (*ibid*). In his second visit, the narrator describes the tailor's humble apartment and his paraphernalia, including a "cloth covered dummy [*golem*] shaped like a woman without head or feet."<sup>64</sup> (57). The image of the dummy turns the narrator into a kind of man-made creature, the subject of the craftsman's creation: his body will eventually replace the tailor's dummy and will be refashioned according to the artisan's taste. Indeed, upon wearing the finished overcoat, the narrator notes that his personality has changed somewhat (64). The tailor's work presents art or craft as an act of creating or refashioning human beings.

Along the way to rebirth the narrator falls sick and feels more than once that he is going to die, or he dies symbolically in his dream. The most notable time this happens is in chapter sixty five, when the narrator falls ill. At the height of his crisis he writes his own will, noting that his illness was caused by malnutrition (399). The man who heals and rehabilitates him is the "vegetarian doctor," his childhood friend Kuba Milch, who Mrs. Zommer cited as the expert for healthy nutrition. As the last of the figures who refashion the narrator, Kuba not only administers

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<sup>64</sup> It is important to note that the word 'dummy' in the translation stands for the Hebrew word *golem*, as is the case in all other instances.

medications and gives the narrator instructions but also tells him how to live a healthier and more wholesome life and to refrain from bad habits. (416, 418) Finally, at the *brith* of Rachel and Yeruham's son, the narrator serves as *sandak* (godfather). On a metaphoric level the baby is partly his as he and Yeruham desire the baby's mother. But at the same time the baby is a reincarnation of his old self. He is thus both father and baby: he sires a son and witnesses himself being reborn.

The second model is based on the theme of replacement and prosthesis that is developed throughout the novel. This theme is linked to the question of restructuring the human body as a whole and to the notion of the *golem*, which epitomizes the kabbalist idea of creation through language. According to Scholem, the idea of the *Golem* emerged in Hasidic circles in Provence and Ashkenaz in the Middle Ages (1980: 395). It was perceived as an anthropoid created from dirt through magic incantation (ibid: 398). In much later Ashkenazi traditions in the seventeenth century, the *Golem* emerged as a magical servant of his creator and its creation became associated with historical figures, chiefly the Maharal of Prague (ibid: 423).

The concept of the the *Golem* serves Agnon in his discussion of the prosthesis, that is related in turn to the horror of World War I. In this context, the prosthesis is the other side of the amputated, dead limb, and it functions ambivalently as the uncanny that returns the missing limb in an artificial form but also as a source of solace and even pleasure to those who need it, like the soldiers who were wounded during the war. The making of prostheses is described as the greatest achievement of German state-of-the-art medical technology, part of the image of German culture offered in the novel. This culture is presented as ultra-modern, highly industrial and decadent. As such it also stands for modernism, urbanism and industrialism. The destructive power of modern war and the healing power of modern (German) medicine are two faces of modern technology that together lead to the creation of an artificial body.

German industry is associated with the commercialization and industrialization of healing and its tremendous advancement, but also with the modern metropolis. When meeting the tailor's wife, Sprintze, the narrator hears from her about her experiences when living in Berlin. The most shocking revelation for her there was that everything that looked alive was actually artificial and made in a factory. She says, "I put out my hand and picked a cherry, but as soon as I sank my teeth in it I learned it was made of wax" (60). What astounded Sprintze even more was her visit to the theater, in which she found that the actors were actually puppets, or dummies (60). In other words, modernism and modern technology are related to the German city and to the artificial, the unnatural and the automaton. At the same time, modernity is also linked to healing and to the best medical technology, also offered by Germans.

The prosthesis and its potential is also a mixed blessing. Sometimes it is so good that it exceeds the flesh-and-blood limb. As Daniel Bach tells the narrator, referring to his artificial leg, "this man-made leg is better than the other, which is the work of God. It doesn't have to worry about rheumatism, and beats the other for walking." (3) The idea of replacing body parts gains momentum as a visionary fantasy in the novel in the conversation between Yeruham Freeman and Schutzling about the future of humanity:

In the course of their talk Yeruham asked Schutzling, 'How do you picture the generations to come?' 'There is an example already pictured and extant,' replied Schutzling. They will be one-third like Daniel Bach and one-third like Rubberovitch, and one-third like Ignatz. If a trace of humanity remains in the world, they will make themselves wooden legs and rubber hands, and they will have noses like Ignatz. (339)

Although here the body is discussed in a highly sarcastic tone, the vision of the prosthetic body is not entirely negative. This body is associated with man-made dummies and automatons. Thus, tailor dummies, theater dummies and manmade human bodies (or *golems*) are all related to the same theme of the artificial/artistically created body. This body is uncanny and horrifying. It deceives the naïve consumer or spectator in the theater, but it also epitomizes the fantasy of perfect healing that challenges divine creation.

The vision of re-creating a whole and complete human body through medical technology is fully developed, and its implications visibly demonstrated in Leibtche Bodenhaus' story about a wounded soldier he met when serving in the army during the war:

During the war I served with a certain doctor. Once they brought in a soldier, a young man, whose feet had been frozen in the trenches. Since his feet were frozen he could not move away and hide from the enemy. So he was struck by a grenade splinter, which broke his teeth and smashed his gums. His legs, my dear sir, could not be saved... so the doctor amputated them above the knee, but he repaired his mouth. He sewed and cut and sewed and made him some kind of gums from some kind of material... When I saw that young man, who had lost his legs and had nothing left of his face but a kind of open wound, I used to turn my face away and weep, for I was afraid I might go mad. But the doctor liked to look at him, and whenever he was not busy with the other wounded he would occupy himself with him, patching and mending his face... And he would mention the names of famous professors and say, "such perfect work they have never done in their lives." (408)

The tragic story of the wounded soldier ends when he is transferred to another hospital in the rear. The doctor, feeling responsible for his human creation, ties a note to his neck, with detailed care instructions. However, in the course of the evacuation a German lieutenant insists on taking his place in the wagon. The amputated soldier is left in a desolate place, with little chance of survival.

The story of the wounded soldier can be read as a parody on the traditional legend of the *golem*.<sup>65</sup> Agnon uses this tradition as a foil for his discussion of the limits of human and especially authorial presumption or hubris. The story offers a succinct metaphor for Agnon's perception of authorship in a godless world. The point of view of the wounded soldier is characterized by a sense of complete bodily dismemberment and lack of agency. He is nameless, speechless and cannot move independently. Although initially he is meticulously cared for, later he is dumped as a lifeless object. At both moments his point of view is irrelevant. He is the

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<sup>65</sup> Calling the wounded soldier *golem* finds support in a later work by Agnon, *Ad Henah (Thus Far)* published in 1953. In this novella the returning soldier, Hans, is called *golem ish* (human golem) and is implicitly presented as a shell shock victim (note the similarity to the depiction of the *golem* in kabbalist tradition as mute). Hagby notes that among Agnon's work *AGN* is the closest in tone and in theme to *Ad Henah*. Following Shaked, he establishes the wounded soldier in *AGN* as a precursor of the *golem* in *Ad Henah* (2007: 132).

instrument of his doctor's experimentations and the object of the latter's professional curiosity and pride.<sup>66</sup> Much like a theater dummy he occupies the borderline between the living subject and the inanimate object. The doctor is described here as a fine artisan, and like the tailor before him he is "patching and mending" his patient's face as if it was a precious garment. In his role as a doctor he not only heals, but using techniques of plastic surgery he tries to restore the soldier's human appearance in an act that resembles divine creation.

The story of the wounded soldier, examined within its historical context and within the context of the novel, reflects Agnon's view of authorship at this point in history. On the one hand, the subject of creation, i.e., the text and, by implication the nation, and the author himself as part of it, are fragmented. The nation, described throughout the novel as a corpse coming back to life, is dismembered and in need of thorough repair. On the other hand, the author as a human doctor does not believe in his ability to replace God and is limited in his ability to sire a body that will replace the old, diasporic Jewish body. The body he might sire has no chances of survival, both because of the cruelty and senselessness of the modern world and because it is an unnatural and unviable creation, originating in the mind of a human being. The doctor, as the epitome of the romantic ideal of the author, reaches the pinnacle of artistic creation and at the same time confronts its horror. The implications of this failure for the national revival in *Eretz Israel* are clear: both can be born only in relation to and in discussion with Jewish textual tradition. The analogy between the two models of creation juxtaposes the classicist model of authorship and the romantic one exposing the horror inherent in the latter, while at the same time problematizing the former by presenting the author himself as a potential dummy.

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<sup>66</sup> Joanna Bourke notes the professional challenge and enthusiasm that was aroused among field doctors during the Great War in response to the immense number of amputations required. She notes that "some doctors were thrilled in 'anticipation of cutting off legs and arms upon the stricken field'" and suggests that at the early years of the war more amputations were performed than were actually needed. However, as the number of casualties continued to grow, a sense of boredom and monotony spread among field doctors (1996: 33).

## Conclusion

This chapter examined Agnon's concept of authorship in the context of the transition from life in the diaspora to life in a homeland in line with Zionist ideology. The Zionist project epitomizes Svetlana Boym's concept of restoration, being premised on revival of the past for the purpose of national resurrection. The Zionist revival was based on an ambivalent relation to the past: on the one hand, it strove to restore pre-diasporic past in the historic homeland after 1800 years of living in the Diaspora. On the other hand, the Zionist project insisted on rejecting Diasporic culture and established Hebrew culture on the premise of *shlilat ha'gola*, or the rejection of exile. In writing AGN, Agnon was committed to the Zionist ideal. He was a canonic writer established in Palestine, and the Zionist establishment embraced his work. At the same time, coming from a traditional Jewish background, he refused to succumb to the Zionist precept of *shlilat ha'gola* and the novel unfolds his attempt to offer a narrative that is both Zionist and affirming Diasporic culture.

The chapter on Agnon's concept of memory explored Agnon's attempt to establish an alternative vision that incorporates Diasporic culture into the Zionist utopia. Agnon's attempt is fraught with paradoxes. On the one hand, he fully succumbs to the Zionist demand to establish a Universalist national discourse and reject the ethnic and parochial nuances of Diasporic Jewish culture. He also contributes to the mission of constructing Hebrew rootedness and indigenoussness in Palestine despite of the difficulties of such project. On the other hand, Agnon keeps a highly critical tone in relation to the Zionist flattening of Jewish history, although he ascribes this tendency, more specifically to socialism and to communism.

The chapter on Agnon's authorship explored the other side of mending the rift in Jewish memory as a result of the transition to the Zionist homeland: dealing with his own place within the Zionist project, and examining his role as a modern writer, Agnon dramatizes the rift, the chasm, and the impossibility to maintain continuity. Being a modern author and novel writer

Agnon's protagonist epitomizes the rift that he wants to mend. Examining different concepts of authorship the narrator juxtaposes the classic, traditional model on the one hand, and the romantic and Kabbalist models on the other hand. Agnon implicitly equates the romantic and kabbalist models, as they similarly offer a concept of solitary male authorship (romanticism) and procreation without the intervention of God or of woman's body. In both cases the result is dubious and horrifying. The discussion of mending the text and of creating a new Jewish body are also metaphors for the Zionist project of reviving national culture in Palestine. Therefore, the skepticism towards the project of authorship/ procreation can be applied to the project of nation building as well.

Examining the way Agnon deals with authorship revealed that the author might try to mend and patch the torn fabric of Jewish memory, but he cannot take the place of God and reconstitute the national body. Eventually he chooses to give up the diasporic parts of this body, and relegate the people remaining in Diaspora to oblivion, thus undermining his own project of mending and healing.

## Chapter 4

### The Drama of Authorship: Performance and Identification in the Yash Novels

This chapter examines the way Jacob Glatstein presents his authorship in the Yash novels, through the story of a mid-life journey to his home town in Poland to visit his dying mother. As in Agnon's case, the visit to the Eastern European home is an occasion for an ars poetic meditation on authorship and its role in contemporary Jewish culture. The visit takes place in a context of personal and national upheaval and realignment. It poses critical questions for the individual writer and forces him to engage in public affairs at a time in which poetic decisions by well known authors had cultural and even national reverberations. Much like AGN, the Yash novels present a male protagonist who uses first-person narration and, relatively late in the story, identifies himself as a professional author. This narrative strategy, similar to Agnon's, raises questions about the autobiographic and ars poetic nature of the works.

#### Where is the "I"? : Authorship and Autobiography

The Yash novels are elusive in terms of their generic classification. They present a 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, who seems to be the author of his own story. As his name, Yash, is similar to that of the biographic author, Yankev, and sounds like one of its nick names, we tend to read the novel as an autobiography. As Philippe Lejeune suggested, an autobiography is established with a tacit pact between reader and author that pertains to an extra-textual reality. According to this pact, if the name of the author is identical to that of the narrator and the protagonist, then we assume that the work is autobiographic (Lejeune 1989 3-31). However, Glatstein's narrative challenges almost every possible norm and expectation of the genre. Glatstein presents a paradox when focusing on the "I", i.e., the narrating voice, while at the same time refracting the world and sense of self, sometimes to the point of narrative incoherence. This technique is indebted to the artistic credo of the inzikhist movement, of which Glatstein was one of the founders.

In their 1919 manifesto, written by Glatstein and Leyeles, the Introspectivists laid out their poetic principles. It demanded concentration on the way the world is seen by the inner self, and listening to the inner voice, regardless of how chaotic and idiosyncratic it may be (in Harshav and Harshav 1986: 774). The refraction of outer reality through the inner lens was described by the *inzikhists* as kaleidoscopic. Harshav notes,

in their theory of kaleidoscopic art the *inzikhists* brought together several modern principles: the psychology of the stream of consciousness, the multidimensional nature of modern life, simultaneity of experience, representation through splintered elements, rather than through a full description, and the conscious organization of a poem as a “fugue” or a “symphony” of heterogeneous elements playing together in a single, integrated whole. (1990: 182-3).

Harshav argues that Glatstein did not follow these principles most of the time in his mature poetry. However, they can be clearly discerned in the Yash novels. The use of kaleidoscopic style, along with a deconstruction of the relation between author, self and autobiography, accounts for the unique autobiographical style of the Yash novels.

The novels are fragmentary and do not allow us to reconstruct “the unity of a life across time”, as Gorges Gusdorf’s suggested regarding autobiographies (in James Olney, 1980:37). Glatstein does not produce a continuous, chronological, confessional autobiographic narrative, starting with childhood memories and moving on to the development and maturation of an individual identity, in the Western tradition dating back to Rousseau’s *Confessions*. Glatstein challenges the concept of the self as coherent and observable by itself. Instead we encounter a post-Freudian, semi-conscious self that is irrational, unknowable, destabilized, and therefore partly unable to “make sense” of its own past experience. Glatstein’s text is a medley of heterogeneous types of narrative: it starts as a description of a scene, goes on to narrate dialogues between the narrator and the people he meets during his trip, moves on to other people’s monologues and to the narrator’s memories, hallucinations, dreams and even a play within a dream. Apart from the fact that the narration is not always coherent and continuous, the narrator’s

conscious state of mind is narrated as fragmented; in large parts of the text he is not conscious of the world outside him. Instead, he dozes off, day-dreams, or simply sleeps. The “I” of the narrator wavers between conscious and unconscious states, subjective and inter-subjective reality and is inherently different from the conscious and knowable “I” characteristic to the Western confessional tradition.

The interaction of the “I” with outside reality is also problematic, as this reality is refracted through memories of other places and times in a journey back to the Old World. New York City, a rural community in the Catskills, pre-World War I Warsaw and Lublin, an interwar resort in the outskirts of Lublin, and the Polish resort town Kazimierz, a town that became a tourist attraction because it is picturesque, serve as scenes of social interaction, reflection and remembrance. This constant interaction of the self with place and memory situates the novels on the fine line between autobiography and travel narrative. Indeed, critics have noted that the two genres interact and inform each other (Smith and Watson 2001: 150).

Glatstein’s narrator refrains from identifying himself as a writer. Even when he watches a play in his dream, he refrains from identifying himself as the author of the play. Thus, Glatstein plays against the expectation that Yash should be identified with the biographical author and problematizes the category of “author.” The same problematization can be discerned in several of his early poems. Glatstein expressed suspicion of autobiography in a 1928 poem titled “Autobiography”, in which he unfolds a completely fictive and fantastic life story to his son. The poem, humorous in tone, ends with the biographic author’s true present situation, that of a “poor newspaper writer” (Harshav and Harshav, 1986: 247). According to Avraham Novershtern, this poem reflects Glatstein’s resistance to autobiographic writing as too revealing (in Cammy et al. 2008:283). As Jan Schwarz notes, in a 1955 interview Glatstein characterized his poetry as a “screen against exposure” (2005: 101). Beyond resistance to exposure, Glatstein’s ars poetic poems reveal a reluctance to submit to a simple reduction of the biographic self to literary

representation. The play of concealment and exposure in Glatstein's poetry can illuminate the question of autobiography and the conception of the "I" in his prose. In poems like "Oytobiografye" (autobiography) and "Mayne Lider" (my poems) Glatstein does not completely dismiss the notion of autobiography. Rather, in the first poem he destabilizes the notion of a "real" self, which is reconstructed through the autobiographer's memory. In the second poem he points out the need to relinquish any simple relation between the real person and the authorial persona, i.e., the way the author presents himself in his work.

Glatstein's novels are dialogic: against the Cartesian logic of a single, conscious and self-knowable individual the narrative emerges through conversation with other people, who are sometimes more important than the narrator. Leah Garrett explains the "anti-metaphysical" nature of Glatstein's narrative voice:

The "anti-metaphysical autograph" locates self-knowledge in interactions and dialogues with others and is preeminently the autograph of the Yash novels. By positing selfhood in a dialogic framing – the 'I' becomes knowable and portrayable through others – the works resist essentialist and metaphysical constructs of selfhood. (1998: 210)

Apart from their dialogism, the modernist aspects of Glatstein's novels complicate and challenge the concept of authorship as an act that involves agency. As Smith and Watson note, "we tend to read autobiographical narratives as proofs of human agency, relating actions in which people exercise free choice over the interpretation of their lives and express their 'true' selves. In fact, traditional autobiography has been read as a narrative of agency; evidence that the subjects can live freely" (2001: 42). Glatstein the Inzikhist is already far from traditional notions of the "I" and of autobiography. Not only the subject's external life circumstances challenge any assumption of authorship, but also by Glatstein's artistic credo.

As Dan Miron notes,

[in *The Yash novels*] Glatstein was interested in a radical modernist deconstruction of the norms of the psychological novel, of its basic premise, i.e., that character is destiny, that the relation between character and life

circumstances determines the plot – [this] did not seem to him, as to other modernist writers, compatible with 20<sup>th</sup> century reality, in which destiny is determined by causes that are not related to character (wars, revolutions, global and local economic crises, etc.), and by life in the huge, anonymous modern metropolis, with its frantic activity; it does not allow for a stable connection between character and circumstances (Miron 2006: 272).

Lack of agency is evident in the Yash novels when Glatstein describes Yash's first years in America: Yash is described as either a roaming, bodiless consciousness, still detached from its present surrounding, or as one of a throng of immigrants struggling to make a living in a hostile new world. In the fictional present, he is afraid to assert himself against his boss when asking to leave for his home country to see his dying mother. His childhood memories depict a picture of Jewish life as subject to historical upheavals that did not leave the individual much control over his or her life.

The same sense of curtailed agency is evident in Glatstein's famous poem "1919", written the same year. The poetic subject is reduced to a trace of his former self, becoming a tiny round dot that rolls through the streets, feeling trapped under the sky. At the same time, red headlines squash its head, and someone's long tongue smears red on his glasses and obstructs his vision. The poem reflects the political events of this year: The Russian Civil War, the wave of pogroms in Ukraine and widespread unrest after World War I. These events, albeit geographically remote, crush the subject to death as if he was their direct victim, and a complete sense of helplessness characterizes the 'I' in the poem. David Roskies, commenting on *1919* in particular, argues that the question of agency plagued the newly conceptualized 'I' of modernist Yiddish writing as a whole:

The modernists... introduced a new 'I' to Yiddish poetry: intellectual, introspective, and dispassionate; a multi-faceted personality in a constant state of flux. One poem or one consistent mask would not suffice to express the fragmentary nature of modern life. The problem, however, is that profound self-knowledge seemed to preclude effective action in the real world. Here is an individual too sophisticated to believe in any escape from the labyrinth. It never occurs to Yankl son of Yitskhok [the poem's protagonist] to resist the bombardment of splinters. (Jospe and Fishman 1980: 359).

Glatstein's response to this crisis of authorship and agency can best be understood through the notion of performance. The concept of autobiographic writing as performance stresses the fact that this writing enacts the "self" that it claims has given rise to it:

A performative view of life narrative theorizes autobiographical occasions as dynamic sites for the performance of identities constitutive of subjectivity. In this view, identities are not fixed or essentialized attributes of autobiographical subjects; rather they are produced and reiterated through cultural norms and thus remain provisional and unstable (Smith and Watson 2001:143)

The traditional notion of autobiographic writing as self-expressive assumes a pre-existing interiority within the narrating subject, which is, implicitly, unified, awaiting its unfolding through writing. This view assumes the existence of an "I" before the text (ibid, 1995: 17). The performative conception is premised on modernist and postmodernist notions of the "I" as fragmentary and partly unconscious. Such notions cannot yield a self that has a continuous history. The interiority of the self that is said to be prior to autobiographical expression or reflection is an effect of autobiographical storytelling." (ibid: 18)

In the Yash novels, Jacob Glatstein presents authorship and autobiography in the modern world as a dilemma. He applies the introspectivist, kaleidoscopic credo and brings it to its inevitable conclusion, i.e., the deconstruction of the Cartesian logic of the "I" as knowable. While performative identification cannot substitute for the traditional notion of a fixed identity, it is the only strategy that allows the narrator to respond to the onslaughts of the modern world.

### **Staging Difference: the Drama of the Jewish Immigrant**

The performance of the "I" unfolds in the context of immigration from Eastern Europe to America. At the same time racism and anti-Semitism in Europe are becoming more visible. In the United States anti-immigration sentiments are rising. From the beginning of mass immigration in the 1890s to the Immigrant Acts of 1921 and 1924 anti-immigration sentiments characterized American society, and restricted immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe (Chametzky at

al. 2001: 10). As David Roediger notes, until the end of World War II, American immigration authorities consolidated racial categories and ascribed whiteness to certain groups that were not unequivocally deemed “white” beforehand, like Italians, Greeks, Slavs and East European Jews. (2005: 9). At the same time, a clear distinction between race and ethnicity has only emerged in America since World War II (ibid: 25). As a result of these circumstances, as Sander Gilman notes, “the anxiety of all Jews, even... extremely acculturated one[s]... about their status as members of the dominant culture was high” (1991: 26).

Yash’s journey from his present home in New York City to his old home in Poland reveals his complex position as an emigrant in New York and a Jew traveling to the Old World. His ethnic, religious and racial differences are repeatedly exposed. He gradually becomes a particular, racialized subject by differentiating himself and being differentiated from others. Some of his interlocutors assert their similarity to him, some assert a non-essential difference from him, and some treat him as the absolute, inassimilable and abjected Other. In addition, most, if not all, Jewish people that Yash meets on his way are preoccupied with their Jewish difference, including those who deny it. Eventually Yash is “at home” only in a discursive world of secular Yiddish culture that is transnational and cosmopolitan.

Yash’s subjectivity as a Jewish male unfolds in the novel through a negotiation of his deficiencies. The conception of identification or subjectification as a constant affirmation and denial of difference allows us to see its deep relation to the performative and the theatrical. As Stratton notes, “given the racialized construction of the Jew as always, ultimately, unable to assimilate, it is understandable that an aspect of the modern stereotype of the Jew is her or his acting ability, and the genius claimed for the Jew as an impersonator and mimic.” (2000: 60). Stratton and other critics have suggested that passing is a basic strategy of denying difference among new immigrants, mainly among Jews in anti-Semitic contexts: “Coming out is a part of the discourse of assimilation, as is passing... Where passing is the practice whereby a person

gives the appearance of being something other than they are... Coming out is the practice of publicly acknowledging that which need not be acknowledged in that particular society” (2000: 12). Passing can involve different kinds of behaviors such as learning the language and accent of the dominant culture, changing one’s dress or even converting to the dominant religion. In many cases, however, difference haunts the passing subject as a constant threat that might resurface, or what Freud termed the *unheimlich* (uncanny). (ibid: 73-4).

In the Yash novels, dramatic and theatrical metaphors are so replete that we get a sense that life as a whole is a drama. Life on the ship from New York to Paris is a manifestation of this drama (see, for example, 11-12). The ship functions as a stage upon which everyone becomes an actor, everyone plays a role, but, as Yash notes, “everyone becomes different in a different way, and so the balance in God’s world and among its creatures is maintained.”<sup>67</sup> (Yiddish Part 1: 9, English: 4) As other people act their roles, Yash feels that he is also changing: “I was evolving into a different person... I fell into my role too, and played it as elegantly and as politely as I was able.” (5) Still, within this performance on board, Jews’ performances have a unique, desperate quality. While other passengers have a range of options regarding their performance, the Jews’ options are more restricted, and they would rather deny their perceived difference. Indeed, the choice between passing as a non-Jew and maintaining a Jewish performance is central for the passengers on the ship and for many Jews throughout the first novel. The Jewish boxer sarcastically conveys this feeling when he asks Yash: “Say, what kind of Jewish bastards are walking around this ship anyway? They’d eat shit rather than admit that they’re Jews. One Hitler isn’t enough for them, the bastards.” (11)

Although the atmosphere on the ship is largely tranquil and free of world politics, it is clear to Yash from the start that people perform their identities in accordance with certain ethnic,

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<sup>67</sup> The English translation of the *Yash Novels* appeared in one volume containing both parts under the title *The Glatstein Chronicles* (2010). The translation is sometimes too free to support certain points that I am making. In such cases I translated directly from the Yiddish, while designating the page to which I am referring in the English translation.

racial and political considerations. The ship's newspaper, bringing news about the "Night of Long Knives," disturbs the cosmopolitan illusion even for Yash (24). He then decides to go looking "for Jewish eyes and for Jewish ears." (Yiddish Part 1: 36, Eng: 23) Upon realizing that racist political discourses limit the performance of his identity anyway, Yash becomes an active proponent of open Jewish performance. He also sees other Jews' attempts at passing as pathetic. Yash finds some Jews who willingly identify as such and some who are very reluctant. In both cases the drama of passing or admitting to being Jewish is mediated through the language that people choose to speak, whether Yiddish or English, the latter serving as the lingua franca on the ship.

Indeed, an important Jewish marker in anti-Semitic discourse and one that is particularly relevant to the novel is what Sander Gilman calls "Jewish language" i.e., a complex notion of difference based on the way Jews talk (or are perceived as talking), which is distinct from the way the dominant, non Jewish group talks. The image of the Jewish language is related to the concept of Yiddish as a "non language", or "a language beyond the pale of all the social conventions of culture" (Gilman 1990: 215). In the eyes of Germans around the turn of the century Yiddish was perceived as a "primitive pidgin spoken by the Eastern Jew," or as *mauscheln* (ibid: 254). The latter term referred to the use of Yiddish accent, intonation, or vocabulary that marked the Eastern Jews as others. Even when Jews assimilated and produced literary works in High German, they were still represented in anti-Semitic propaganda as using a borrowed language concealing their irreducible difference (ibid: 241).

Yash has a very instructive encounter when he addresses a Dutch Jew who, "caught in [his] net proved less complaisant" (28), and who not only chose to speak English, but also denied any acquaintance with the Jewish languages of the old Amsterdam Jewish ghetto (30). Upon being identified by Yash as Jewish, the Dutch man says: "How did you know I was Jewish?... Well I am, but not one of those common Polish Jews. I'm Dutch." (29) When assertively

identifying himself as a Polish Jew, Yash receives the dubious compliment “you don’t look it.” (30) This encounter demonstrates the Dutch Jew’s self-hatred.

As Sander Gilman suggests, “Self-hatred results from outsiders’ acceptance of the mirage of themselves generated by their reference group – that group in society which they see as defining them – as reality.” In the next stage the hated minority projects its perceived difference onto a more specific group that serves as an extension of this minority. In the case of the Jew at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this refers to German or other acculturated Jews projecting their difference onto the East European Jew. However, as Gilman notes, “the central problem with this secondary level of projection is that it is almost impossible to create a complete break with the new Other. For even as one distances oneself from this aspect of oneself, there is always the voice of the power group saying, “Under the skin you are really like them anyhow.” (ibid: 3). This observation makes Jewish difference ambivalent. This ambivalence arouses both the anxiety of the dominant group as well as that of its rejected Other, who then produces ever more others.

Therefore, the Dutch Jew does not blame the Dutch people for his need to dissimulate as non-Jew, but he rather blames East European Jewish immigrants. As he describes them, Dutch people are willing to grant the Jews full equality, on the condition of cultural assimilation. But three things destroy this seemingly ideal picture of emancipation and assimilation: Hitler, the emergence of Zionism, and – the crucial point for Yash’s subjectivity – the traditional, Polish Jews who emigrated to Western Europe, including the Netherlands. Referring to them, the Dutch Jew says:

No less than their Christian neighbors, Dutch Jews detested the Polish Jews in their midst. With their long, scraggy beards, the Polish Jews who shuffled about the streets of Amsterdam in their ridiculous garb were an embarrassment to the Dutch Jews, to say nothing of the Christians, generally patient and tolerant souls. The Polish Jews were doing great harm to their Dutch coreligionists, and their presence was a slap in the face, because no matter how hard the Dutch Jews tried to keep their distance from the Poles, the Christians felt that the Dutch Jews bore some responsibility for the behavior of their eastern brethren (31).

Although the Dutch Jew apparently lives in a state that grants him full equality, this equality is predicated on the erasure of difference. The emergence of a visible difference embodied by the Polish Jews threatens to expose the invisible difference that Dutch Jews endeavor to hide. This state of affairs makes any Jew who wants to assert himself as such, including Yash, consider the high toll he might pay for it, even in a liberal country. Polish Jews were indeed received very ambivalently by their own coreligionists in western European countries where Jews had been emancipated.<sup>68</sup> They served as the uncanny of the emancipated Jew; they were imagined as the difference that was repressed and resurfaced, to the horror of Jews who already acculturated. From Yash's perspective as a Polish Jew, the Dutch Jew's reluctance to identify as a Jew, reflects Yash's complicated position as an Other: for most passengers, he is the assimilable Other. For some Jews he is a fellow Jew, while for others he is a co-religionist who does not share their ethnic or national affiliation. For anti-Semitic passengers, he is the abject Other, while for Jews invested in passing he is the hated uncanny, i.e. an *Ostjude*, the perjorative term used to refer to the Jews from Eastern Europe. Thus, when considering his subjectivity in an anti-Semitic context Yash has to position himself against anti-Semitic non-Jews on the one hand and against West European Jews on the other, who, by passing as dominant non-Jews, replicate their racism and yield to self hatred.

While on the ship, Yash is free to decide whether to pass or identify as a Jew; on the train from Paris to Warsaw, his situation is much more vulnerable. As a liminal space, the ship allows the passengers time off from their accustomed performances. They can cross class lines, at least to a degree, indulge in romances and loosen the ties of normative behavior. Upon debarking the ship, Yash notes that "everyone had changed into different clothes and looked oddly overdressed. There was a sudden change of decoration" (Yidd. part 1: 182, Eng. 136). It is clear that a different "play" is about to begin. Indeed, the difference is already felt on the train that takes the

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<sup>68</sup> For a thorough discussion of this issue see Aschheim, Steven, *Brothers and Strangers, the East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923* university of Wisconsin Press, 1999.

passengers from the port to Paris. Unlike the ship, where everyone was relatively free to walk around, the main limitation being economic, here people are compartmentalized according to their destinations, indexing their ethnicity (Yidd. Part 1: 183, Eng. 136-7). On the train, destination becomes destiny.

The range of choices is most limited when Yash takes the train from Paris to Warsaw, traveling through Nazi Germany. Yash knows well that his American passport and his assimilated look, are the only things that will set him apart from the general lot of the European Jews he sees through the windows. Although he chooses to identify himself as a Jew when talking to a philo-Semitic German businessman, when Hitler-Jugend wearing swastika armbands invade the car, Yash must try to pass as a non-Jew. For a moment he considers getting up and making a speech to reveal himself (158). However, rumors about the Hitler-Jugend's violence dissuade him from doing so (157). In fact, his anti-Nazi interlocutor realizes the same thing and gives the Nazi salute and says "Heil." In the highly politicized, racialized and anti-Semitic atmosphere of Yash's home-bound journey, identity is presented first and foremost as a performance that immediately positions the Jewish subject in relation to his/her Other.

A glimpse at Yash's remembered past further illuminates the dilemma of Jewish identity and relates Jewish authorship to castration complex. As in the Freudian account of difference, Glatstein presents anti-Semitism and racism as heavily implicated in a sexual economy that sees the Jewish male as lacking in masculinity. Indeed, the racialization of the other is also related to his feminization. One approach to the question of intergroup differences and the anxieties they arouse is presented by Freud in his 1927 essay, "Fetishism". Freud suggests that the male child's first realization that his mother does not possess a phallus, i.e., that she is different from him, arouses castration anxiety. The fetishist scene of discovering the sexual difference is ambivalent to begin with, as it wavers between the assurance of similarity and the anxiety of difference. Similarly, assimilation is premised on the perception of the dominant group that the Other's

difference is inessential and thus eradicable. When the discourse becomes racist, the dominant group wants to construct the Jew as a subject of irreducible difference (Stratton 2000:58).

The fact that the original, Freudian token of difference – the phallus, and by implication its lack – was substituted for other differences, such as skin color or the lack of certain characteristics, should not divert us from the fact that lack, and thus inadequacy, is always at stake. Although rendered in different terms, lack always reverts back to the primal difference and feminizes the Other. This is especially true in the case of the Jew, whose feminization rested on entrenched stereotypes in European culture. As Stratton notes, in this model anti-Semitism is equated with misogyny, and the corollary assumption that the dominant group is male (Stratton 2000:55).

The feeling of inferiority as castration haunts Yash's childhood and adolescent memories. Visiting Warsaw before going on to his home in Lublin, Yash remembers when he visited this city as a youth. He mentions the exams he and the student he tutored had to take at the Krinski Business School. This school was the inferior option offered to Jews, after their annual quota at the Russian high school had been filled<sup>69</sup>. The business school did not offer good career options for its graduates and looked like a miserable Jewish imitation of the non-Jewish Lublin Gymnasium (168). The school metaphorically presented the image of Jewish castration. Not only did the students' uniforms lack the brass buttons that adorned those of the privileged students in the Russian school, but also, "Krinski was the destination of those with no other alternative, after the Gymnasium examiners have cut Jewish hopes every year with their scythes" (Yidd. Part 1: 223, Eng. 168). This enforced inferiority of Jews as an oppressed minority group is covered over by grotesque mimicry of the dominant group that only underscores what Jews lack. The squeaky, shabby Krinski School has an overly impressive director to hide the institute's inferiority:

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<sup>69</sup> This part of Poland was then under Russian rule.

A man with a prominent red nose and a beard so expansive it looked pasted on. Rozhdestvenski, head of the Lublin Gymnasium, could permit himself a thin, black mustache, but his Krinski counterpart, Woskresenski, felt that he must sport the broad, red beard of a Russian Orthodox priest... But Rozhdestvenski's little mustache inspired more fear than Woskresenski's pan-Slavic beard, which belonged to the world of Jewish exaggerated caricature, mimicking the stranger open-handedly (Yidd. Part 1: 224, Eng. 168).

Homi Bhabha discusses this kind of performance as mimicry in post-colonial context.

Mimicry is the attempt of the Other, in this case the Jew, to assimilate through an imitation of the norms and behavioral standards of the dominant culture. Attempting to construct identity, the subject mirrors the dominant Other. When assimilation is forestalled, as in the case of the Polish Jew, mimicry becomes excessive, desperate, and moves towards parody (Stratton 2000: 60).

In a more explicit reference to castration, Yash remembers how the Catholic hospital, in which he was treated for appendicitis, reminded him of the Lublin Gymnasium, which he attended as an extern. The experience of being examined by disparaging non-Jewish teachers and a priest was humiliating and reminded the Jewish student of his lack: "Heh, Heh, it implied. Yakov Isakovich! [his name in Russian; Jacob, son of Isaac] A little Jew wants to share our privileges" (169). Regarding the priest who examined him, Yash notes, "he only wanted to dig around in me with a little knife. It was at the Szwienteduski hospital that they cut out my appendix" (169). The association to castration is clear, completing the picture of Jewish difference experienced as male impotence.

Yash's sense of impotence and lack of agency becomes a central theme of the novel, intricately intertwined with a sense of impotence, sterility or lack of hope for Jewish progeny on the part of the male Jew. In describing his childhood in Lublin, Yash focuses on Jewish fear. When talking to his former fellow passenger on the ship, an American teacher from Wisconsin, upon meeting her again in Paris, Yash confesses his feelings as a Jew and an immigrant: "I had fled from my town as you would from a place of horror, because that's what it was. A Jewish child was raised on terror. Our Gentiles were terror for us. Your crucified was terror for us..."

(Yidd. Part1: 195, Eng. 147) Yash reveals the reasons for this terror in other childhood memories and in his dreams. In his first detailed dream he describes Jews as caught between two forces, “the grand Russian Orthodox cathedrals and their less imposing Catholic neighbors.” (162) He recalls being a small child during the 1905 Russian revolution, when Jews were caught between the Cossack police force of the imperial regime and the revolutionary terrorist forces. Yash describes these events from the point of view of a child bystander, representing ordinary Jews as uninvolved in the upheaval and only wanting to survive. In the aftermath of one of the great pogroms, he realizes that whichever way he looks, he faces terror: “on the one side, Tsar Nicholas and his pogroms, and on the other, the young people in their blue, black, or red peasant shirts, with their sashes and tassels” (56).

The narrator projects the sense of impotence onto the Jewish God, who is unable to protect His believers. When the socialists occupy the synagogue on Purim eve and demand that the Jews defame their God, Yash feels that he has to protect God against them: “to oppose the Jewish God? What sins had He committed? ... What could one have against such a God, who was ready at any moment to hasten the Redemption, but whose hands were too short and weak to bring the Messiah?” (56-7).

Yash’s sense of helplessness is situated in his inability as a small child to take active part in the historical events unfolding around him. When Yash tells his father that he envies the young Bundists, members of the Jewish socialist party, his father tells him that “the revolution would get along just fine without [him]” (63). Later, while still a child, Yash’s cousin invites him to a gathering of Zionist socialists. Once again his plans are thwarted: “my younger brother betrayed me, and my pants and boots were confiscated to prevent me from going out. Father commented that the Zionist revolution would also carry on without me.” (65) Eventually, when Yash is mature enough to act independently, the popular revolution has waned, and a general feeling of despair and decadence descends upon the formerly enthusiastic workers and youth. Since there

are no more opportunities for action, Yash spends his days with his privileged and artistic friends, idling and deliberating, like Hamlet, whether “to be or not to be” (69-70).

Most critics describe Yash as emigrating from a place of persecution to a place that allows assimilation, neglecting to note the price that freedom levies on the Jewish immigrant. Referring to Glatstein the author, Ruth Wisse argues, however, that “America’s opportunities were proving to be a mixed blessing: the Yiddish writer might turn cosmopolitan, but acculturation also encouraged Jews to switch to English...” (in Miller Budick 2001: 151). In the novel, after immigrating to NYC, Yash also experiences lack of difference as threatening his identity. The big city with its throng of immigrant workers is alienating. Describing his life as an immigrant in New York City, he recalls:

An alarm clock roused everybody to work. They would scratch themselves, mutter and grumble, one after the other they would flush the toilet – impatiently, one after the other ... When they had gone, a faint smell pervaded the rooms where they had performed their hasty morning ablutions. A quarter of an hour later the same faint smells were being exuded through the pores of their skins, as legs pressed against legs, buttocks against buttocks, in the crowded subways, rickety elevated trains, and overcrowded trolley cars (Yidd. Part 2: 44, Eng. 209).

As Yash recalls his life as an immigrant, he depicts both aspects of difference as threatening the subject’s agency: on the one hand, anti-Semitic persecution in Europe designates and isolates him from non Jews, who cast a hostile look at him; on the other hand, assimilation in America diminishes his humanity and, by implication, his agency. Glatstein thereby exposes the illusion of the dream of emancipation and equality promised by the liberal nation-state; emancipation is revealed as dependent on the erasure of the Jewish difference. Constructing a self-defeating narrative authority provides Glatstein a strategy, though a paradoxical one, to engage critically with the historical moment of racial profiling and persecution. His narrative authority, structured around performance rather than around metaphysical truth, allows him to mirror the Jewish condition in his time.

### *Purim Shpil and the drama of Jewish identity*

The centrality of theater and theatricality to identity formation and authorship in the Yash novels is not limited to conceptions of performance, difference and mimicry. Glatstein intertwines the idea of racial identity as performative with the folk tradition of Purim Shpil, a tradition dating back to the sixteenth century. The Purim shpil was a performance of biblical stories, both directly related to the holiday on which they were performed, i.e., the story of Esther, and not directly related to it, especially the Joseph story. The performers of the purim shpiln, usually young men in Eastern Europe, sometimes included anachronistic material related to local politics or personalities. The performance occurred after the holiday feast in the homes of wealthy Jews who had enough space in their house to allow for it and the means to provide charity to the performers. The plays featured stock characters played by amateur townspeople (Joel Berkowitz and Jeremy Dauber 2006: 5). As a tradition originating in folk festivities and carnivals, the purim shpil was based on a carnivalesque reversal of roles and a dissolving of everyday boundaries and statuses; the poor players personified rich townspeople and, in the plays themselves, powerful characters (like Haman, in the story of Esther) were humiliated by the meek (like Mordechai, in the same story). While based on biblical stories, the plays contained lewd overtones, sexual associations and gender reversal, as all the players were male. This was part of a ritual that can be characterized as liminoid<sup>70</sup> (Ahuva Belkin, 2002: 46 and in passim).

From this repertoire Glatstein used the stories of Joseph and Esther as a symbolic frame to his novels. The two stories revolve around dissimulation - passing as non-Jewish - and asserting one's Jewish identity at a critical moment for the Jewish people. Through these two stories Glatstein addresses the main dilemmas of contemporary Jewish people in general, and more specifically the dilemmas he faced as an immigrant Jewish male author. Each episode in the Biblical stories illuminates some aspects of Yash's situation as a male Jewish immigrant

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<sup>70</sup> Liminoid activities, according to Victor Turner, are outside the rites of passage structure and are individualized leisure pursuits such as art, sport, pastimes and games. .

returning to his birthplace in anti-Semitic Europe and as a Yiddish writer. At the same time, by symbolically inserting Yash into these stories in various roles, Glatstein positions his protagonist as an emblem of the Jewish people as a whole, in a very similar manner as Agnon. In both cases, the conflation between the biography of the narrator and that of the author is intentional and reflects the role of the author (both biographic and fictional) as a synecdoche of the nation.

Glatstein uses the Biblical story of Joseph to relate to every aspect of Yash's life as a man and an artist. Through this theme Glatstein outlines Yash's identifications with Jewish people and his role as a public figure, while positioning himself as a savior, a male heir, an exiled son and a lover – all of which are roles that he never completely fulfills. By considering these roles Yash reflects on his life throughout this mid-life homebound journey.

Both the Joseph and the Esther story are stories of dissimulation as a result of persecution. The first time the Joseph story appears in the novel relates to this aspect. Glatstein refers to the scene in which Joseph, after becoming a prominent figure in Egypt, meets his formerly treacherous brothers after a long separation and uses his foreign appearance to hide his identity. Eventually, after taking advantage of his high status and putting them in a difficult situation, he reveals himself to his brothers and reconciles with them (Genesis 42-45). In his reference to this story Glatstein stresses the acts of dissimulation and revelation, and the reason for the eventual exposure that is familial and ethnic kinship. On the ship Yash meets a group of young Russians who embody the young generation of socialists in Soviet Russia, the ones who enjoyed the fruits of the 1917 revolution. As socialists they are reluctant to talk about ethnic or religious affiliations and show pride in their newly acquired freedom and equality. However, one member of the group approaches Yash and makes it a point to confess his Jewishness:

I was approached by one of the Russians – *as was Joseph by his brothers* – who told me what was anyway obvious, that he was a Jew... once the secret was out, [he] decided to go for broke and tell me everything. May the Gods of internationalism forgive me, but,

amid this colorful, multinational assemblage, his words sounded especially homey, redolent with the Jewish aromas of freshly baked hallah... (75 my emphasis)

Yash's comments on the Soviet Jew and his largely optimistic story reflect Yash's doubts about internationalism and cosmopolitanism. After meeting the Dutch Jew, Yash implicitly doubted that a Jew could ever become "truly" Dutch, in spite of all good intentions, and here, again, he has doubts about the Soviet attempt to wipe out ethnic and religious loyalties. In both the Dutch and the Soviet cases, equality is conditioned on the erasure of difference. With the former it was evident in the Dutch Jew's reaction to the uncanny traditional *Ostjuden* who threatened to expose his difference. Here it is evident in the Soviet Jew's horror upon hearing Yash's innocent compliment, "Yevreyskaya golova", a Jewish head (Yash adds irony to this Yiddish compliment by rendering it in Russian). This dubious compliment, a Yiddish idiom that Yash is toying with, arouses anxiety within the young, socialist group flaunting its ethnic blindness. (76)

The act of revealing oneself to one's "brother", as Joseph did, stands both for the choice to reveal one's identity rather than conceal it, and the choice to identify with one's people rather than with the Enlightenment-based idea of the secular nation state. Yash's reaction to the Nazi targeting of Jews is nostalgia for home and to ethnic relations. Glatstein critiques the powerful erasure and repression that the discourse of nationalism and emancipation, in its contemporary European form, effects. The regulatory force of this discourse inevitably turns the national subject into a neurotic who has to constantly hide his difference.

The Joseph story also serves Yash to consider his own position as an immigrant returning for a home visit and his mission in relation to his people. He sees himself as coming from the land of plenty to visit his brothers in time of distress. Thus, Joseph's figure as the savior of his people serves Yash to consider his duties when returning to Poland. During his visit Yash feels like Joseph, i.e., the absent, prosperous immigrant son who is expected to deliver his brothers from

their plight. In the second novel, when Yash wakes up from his dream, twelve different local people approach him, as the sons of Jacob approached their brother Joseph. They beg for his help in finding their lost relatives in America. They do so in the name of ethnic and communal kinship, which only exacerbates Yash's feeling of helplessness, knowing that he can hardly offer real help (271-284). The fact that he is expected to help his Jewish brothers by assuming a public role burdens him. Yash struggles with the need to assume public responsibility, since the historical moment does not allow a Jewish author the luxury of creativity in isolation. The struggle between "pure art" and the need to situate oneself politically also resonates with Glatstein's career as a columnist who engaged the Jewish public in the Yiddish press.

The scene of Jacob's death (Genesis, chap. 49) links personal and national memories. It appears several times in the novel, especially as the model for the death scene requested by the Jewish historian, Steinman. By evoking Jacob's death, Glatstein deals with patrilineage and questions of individual and national legacy and continuity. Steinman represents the proud, secular, Yiddish-speaking East European Jewish culture, with which Yash has much in common, except that Steinman consciously gave up his personal and artistic aspirations to serve his community (323). The decision to become a storyteller and collector of oral Jewish tradition instead of a historian reflects Steinman's evaluation of the current situation of the Jewish people, which does not allow people to follow their desired career path. Steinman chose a popular kind of writing to address the condition of the people, whose immediate physical needs he could not ignore. In doing this, Steinman expresses a dilemma that plagues both Yash and Glatstein: how to write personal poetry without ignoring public concerns but without compromising one's artistic ideals.

Glatstein evokes Jacob's death when Steinman, preparing to die, confesses to Yash that now, after getting to know the full diversity of the Jewish people – young and old, rich and poor, nationalists and assimilated – he feels like Jacob on his death bed. He says, "I should like to

gather them all around my bed so I could tell them many things, so I can admonish them... I should like to gather them all around my bed, just as Jacob gathered the tribes, and here is what I would say to them..." (326) At this point Steinman reveals his spiritual legacy, his message to the people. While Steinman seeks continuity on the national level, he is also searching for an heir, as he only has one daughter, who is unmarried and past her childbearing years (217). The question of continuity pertains to Yash both as part of a culture whose continuity is questionable, and also as the one whom Steinman implicitly chooses as his heir. Throughout the novel, Steinman bequeaths his spiritual legacy to Yash, and on his death bed, it is Yash who conveys the faint words of the dying man to the group gathering around Steinman (367-370). Yash hasn't made the kind of commitment to public affairs that Steinman did and is conflicted regarding his mission and obligations as a Jewish author. The scene of Jacob's death, reenacted by Steinman, raises the question of Jewish continuity and activism in the face of rising anti-Semitism in Europe.

Glatstein touches upon the question of the Jewish woman and mother through two episodes from the Joseph story. The scene of Rachel's death in childbirth and her burial in Bethlehem, outside of the family burial plot in Hebron (Genesis 35:16-20), serves Glatstein as a way to deal with the Jewish maternal lineage. This episode plagues Jacob upon his deathbed, and he asks his son, Joseph, not to do bury him in Egypt but to bury him in the land of his fathers. Because of her unfortunate end, Rachel is associated in Jewish tradition with the lamentation of exile (see Jeremiah 31: 14). The Bessarabian Jew on board the ship who mentions this story to Yash also feels acutely detached from Jewish life, due to his choice to live so far from established Jewish communities. Rachel serves as the symbolic mother-figure associated with the plight of dispersal. Glatstein also uses the biblical story of Rachel to position his narrator as an emblem of the Jewish people. He identifies his narrator as a Jacob figure, thus inserting himself to the Biblical family drama. He identifies both with the figure of Jacob and with that of Joseph. Yash is

also identified in the novel as son of Isaac, his mother is (Ita) Rachel and his brother is Benjamin (160), therefore weaving him into the Biblical family of the fathers and mothers of the nation.

The relationship between Joseph and Potiphar's wife positions Yash as a man who evaluates his masculinity. A young woman named Saba tells him about her love story with a young Hasid who frequents the resort every year with the hasidic rabbi's retinue. She compares this story to the biblical story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (250, Genesis 39:7-21). Eventually, in Yash's second, detailed dream (254-269) Saba plays the role of his female partner, first as a theater companion and later as a lover (268-9). The presentation of Yash as a man and a lover reflects his struggle with feelings of impotence as a Jewish male immigrant.

The biblical story of Esther adds to our understanding of the male Jewish author's dilemmas by presenting female sexuality in the context of discrimination and persecution. Esther's story is presented in the novel both in its Biblical version and through the medieval, Polish legend of Esterke, a popular figure in Polish literature and culture, which has reflected both philo-Semitic and anti-Semitic sentiments. Chone Shmeruk argues that, the Esterke story was always linked to political issues. The earliest, fifteenth-century version is contemporaneous with the extension of the privileges granted to the Jews of Poland by Boleslaw of Kalisz, suggesting that these privileges were gained through the intercession of a Jewish mistress (1985: 14). The Esterke story appears in Jewish sources only at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Jews preferred to depict Esterke as the Polish king's wife, who interceded on behalf of her people as the biblical Esther has done. As an example of cross-cultural influence, the Polish versions use motifs from the Book of Esther, and some *Purimshpiln* staged in Kazimierz at the beginning of the twentieth century performed the Polish story rather than the biblical one. (ibid: 55)

The novel explicitly discusses the story of Esther mainly during Yash's visit to Kazimierz, long renowned for its historical sites, including the castle allegedly built by Casimir

for Esterke. On his way to the town Yash has a long conversation with his companion, Neifeld. The latter discusses the problem of conversion and frames Queen Esther's story in this context. He sees the plight of Polish Jewry as caused by anti-Semitism and persecution and worsened by the Jewish dowry system and the unequal status of the sexes. Since the economic situation is grim, he tells Yash, Jewish men only look for wealthy brides who have a decent dowry so that they can avoid the complete starvation that is the lot of most Jews. As a result, many poor Jewish girls embrace Christianity (339).

The association of conversion with the dowry system links conversion to the issue of Jewish female sexuality and presents female sexuality as a challenge to the Jewish male. On the one hand, the Jewish woman can serve as a mediator between nations, as in the Esterke story. On the other hand, when female sexuality is not harnessed to the national narrative, and Jewish women convert or are simply absent, Jewish continuity is jeopardized. The Bessarabian on the ship related one such extreme case. He described life in Bogota as grim, because there were no Jewish wives to be found there, and the continuity of the Jewish community was in doubt. (37) But more often, as in the case Neifeld describes, Jewish women refuse to harness their sexuality to the national narrative or to any other phallogentric narrative, thus threatening the male in general and the Jewish male in particular.

The novel presents the issue of feminine sexuality both as a Jewish problem and as a universal problem in the years after World War I. The novel features many strong, independent and seductive women, not all of them Jewish, who threaten male domination. The teacher from Wisconsin who Yash meets on the ship is only one of several single female passengers who go to Europe for the obvious purpose of having sexual relations that are not permissible in their small American hometowns. Throughout the novel mature women try to seduce younger men, whom they greatly outnumber due to the carnage of the war. In Part Two, the elderly, "calcified" Jews in Buchlerner's guest house are symbolically castrated by their wives or daughters. Mister Finkel's

second wife tyrannizes him and mocks him (221, 233-5, 243), while Steinman's daughter gives him a pill every time he tells a riveting story or analyzes an idea, reminding him of his disabilities and offending his manly pride. (220, 331) The limited liberation that women experienced after the war aroused general male anxiety. As a result, men attempted to re-harness female sexuality for national and familial purposes. This is evidenced by the Wisconsin teacher's story of her rape by one of her cousins during a home visit to Norway. (146) In the story, on the morning after rape, the cousin offered to marry her, retroactively turning the rape into a way to "have her" for life.

However, the Jewish case is more fraught, since here liberated female sexuality jeopardizes a national continuity that is already questionable and threatens to castrate a male who is already considered emasculated. In a male-dominated discourse the Jewish woman is doubly othered. The fact that the Jewish male himself does not fully possess the phallic prerogative, i.e., he is feminized by the dominant group, turns the relationship between the male and his internal others highly ambivalent. Therefore, Jewish women are too loosely tied to the name of the (Jewish) Father to be safely possessed by their men, and Jewish sons are too ambivalently castrated by their fathers to develop what might be considered normal manhood (2000:56). For this reason, part of Yash's assumption of authorship requires reclaiming his male body and gaining some control over the Jewish female's sexuality.

All these elements are interwoven in the Esterke legend as told by Yash (349) and interpreted by Neifeld (354). In Yash's version, which highlights the origins of the legend in the *Purim shpil*, the king has a "paper crown of Purim", i.e., his crown is part of the carnival masquerade that Jews wear in Purim. He carries the Jewish girl "up the hill in his own arms, higher and higher" denoting Esterke's climbing the social ladder through her forced conversion. The act of climbing also relates to the king's sexual excitement, as "it seems that she was naked, or rather, three-quarters naked, for King Casimir had wanted to remove the last of her clothes with his own trembling hands." (349) However, once converted and on the hill, all paths back to

her family and people are blocked. (350) Neifeld's version clearly renders conversion as crossing the border between life and death:

For what has really gone on here in Kazimierz?... The Jew had his own poor world, and the Gentile led his own separate life. We always walked as far as the city gates, beyond which death lies – a great cemetery full of ancestors... But the people created a legend in defiance of the limitations of this life, according to which one of our daughters gets together with one of the others, a king, no less. There is not so much as a mention of marriage... no Jew will touch upon the moral aspect directly... We have given up a daughter, sent her out into the world like an ambassador, and we ask no questions. (354-5)

Female sexuality is a way for both male and female Jews to cross the national border to the Other, but, as Neifeld and Yash note, this crossing can only occur in legends, because in real life the crossing involves death, detachment from one's people, or, as in modern times, losing the links to one's family and culture for the sake of social or economic advancement.

Glatstein uses the stories of Joseph and Esther to frame the novels within a discussion of the major themes at the heart of contemporary Jewish life: Jewish identity in the face of anti-Semitic persecution, Jewish continuity in light of the looming calamity, and the economy of sexual relations as it unfolds in the life of an ethnic minority. At the same time, the two stories chosen are popular themes of Purim-shpiln and therefore unfold the theatrical idiom in the novel. The dream-play that appears in the second novel links questions of authorship with the tradition of the Jewish theater.

### **Performing Authorship in a Dream Play**

Authorship is most intensely and explicitly discussed in Yash's second detailed dream, recounted in the second novel (pp. 254-269). A reading of this scene illuminates Yash's depiction of authorship as the drama of a Jewish male, writing at a time of anti-Semitic persecution. Here the theatrical tropes turn literal and the performance of identity turns into a play, set in a dream. The play invites a Freudian interpretation as representing the same anxieties that plague Yash throughout the novel. The dream reflects two main defense mechanisms active in dream work:

displacement, i.e., a redirection of affects from an object felt to be unacceptable to an object felt to be safe and acceptable, and condensation, i.e., the process by which a single symbol or word is associated with several ideas or feelings. The dream can also be read as revolving around repressed sexual desires from early childhood that still disturb Yash as a mature author. The content and the setting of the dream present Yash's personal development as an author as emblematic of larger phenomena: the development of Yiddish culture and especially of modern Yiddish theater.

Psychoanalytic ideas were central to the development of modernism from its inception. In fact, some authors see these ideas not just as the object of modernist art but as the *raison d'être* of modernism. As Astradur Eysteinnsson notes,

Modernism is judged not as an aesthetic complement of social modernity, but rather as a vehicle of crisis within the “progress” of modernization. The signs of this crisis are generally felt to reside in a modernist preoccupation with human consciousness (as opposed to a mimetic concern with the human environment and social conditions), and they are perhaps most pronounced in the use of the “stream of consciousness technique in modernist fiction... modernism is felt to signal a radical “inward turn” in literature, and often a more thorough exploration of the human psyche than is deemed to have been probable or even possible in pre-Freudian times. (1990: 26)

When Freud's seminal work “The Interpretation of Dreams” was published in 1899, its insights reverberated in the work of all modernist movements, making the dream and its peculiar logic a field of experimentation and exploration. This is evidenced, for example, in the works of the surrealists, or in Strindberg's 1901 “A Dream Play” (Bradbury and McFarlane 1991: 85).

The Inzikhists as a group were influenced by Freud's work, as reflected in B. Alkvit's review of *Ven Yash iz geforn*, in which he says that their artistic sensibilities were shaped by James Joyce, Marcel Proust and Sigmund Freud (B. Alkvit, quoted in Schwarz 2005: 101). In the introspectivist manifesto of 1919 Glatstein, Leyeles and Minkov make a glib comment about psychoanalysis: “We insist that the poet should give us the authentic image that he sees in himself and give it in such a form as only he and no one else can see it. If such a poem then becomes grist

for the mill of Freudian theory... we do not mind” (in Harshav and Harshav 1986: 776). The introspectivist technique and the kaleidoscopic poetics of the *inzikhists* are manifestations of the same “turn inward” motivated by modernism and psychoanalysis. The *inzikhists*’ insistence on the subjective, sometimes chaotic, inner world is, as Harshav noted, akin to the use of stream of consciousness in prose. Glatstein was interested in Freudian theory and methods throughout his career. In an interview with Yankev Pat he noted that “our generation... published Sigmund Freud, who expressed the soul struggle of our generation” (quoted in Hadda 1980: 189). In several of his poems he uses Freud as the protagonist, mainly to address dilemmas that plague the poetic persona.<sup>71</sup>

The two narrated dreams in the novels are only the most explicit parts of a more general narrative technique that presents the “I” as displaced and only partly conscious; elsewhere the novels present a narrator who tells parts of his story while hallucinating, dozing, or sleeping. At a certain point, at the end of a long section of remembrance that is rendered as a hallucination, Yash confesses that he skipped the most consequential moments in his life in this case, the moment of meeting his parents after twenty years of absence, while dreaming. Not coincidentally, he says this while traveling in a wagon, and he compares life to a voyage experienced in a dream (216).

Yash’s dream play is embedded within a novel that uses *Purim Shpil* themes as its central tropes. In addition, references abound to modern Yiddish playwrights, chiefly Abraham Goldfaden (1860-1908), a Russian born poet, playwright, stage director and actor, considered the father of modern Jewish theater. Goldfaden’s operetta tunes are sung mainly by the proletarian workers (65, 69), and women (Yash’s mother sings a well-known song from Goldfaden’s play *Shulamith*, 208). Goldfaden’s plays and Yiddish theater in general are represented as popular

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<sup>71</sup> Glatstein uses Freud in his poem “A froyd-epizod” (“A Freud-episode”), in his *Gezangen fun rekhts tsu links* (1971). He also uses the figure of Freud in *Tsvey lider vegn altn* (“Two poems about the old man” in *A yid fun Lublin* (1966).

entertainment for the masses. The dream pits this popular genre against “high-brow” or avant-gard Yiddish literature to express Yash’s own doubts about the accessibility of his writing and his preferred sources of inspiration.

The dream opens with two preambles to the play. In the first, Yash sees a composite figure that looks both like Buchlerner, the owner of the resort, and the shikse, or gentile young woman, who feeds the geese in the same place. The composite figure turns into Abrasha Weisgelt, a Jewish violinist who became paralyzed in the middle of his meteoric rise to fame, and complains to God about his condition. In the second preamble, Yash sees himself clad in an elegant suit but is unable to find his socks. He runs around, looking for his shoes. At this point he enters a dark space, and through a narrow opening he sees that a play is being performed. He tries to recognize the play, and in the meantime rejects three options: it is not the *purim* play he wrote and performed as a child, nor is it the “Manhunters”, or “The Vow”, in which he took part as the prompter and ruined the performance by being struck dumb. Prior to the play Yash describes the highly critical audience: his father, who expects to see a popular, easy to digest play; his mother who would like to see an operetta by Goldfaden; and Saba, his female acquaintance from the resort, who measures the play against the artistic standards of Chekhov.

The play itself starts with a dialogue between two Jewish women, Basia and Gnendl. They speak about their stifled desires, due to the demands of Jewish family life. Nahman, Gnendl’s husband, arrives with a guest for the Sabbath. The guest, who turns out to be a Jewish goldsmith and a childless widower, envies Nahman for having a beautiful, chaste wife and a quiet family life. At this point enters Yankel, Nahman’s Jewish apprentice, who expresses his desire for Gnendl more explicitly than the Jewish guest did before. A third guest, Goddam Devilfilth, enters last. He looks like a demon, but Nahman presents him as a Jew who makes friends with the gentiles. Goddam’s behavior is extremely lewd, and he courts Gnendl very coarsely. Two young male gentiles now knock on the door and enter. They are drunk and demand a kiss from Gnendl,

whom they call “the Jewish princess”. Goddam drives them away by force. Then the guests leave, and the Jewish goldsmith retires to sleep in the living room. When the curtain goes down, Yash notices that Grendl turned into Saba, and that she lies down in her bedroom. At this point he feels he is Nahman, steps forth, and Saba greets him by calling him Joseph. Yash-Nahman swears love to her and promises to shave his Jewish beard and turn into a virile gentile. Saba suddenly turns into an old woman, Yash runs away, and the crowd demands its money back.

In the dream Yash acts out his anxieties as a man, Jewish author, and a modernist. The first part of the dream suggests that one kind of anxiety arises out of the plight of the Jewish artist whose chances of success are curtailed by anti-Semitism. The composite figure that Yash sees at first becomes Abrasha Weissgelt, the Jewish violinist who, after long years of practicing, “started the long climb to musical eminence” but became paralyzed when he reached the top (Yidd. Part2: 117, Eng. 255). When the poor man complains to God about his misfortune, the narrator wonders “what is there to say about such *Unesanneh Tokef*” (ibid, the last two words are not rendered in English translation). The reference to Rabbi Amnon’s medieval prayer, composed while defying conversion, and the fact that the figure is half-Jewish, suggests that the misfortune described is conversion to Christianity. Abrasha wanted to climb the ladder and achieve artistic fulfillment and success, but he was struck with paralysis because anti-Semitism prevents the Jew from moving up the ladder and succeeding. The alternative of conversion involves spiritual and sometimes physical death. The attempted conversion failed in two senses; not only has it led to paralysis, forestalling any artistic success, it also has left the violinist with the old sense of Jewish impotence, the lack of a firm base on which to stand, as indicated by the fact that his legs are pickled calves’ feet<sup>72</sup>. The next part corroborates the impression of castration anxiety by presenting the dreamer wearing a dark blue suit but searching for his lost shoes, a somewhat trite metaphor for castration. The disparity between the respectable upper body and the flawed lower

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<sup>72</sup> A Jewish dish and a reference to the image of a demon with human body and animal legs in Jewish folklore.

part conveys the same sense of composite body deficient in masculinity reflected in the composite figure.

In the dream Yash reveals his personal and social anxiety in relation to his potency as an author. The dreamer watches a play through the crack of a half-opened door. He notes that the play is not the *Purim shpil* that he wrote and presented to his friends at home, nor is it another play presented by the local amateur theater group in which the narrator served as prompter. It is also not *The Vow*, a play by Jacob Gordin,<sup>73</sup> which also had been presented by the amateur theater group, this time in a public hall, with Esther Rachel Kaminska, one of the leading Yiddish actresses of her day, as the guest star. “The Vow” starts with a wife’s promise to her dying husband not to remarry after his death. The narrator remembers that he served as the prompter because his friends never wanted to give him a part in the play. However, even in this role he ruined the show, because he became “so engrossed in Kaminska’s heartrending performance” that he forgot to give the cues to the actors (257). He turned into a “calf-like spectator”, the Yiddish idiom *kalblishe mentch*, meaning a mentally disabled person (not translated; see Yiddish: p. 121), and the performance eventually stopped. Thus, as the text states, “On his deathbed, Ronia’s husband forgot to ask for her solemn vow, and she forgot to give it” (257). The guest star’s name is similar to that of Yash’s mother (Ita Rachel), suggesting oedipal interpretations, in which a son watches his mother on stage, feeling awestruck like a calf. The scene conveys a sense of social and sexual inadequacy. While the narrator-as-prompter fails to do his job at the critical moment, he forestalls the vow and undoes the promise of the wife (and, implicitly, his mother) to her husband, thus unwittingly fulfilling his oedipal wish.

The fact that Yash does not recognize the play as his own work implicitly presents him as heir and successor to older phases in the history of Yiddish theater. These correspond to each of

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<sup>73</sup> Jacob M. Gordin, 1853-1909, was a Russian-born American Jewish playwright active in the early years of Yiddish theater. Gordin is known for introducing realism and naturalism into Yiddish theater.

the plays described: the first is a home production of a *purim shpil*; the next is an amateur production of some unknown play, with a title that implies a low-brow content; and the third is a more serious production, a play by Gordin with no songs or dances (i.e., not a popular musical) with a famous professional actress as the guest star. The next stage in this capsule history of Yiddish theater is modernist drama, and this is implicitly what Yash presents himself as offering.<sup>74</sup>

Yash's writing style is criticized by the crowd's derisive comments, which only increase his anxiety. Yash's parents sit in the audience behind him, seated in armchairs. Saba sits beside him, so the young couple is analogous to the old one. Yash's mother radiates joy, while his father watches the play with good humor but also very critically.<sup>75</sup> (Yidd. 121, Eng. 257) He sees his son's playwriting as elitist, in the spirit of the first modernist Yiddish author, I.L. Peretz. The father is said to be wearing a "special critical pince-nez", metaphorically rendering his critical attitude (Yidd. Part 2: 121, Eng. 257). This is a scene of rivalry between father and son, and the son's virility is being tested through his writing. At the same time, Yash's wish that the play were one of Goldfaden's implies that his anxiety has a socio-cultural component. The way Yash situates himself as a spectator and a son sitting in the crowd in front of his parents alludes to the common familial trope used both in the historiography of Yiddish literature and in that of Yiddish theater. Sholem Aleichem famously presented Mendele Mokher-Sforim as the grandfather of Yiddish literature and himself as his grandson in order to create a respectable genealogy for Yiddish literature and establish its canon (Cammy in: Cammy et al. 2008:86). In the case of Yiddish theater, as Nina Warnke notes, the theater was described as a young child and Goldfaden saw himself as its father. In the same vein, Gordin presented himself as the foster father, trying to

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<sup>74</sup> In his 1909 essay *Dos idishe drama* (the Yiddish Drama) critic Dovid Pinski divided the history of Yiddish drama in to three periods of development: the primitive beginnings under Goldfaden, the intermediary phase of Gordin and a third, phase of apotheosis that represented his own ideals. This model is popular to this day and Glatstein might allude to it here (Nina Warnke, in Joel Berkowitz 2008).

<sup>75</sup> The English translation exaggerates the father's criticism and misses his humor; on the whole his comment is sarcastic but made in good spirits.

save the abandoned child after Goldfaden allegedly deserted it (in Joel Berkowitz 2008: 207). Being the son in this scene, Yash presents himself as an heir to a certain theatrical and literary “family tradition”. He also compares himself as a (relatively) young author and Yiddish theater and literature itself as child.

The fact that the theater is boisterous and the crowd is vulgar also alludes to the history of the Yiddish theater. In America at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Yiddish theater flourished on the Lower East Side as an entertainment mainly for lower class and minimally educated immigrants. Warnke describes the typical theater as an “unruly, boisterous place which entertained its audience primarily with plays that emphasized spectacle over text, visual attractions over logical plot development, slapstick over emotional subtlety, entertainment over education” (in Berkowitz 2008: 201). From the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Yiddish theater became the arena of a constant struggle between its audience’s penchant for *shund*, popular, sensational “potboilers” and critics’ and some playwrights’ attempts to refine it and develop a professional, elitist dramatic tradition in the European style. This struggle played out both in Europe and America.

A similar campaign against *shund* was conducted within the discourse of Yiddish literature when Sholem Aleichem indicted popular writer Shomer (pen name for Nahum-Meir Shaykevitch, 1846-1905) in his “judgment of Shomer” from 1888. Sholem Aleichem accused Shomer of writing hackneyed adaptations of European dime novels. This attack was part of an effort to attract the mass readership that started to form in Yiddish literature around the turn of the century. He tried to do it by creating a new folk literature that would bridge the divide between elite and lowbrow and define a new canon (ibid: 93). This public discussion about the norms of Yiddish literature persisted for decades. In 1930 Glatstein intervened in this debate with his poem “Shomer” and his essay “Unzer elter feter Shomer” (“Our Great Uncle Shomer”). In the debate Glatstein represented a high brow, avant-garde poetry that hardly had any readers among the proletariat that comprised most of the Jewish immigrants to America. The problem of readership

was acute in the case of *Inzikh*, as the semi-educated masses could hardly read them, while their children, who were already educated in America, read English well enough to satisfy their cultural needs in that language. (Itay Zutra 2011: 35). Glatstein was situated on the other extreme of the literary spectrum from Shomer. However, in his revisionist reading of Shomer, Glatstein rehabilitated him and saw a great affinity between Shomer's project and that of the modernists. Both rejected the realism: Glatstein insisted that social reality should not define the boundaries of Yiddish literature. More importantly, Glatstein realized that Shomer had been responsible for the creation of mass readership in Yiddish.

Yash's dream play integrates many aspects of the folk theater and of the *purim shpil* tradition along with elements of high-brow theatre<sup>76</sup> and a modernist twist. Like Sholem Aleichem, Glatstein attempts to create a mature Yiddish theater that caters to several kinds of audiences, bridging the gap between low and high-brow culture. At the same time, Glatstein parodies elements of popular Yiddish culture, including its penchant for lewd humor, its treatment of marital relations, and its use of Yiddish folklore. He presents this play in his dream to an audience whose sympathy is questionable from the start and who partly vanishes towards the end, reflecting the precarious state of the modernist project in Yiddish and its questionable future. At the same time, the scene reveals Yash's personal doubts as an author, as reflected in Saba's implication that he might fail both as a popular writer and as a modernist (258).

The play itself raises the issue of Jewish female sexuality and the ability of the Jewish male to both protect it and to harness it for the purpose of Jewish continuity. Gnendl's complaints to her friend Basia about the need to curb her sexuality after her marriage and the subsequent intrusions of lusting males into her house, remind us of the folklorist roots of the Yiddish theatre. The scenes remind us that the story of Esther begins with Queen Vashti, who was reluctant to

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<sup>76</sup> Miron notes that the play within the dream looks like a traditional family drama in the spirit of I. L. Peretz (2006: 275).

expose her sexualized body at the behest of her husband, and continues with the story of her Jewish successor, who harnessed her sexuality to serve her people. In the Sabbath eve scene Nahman and Gnendl host an invited male Jewish guest and suffer the presence of several additional visitors. These guests express their desire for Gnendl with increasing openness, calling into question the Jewish husband's power to protect his wife and the privacy of his home. From a Freudian point of view, all the male characters can be seen as reflections of the narrator's unconscious drives, and the play can be read as an acting out of Oedipal desire that gradually intensifies and becomes increasingly blunt and obscene. The male intrusions also allude to the lewd intimations of the *purim shpil* which were mainly targeted at the female characters (played by male actors) as well as the fact that the informality of the plays allowed the actors to burst into their hosts' houses but also allowed the audience to interact with the actors. In much the same way, Nachman and Genedel's Jewish home is porous and lacks firm boundaries.

The play can also be interpreted as a reenactment of the primal scene, which traumatizes the psycho-sexual development of the child. Yash is barred from the primal scene as a child. In the first novel, after meeting the "slipper-clad Jew" – the first openly unapologetic Jew Yash meets on the ship – Yash remembers what Sabbath eve looked like in his parents' house and associates it with his parents' intimate life taking place behind closed doors (25). As Ruth Wisse notes, "Yash has never experienced his parents' Sabbath except as a voyeur" (2001: 157). We repeatedly learn throughout the first novel that the same kind of complete stillness of the Sabbath only shrouded Jewish streets on one other occasion: before an imminent pogrom (see, for example p. 62-63, p. 162 in the first part). Thus, the novel associates conjugal pleasures with threats of invasion. Just as Yash dreams to finally open the doors of his parents' bedroom and witness the primal scene, he also experiences extreme anxiety about outside invasion, an anxiety that could be explained as the projection of his psychic fear of castration. But for a Jewish boy in Eastern Europe, this anxiety is also anchored in political reality. Thus we can watch the play,

viewed through an open door, as a staging of the primal scene, initially hidden from the child's eyes, a staging that is interrupted by personified projections of his own psychic contents.

Therefore, the moment that the young, gentile young men break into the house is crucial, as inner neurotic drives are fully conflated with outer political reality. At the same time that Grendl, the decent Jewish wife, is threatened by the multiple reflections of her son's Oedipal desires and his wish to invade the privacy of her bedroom, her home is also threatened by male anti-Semitic violence. The Jewish husband is too weak and impotent to satisfy his wife's deep erotic desires, which exposes her to escalating sexual threats. When the gentiles invade the house before they are driven away by Goddam, the roughest guest of all three, the gentiles want to see the "Jewish princess" (267), alluding to Esterke, the Jewish princess whose sexuality was bartered in order to bridge between Jews and Poles. After Goddam drives the gentiles out of the house, he departs, along with the second guest, Yankel. Nahman finally retires with Grendl to their bedroom, and the invited guest is offered to sleep on the sofa (268). The guest embodies the solitary Jewish man, representing the problem of Jewish continuity; while the other men covet Grendl mainly as a sexual object, he covets her as a wife and a potential child bearer. Denied biological continuity, he stands in the same position as Steinman, confronting the problem of female sexuality as necessary for national survival.

The dream ends in a coda to the play, which reflects Yash's wishes and anxieties succinctly: after the curtain falls he finally invades his parents' bedroom in a spontaneous, assertive step and makes love to Saba, who plays the role of his mother-lover while he plays the role of Joseph, the biblical son and lover. Fulfilling his oedipal desires, he also fulfills his wish to assume authorship of his life and to be an active, virile Jewish man instead of the calf-like spectator he was before. But Jewish authorship and masculinity, as well as full sexual pleasure, can only be bought at the price of conversion: Yash promises his lover that he will shave his Jewish beard and play on her body like a (gentile) peasant, not like a Jewish fiddler. He thus

returns us to the initial dilemma of the composite, synthetic man; it is highly questionable whether Yash can actually convert. Also preventing a simple happy ending is the constant reminder that the play is being presented on a displaced stage, pushed to the side of the room, which can be perceived as a metaphor to the dreamer's state of partial consciousness. It reminds us that we are not witnessing the conscious individual agent of enlightenment but a limited subject, whose agency and mastery are curtailed by the displaced and decentered nature of his consciousness. As such, any assumption of authorship as well as any sense of agency is partial and limited by the subject's blind spots.

By presenting a modern *Purim Shpil* in a dream, Glatstein merges modernism as an anti-mimetic trend with the seemingly naïve and popular art of the Yiddish theater. In a very dense chapter, he faithfully imitates the logic of a dream by condensing personal, social and cultural issues within a relatively short space. His play within a dream is a parody both of Freudian interpretive methods and of Yiddish popular theater. However, the way he amalgamates these different discourses sheds a new light on both: popular Jewish theater looks modernist, while Freudian theory becomes a Yiddish play.

## Conclusion

This chapter has traced the way Glatstein interrogates authorship first by destabilizing the notion of the "I" through a sophisticated and modernist play with the conventions of western autobiography, playfulness which undermines any essential notion of identity and leaves the reader only with its various performances. The issue of Jewish identity in contexts of othering and persecution is illuminated by the idea of performance and the theatrical trope, as passing and mimicry are performative techniques, and the Jew in anti-Semitic society is an actor by force. The fact that passing and mimicry destabilize the "I", questions even further the agency of the subject in performing his identity. The theatrical trope that Glatstein presents is also wedded to the specific folk tradition of the Yiddish *Purim Shpil* and its unique history as a popular genre.

Reading the biblical themes in the novels revealed that the novels revolve around questions of Jewish continuity, male Jewish leadership and potency and Jewish female sexuality. By using the biblical themes the first person narrator weaves himself into the national narrative by inserting himself into both stories in different roles. Finally, a reading of the play-within-a-dream goes back to questions of authorship and identity that were discussed in the first section and illuminates the conflicts of the first-person narrator-as-author as intertwined with those of Yiddish literature and theatrical tradition.

The way Glatstein conceives of authorship correlates to his treatment of memory: in both cases, essentialism is avoided; meaning is localized and develops in context. In the case of memory, place is not reified and does not determine identity. Therefore, a proliferation of places and a dynamic relationship between place and memory ensues. In the case of memory Glatstein concentrates on living, vibrant culture, while treating place as exchangeable. The chapter on authorship and its performance revealed a subjectivity that develops in volatile circumstances, in which the “I” is not essentially linked to place. Thus, the “I” acquires meaning through dialogue rather than through affiliation with place. Identity is not hyphenated just once in order to designate immigration (for example, Polish-Jewish) rather, it is multiply hyphenated (Yash is Jewish-American-Polish-Russian-Eastern-European, if we only consider his subjectivity in terms of nationality). Instead of a psychological dynamics based on disavowal or transmutation, as in Agnon’s case, we see here a constant proliferation of identities that are eventually performed in a play. This play is, in many senses, a dramatization of all the projections that Yash has been subject to throughout his life, or all the roles he has been performing: son, lover, Jewish artist and Yiddish writer.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

This dissertation set out to explore the difference between configurations of memory and authorship in national and diasporic contexts through an in-depth reading of “A Guest for the Night” by S.Y. Agnon and the Yash novels by Jacob Glatstein. It started from the premise that both works were written in similar circumstances and deal with similar questions with one major difference, i.e. that Agnon’s novel was written in the context of an emerging national canon, whereas Glatstein’s novel was written and published as part of a diasporic, Jewish-American literary culture. Looking at the construction of memory and authorship in these two contexts this study illuminated several major subjects.

#### **The construction of memory in relation to place and peoplehood**

The discussion of memory revealed that its relation to place is always central, though it receives different meanings in each of the contexts. The way Glatstein relates memory to place is mediated through individual consciousness, and therefore this relation is contingent and dynamic since place becomes an aspect of the reminiscing subject’s consciousness. This is not to say that place does not have collective associations and meanings, as individual consciousness is also a product of its cultural contexts. Because Glatstein describes the relation between place and memory as dynamic, place is not reified, and time becomes at least as important a factor in memory construction. This might be another phrasing of Svetlana Boym’s distinction between restorative and reflective memory, the latter concentrating on the perception of time much more than on place.

In Agnon’s case the relation between place and memory is more stable, and revolves mainly around shared cultural associations and collective memory. The narrator wavers between two places, and between complete reification of place and a more dynamic relation to it, but still, place is the most important aspect of memory. The drama that AGN unfolds is the conflict

between attachment to two different places, and between sanctification of a specific place and developing lasting attachments to vicarious spaces in the Diaspora. Receiving a communal, national meaning, space is first and foremost a shared one. The spaces in AGN are of the collective type: The town, the *beth midrash*, the land. This is precisely the reason why, eventually, the narrator realizes that place cannot be completely detached from the subjective meaning given to it, and therefore, cannot be completely reified. The collective is the carrier of memory, and when this collective disperses, memory is jeopardized.

When further examining the relation between memory and territory, or place, in national and diasporic contexts a complex relation emerges. The common, simple dichotomy linking diaspora to homelessness and lack of ties to place, and nationality to a fixed territory is misleading. Both authors present attachment to the place of birth, in this case, the diasporic home, as an option, though in Glatstein's case this option is not explicitly acknowledged. In Agnon's case, this option is offered by Sprintze Schuster and it is provocative because it is presented in organic, natural terms that challenge Zionist discourse. Another option of connection to the diasporic land in AGN, that of the pioneer's group in the nearby village, presents this attachment as training for the "real" and right attachment that will take place after immigration to Zion. This modern transformation from one territory to the other can be perceived as a modern version of the underground, miraculous rolling of dead bones, books and synagogues from the diaspora to the land of Israel at the days of the messiah as it is presented in the novel. On the other hand, Agnon constructs attachment to the historic homeland through organic metaphors of connection to the land, its soil and the Hebrew language, as well as through stories from the Bible and *midrash*. In Glatstein's case, the complete Jewish detachment from the land finds its limits in the need to commemorate, which has a material aspect, both as it is related to the (dead) body and as it is related to the materiality of the memorial, i.e. its relation to local landscape.

The relation of each culture to the local is also complex. In the Diasporic case, multiple attachments create a proliferation of locales, none of which are reified. The only place in the Yash novels that is reified, i.e. Kazimierz, represents a double displacement from Yash's perspective: it is a replacement for Lublin but also for Yash's temporary home in the guest house. The meaning given to the place is constantly undermined by Yash and Neifeld's cynicism and by their sober conception of authenticity. Reading AGN revealed that within the national discourse relation to place has to be mediated through the nation, otherwise it might be aberrant. On the one hand, national discourse is structured around attachment to a specific place, or locale. However, if this is an attachment to the wrong place, i.e. the diasporic one, it threatens to dismantle national homogeneity. Moreover, I would argue that too deep an attachment to a specific locale within the national territory, can also threaten national cohesion (as, for example, in the extra literary case of Jewish settlers who refuse to move when the government decides to evacuate settlements.)

The relation of national ideologies to nativeness is another case in point. As we noted, the Zionist discourse on the one hand extolled nativeness as the epitome of organic connection to the land. On the other hand, this nativeness is often constructed rather than "authentic".

### **Authorship: being at home in the text**

As both novels deal with authorship on an ars-poetic, i.e., self-reflective level, they both echo the cultural conception of authorship as ownership and text as home. AGN revolves around the question of home ownership and its relation to authorship. The journey back to the old home in fact starts from the devastation of the narrator's home by Arab gangs, which turns him temporarily homeless and a guest in another country, in other people's home. The novel dramatizes the idea that a homeless vagabond cannot author anything worth reading. The example of Leibtche Bodenhaus only supports this notion as Leibtche, who lives in his "aunt's" house and is therefore deopendent, cannot but write dependent, inferior text. Being at home in the text is completely equivalent to being at home in a concrete house. In Glatstein's case, the meaning of

home is similar, except that in the Yash novels the narrator experiences constant displacement: he is driven out of place, and yearns to own it as a pre condition for authorship, as evident in Yash's play within a dream. At the same time, the constant wandering from one place to another, from one home to another, establishes authorship as a performative act. Eventually Yash dramatizes the yearning to occupy space in two occasions: one is at the end of the play, when he bursts into the scene and into Nakhman's bedroom, coveting his wife. Not surprisingly, the second time Yash occupies space, this space is also presented as a female body, i.e. during the visit to Esterke's castle that is actually a hollow structure. In both novels the relation to space is a metaphor for authorship, and it is also a metaphor for masculinity and ownership of the female body.

### **Jewish authorship and masculinity**

The novels I discussed present authorship and masculinity as equivalent. In both cases, both terms are associated with ownership and mastery of space. Each author also positions himself in relation to a certain female body. In Agnon's case the reader can see the parallel positioning of female sexuality and national territory; the woman is a metaphor for the nation, and the rivalry between the two men, the guest and Yeruham, is equivalent to their rivalry over possessing the Zionist homeland. In Glatstein's case the relation to femininity reflects the Jewish subject's lack of potency; lack of ownership in the case of space and place clearly translates to an inability to control female sexuality as a man and a husband.

Another aspect of the relation of authorship to the female body revolves around paternity, procreation and the ability to engender a human body. In Glatstein's case the relation to the body is mediated by the gaze of the other, and manifested through speech, thus manifesting a thoroughly post-modernist conception. The body is a sight of performance, of different acts of identification and different speech acts. Agnon responds to the discourse of Jewish nationality that developed from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and saw the Jewish nation as a dead and

disintegrating body. The author, in this case, is granted the role of a doctor, a healer and a cabbalist, who is supposed to enliven the dead body, or revive it through reassembling its *scattered members*.

## Glossary

**Beth Midrash**, House [of] Learning. Refers to a study hall, whether in a synagogue, yeshiva, kollel, or other building. It is distinct from a synagogue, although many synagogues are also used as batei midrash and vice versa.

**Kheder**, (literally meaning ‘room’) is the elementary school for Jewish religious education. The teacher in this school was called a Rebbe, and the kheder was usually located in his own home.

**Midrash**, a Hebrew term for the body of homiletic stories told by Jewish rabbinic sages to explain passages in the bible. Midrash is a method of interpreting biblical stories that goes beyond simple distillation of religious, legal, or moral teachings. It fills in gaps left in the biblical narrative regarding events and personalities that are only hinted at.

**Ninth of Av’**, Tisha B'Av is an annual fast day in Judaism, named for the ninth day (Tisha) of the month of Av in the Hebrew calendar. The fast commemorates the destruction of both the First Temple and Second Temple in Jerusalem, which occurred about 655 years apart, but on the same Hebrew calendar date. Although primarily meant to commemorate the destruction of the Temples, it is also considered appropriate to commemorate other Jewish tragedies that occurred on this day, most notably the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. Accordingly, the day has been called the "saddest day in Jewish history". Tisha B'Av falls in July or August in the western calendar.

**Regalim** ,The Three Pilgrimage Festivals, known as the Shlosha Regalim, are three major festivals in Judaism — Pesach (Passover), Shavuot (Weeks), and Sukkot (Tents or Booths) — when the Israelites living in the Kingdom of Judah would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, as commanded by the Torah. In Jerusalem, they would participate in festivities and ritual worship in conjunction with the services of the kohanim ("priests") at the Temple in Jerusalem.

**Shavuot**, lit. "Weeks", or the Feast of Weeks, is a Jewish holiday that occurs on the sixth day of the Hebrew month of Sivan (late May or early June). *Shavuot* commemorates the anniversary of the day God gave the Torah to the entire nation of Israel assembled at Mount Sinai, although the association between the giving of the Torah (*Matan Torah*) and *Shavuot* is not explicit in the Biblical text. The holiday is one of the *Shlosha Regalim*, the three Biblical pilgrimage festivals. It marks the conclusion of the Counting of the Omer. The date of *Shavuot* is directly linked to that of Passover. The Torah mandates the seven-week Counting of the Omer, beginning on the second day of Passover and immediately followed by *Shavuot*. This counting of days and weeks is understood to express anticipation and desire for the Giving of the Torah. On Passover, the people of Israel were freed from their enslavement to Pharaoh; on *Shavuot* they were given the Torah and became a nation committed to serving God.

**Succah**, Booth, tabernacle: simple shelter lived in during the holiday of *Succot*. **Succot**, (Feast of Booths, Feast of Tabernacles) is a biblical holiday celebrated on the 15th day of the month of Tishrei (variously from late September to late October). It is one of the three biblically mandated festivals Shlosha regalim on which Hebrews were commanded to make a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem. It follows the solemn holiday of Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement.

The holiday lasts seven days (eight in the Diaspora). The Hebrew word *sukkōt* is the plural of *sukkah*, "booth or tabernacle", which is a walled structure covered with *schach* (plant material such as leafy tree overgrowth or palm leaves). The sukkah is intended as a reminiscence of the type of fragile dwellings in which the Israelites dwelt during their 40 years of travel in the desert after the Exodus from slavery in Egypt. Throughout the holiday, meals are eaten inside the sukkah and some people sleep there as well. In *AGN*, Agnon does not describe the celebration of this holiday. However, in chapter sixty two the guest dreams a long dream, one part of which takes place before the Festival of Tabernacles and deals with the *succah* as a symbol (384). I will deal with the significance of this symbol in chapter 3.

***Unetanneh Tokef***, A rhymed prayer (pyyut) that is part of the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur liturgy. According to legend *Unetanneh Tokef* was composed by the medieval sage Rabbi Amnon of Mainz. A friend of the Bishop of Mainz, Rabbi Amnon was pressured into converting to Catholicism. When he refused, the bishop ordered his hands and legs amputated—one by one—as punishment for not obeying him. After each amputation, Rabbi Amnon was again given the opportunity to convert, which he refused. This event took place before Rosh Hashanah and on that holiday, as he lay dying, Rabbi Amnon asked to be carried into the synagogue where he recited the original composition of *Unetanneh Tokef* with his last breath. Note that the same figure is also referred to by Agnon in a very similar context (see *AGN*, p. 248).

**Yom Kippur**, Also known as Day of Atonement, Yom kippur is the holiest day of the year for the Jewish people. Its central themes are atonement and repentance. Jewish people traditionally observe this holy day with a 25-hour period of fasting and intensive prayer, often spending most of the day in synagogue services. Yom Kippur completes the annual period known in Judaism as the High Holy Days or Yamim Nora'im ("Days of Awe"). Yom Kippur is the tenth day of the month of Tishrei (September-October) and also regarded as the "Sabbath of Sabbaths". According to Jewish tradition, God inscribes each person's fate for the coming year into a book, the Book of Life, on Rosh Hashanah, and waits until Yom Kippur to "seal" the verdict. During the Days of Awe, a Jewish person tries to amend his or her behavior and seek forgiveness for wrongs done against God (*bein adam leMakom*) and against other human beings (*bein adam lechavero*). The evening and day of Yom Kippur are set aside for public and private petitions and confessions of guilt (*Vidui*). At the end of Yom Kippur, one hopes that they have been forgiven by God.

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