The Modern Jewish Canon

A Journey Through Language and Culture

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A FAREWELL TO POLAND

JACOB GLATSTEIN AND S. Y. AGNON

Zol ikh nor nisht blaybn der lebediker eyner.
Farze mikh nisht mit mayne dineh beyner.
Let me not remain the only one.
Do not pass over me with my thin bones.
JACOB GLATSTEIN, JUNE 1938[1]

READERS MIGHT EXPECT this book about the modern Jewish canon to speed up a little at this point. After all, the 1930s are called the period "between the wars," as though they had been lived in anticipation of Hitler's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. If literary history were to follow the pattern of political history, all eyes would be looking forward, to the events that would change the Jewish people forever. But our book lingers on this period of creative consolidation, when Jewish literature reached the climax of a developmental curve that had begun in the latter part of the nineteenth century, battening on the rise of Jewish population that had grown to an unprecedented seventeen and a half million. Some of the finest and boldest literary experimentation occurs in the 1930s in Europe, Palestine, and America.

This chapter is devoted to two works in which the protagonists return from their new societies to rejoin the unsafe present of Europe in the 1930s. When I write "unsafe," I am mindful of Michael Andre Bernstein's salutary concern for what is called foreshadowing, the tendency of certain historians and writers to see historical events, and most especially the Holocaust, as preordained, resulting in "judgmental callousness and historical distortions" that appear to hold victims responsible for not having avoided their doom. Foreshadowing values the present, "not for itself, but

as the harbinger of an already determined future."[2] I share Bernstein's discomfort with the deterministic cast of this rhetorical strategy and the political uses to which it can be put. But in promoting the cause of free will on the part of the subjects and interpreters of history, Bernstein ignores the obvious counterpart to his discussion of foreshadowing, which is the inability of some writers and historians to acknowledge the bleak truth about their own times because they, too, value the present—but as the harbinger of an already determined and *improved* future. Their excessive optimism about man's potential—the rosy edge of the palette whose other side is black—is also incompatible with free will, and with Judaism, because it denies the reality of the present danger. The two authors discussed in this chapter cannot be accused of foreshadowing because they could not have known what lay ahead. Their evocation of an unsafe Europe seems prophetic in retrospect because they did not erase the shadows from the world as it was.

The Divergence of Yiddish and Hebrew

At the end of the 1930s, with no apparent knowledge of one another's work in progress, the foremost modernists in their respective languages—the Yiddish poet Jacob Glatstein in New York and the Hebrew writer S. Y. Agnon in Jerusalem—wrote autobiographical novels about visits they took to their native cities in Poland midway on life's journey. It was highly unfashionable at that time for a modern Jewish writer to identify with his people and to draw attention to their political isolation. In those years when Hitler was coming to power in Germany and capitalist economies appeared to have collapsed, liberal and leftist elites, especially among the Jews, were convinced that the Soviet Union was the only bulwark against the fascist threat. In the United States, ambitious Jewish writers were beginning to enter mainstream English culture. Supported by the twin pillars of modernism and Marxism, they expected to transcend bourgeois society, the parochial concerns of their immigrant parents, and the national crises of their fellow Jews. Intellectuals in Palestine, at the Hebrew University as well as on the kibbutzim, debated the nature of the ideal society of Eretz Israel that would erase the humiliation of the centuries in exile through new secular institutions and a new secular culture. Glatstein and Agnon, however, turned conservative against the liberal and radical tide. Their al-

most simultaneous departure in the same counterclockwise literary direction is the more unusual because of the way they rejoined their artistic fate to the Jews of Poland, then later cast themselves as witness-survivors.

Prolongued sojourn in a European retreat was the literary premise of *The Magic Mountain,* a novel of enormous influence on our two authors. Thomas Mann had turned one of his own visits to the Swiss clinic where his wife was in treatment into the fictional basis of Hans Castorp's stop at the tuberculosis sanatorium. The hero's temporary withdrawal from a life in flux to a relatively static sanctuary allowed Mann to arrange his book as a meditative medley of themes in place of the usual linear plot. It let him probe the mystery of time in a historical sense by presenting the inner significance of an epoch and by depicting his young hero in an extended here and now where the entire contemporary world of ideas coalesces.[3] Agnon and Glatstein did something very similar: they placed their heroes back where time began for them, collapsing the tenses into a sustained hermetic present, and returned them to the center of Europe, where the historical tensions of centuries were coming to a head.

As if between a third-person fictional protagonist like Hans Castorp and personal travel notes, such as Alfred Doblin used in his *Journey to Poland* (1925) or Walter Benjamin in his 1926–27 *Moscow Diary,* Agnon and Glatstein placed their autobiographical narrators at the center of modernist works of fiction, splitting the focus and the narrative tension between the creative, mobile narrator, the implied author of the book, and the community he has come to review.[4] They invited identification of the narrator with the author by attributing to their narrators their own lives and works, confessional revelations, and discussions of their literary craft, while maintaining fiction's prerogative of critical distance. Through disjunctive methods of narration they drew attention not only to the modernist's anxieties over the existence of coherent personality but also to his ambition to encompass everything in a single work. Each drew on psychoanalytic methods: Glatstein's narrator locates the source of his adult crisis in the traumas of earliest childhood, Agnon's explores the nexus between personal and collective myth.

But writing in different languages, the Yiddish and Hebrew authors experienced their literary opportunities in opposite ways. Once twinned in the premodern period, the destinies of Yiddish and Hebrew had diverged so sharply by the end of the First World War that competing ideological

parties had actually formed along linguistic lines. Yiddish was the adaptive diaspora language, easily turned into an argument for "diasporism," for the perpetuation of Jewish autonomy through a national culture wherever Jews lived in sufficient numbers. Hebrew was the centripetal language, the only tongue that united the Jews through time and space, hence the only potential unifying language of a sovereign Jewish nation; it carried the aura of remembered majesty. Writers in these languages might be equally concerned about Jewish destiny, yet they followed the logic of their languages to opposite ideas of salvation. As Yiddish declined and Hebrew miraculously began to take root in Palestine, one of the most wrenching problems of modern Jewish existence became the erosion of the language in which European Jews had fashioned their nationhood for almost a millennium, a language that was everywhere being exchanged for "that abstraction known as the future."[5] Although Glatstein and Agnon were among the least ideological writers of their day, their artistic intuition was guided by the potential of their languages, one of which was waning and the other gaining strength.

It cannot be accidental that, of the two writers, Glatstein lost the race with history, although Agnon began his work much later. The creative instinct that prompted Glatstein to organize a major work of fiction around a voyage back to his native city made it impossible for him to complete the project as planned. He published only two volumes of the projected trilogy—*Ven yash iz geforn* [Yash's Outbound Voyage], 1938, translated as *Homeward Bound,* and *Ven yash iz gekumen* [Yash's Homecoming], 1940, translated as *Homecoming at Twilight,*—eventually abandoning the third volume when the mass murder of European Jews began.[6] The literary scholar Dan Miron writes that Glatstein told him in private conversation shortly before his death that the flow of the trilogy had been "choked off" by the war.[7] With the passage of years, that incompletion became an organic part of the work.

Jacob Glatstein: The Yash Novels

Glatstein had left Lublin in 1914 and arrived in New York at age seventeen. After trying his hand unsuccessfully at jobs in the sweatshops, he registered at New York University Law School. While there, his classmate Nahum Borukh Minkoff drew him away from law and into a new movement of Yiddish poetry for which he was then laying the theoretical

groundwork.[8] In 1919, Glatstein coauthored with Minkoff and the poet Aaron Leyeles the manifesto of Introspectivism, which contained as many points as Woodrow Wilson's peace plan of the same year and exuded the same progressive zeal. Positing an intensely subjective model of Yiddish free verse and placing no limits on the intellectual range of their interests, the Inzikhists proposed to distill through the prism of self—*in zikh*—everything from politics to personal memory in a poetry that was alert to the world in all its contrariety, "unclear or confused as it may be."

> 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. Art is ultimately redemptive, even if it is an illusory redemption or a redemption through illusion . . . Only a truly individual poem can be a means of self-redemption.[9]

Inzikh falls well within Benjamin Harshav's observation that every modern movement of change, either personal or institutional, is borne by negative and positive impulses alike.[10] As one manifest proof of their independence, the poets of *Inzikh* rejected the Jewish practice of maintaining the orthography of Hebrew root words in Yiddish and spelled them phonetically instead so that the eye could rejoice in what the ear perceived. In the Soviet Union, the Yiddish literary establishment was neutering Yiddish orthography for blunt political ends, to deprive the Hebraic component of any pride of place; ideologues of the Revolution leveled Hebrew as the first step toward eliminating the language that represented the religious and learned components of Yiddish. Though Glatstein and his fellow *Inzikhists* dissociated themselves from the campaign against Hebrew, they insisted that the time had come for the son to "set up his own tent," and so they decided to "naturalize the sacral component of Hebrew" (the phrase is Leyeles's) to free up the sound patterns and rhymes and to gain equal status for all Yiddish words.[11] Their rebellion was cast as an American declaration of independence, much as E. E. Cummings tried to democratize English by deemphasizing its capital letters. They exploited the suppleness of their vernacular by incorporating vocabulary and sounds from other languages, paralleling the modernists, like Ezra Pound

and James Joyce, who had reimagined English as the universal tongue. In concert with this aesthetic of freedom, Glatstein published the first of these two novels (but only the first) in the de-Hebraized spelling the group had adopted.[12]

In becoming a Yiddish poet rather than a lawyer, Glatstein had cast in his economic lot with the immigrant community, and since poetry could not earn him a living, he had to turn, as most Yiddish writers did, to the Yiddish press. In 1926 he took a job on the news desk of the *Morgn Zhurnal* (Jewish Morning Journal), a Yiddish daily with a traditionalist Zionist orientation that prided itself on the high level of its writing and the reliability of its coverage. Glatstein was a clever man, an intellectual as well as a poet: "Why should I say, he *may have been* our smartest writer?" one critic blurted. "He *was* our smartest writer."[13] The daily bombardment of news could not help but challenge some of his aesthetic priorities. While modernism and the rhetoric of class conflict insisted that national boundaries were obsolete, political antisemitism everywhere was targeting the Jews. The same opportunities that allowed the Yiddish poet in America to cultivate his cosmopolitanism and selfhood also encouraged his fellow Jews to switch over to English—so that they might read English rather than Yiddish verse. Glatstein's poetry quickened with such contradictions, and under assumed names he also registered his conflicts in short stories and political commentary.

But he had never undertaken a large-scale literary project until his mother's illness summoned him home to Lublin and provided him with the scaffolding for a major narrative. In practical terms, the mother's fatal illness allowed for his first "furlough" in twenty years, mandating an extended trip abroad that he would otherwise never have taken. The Polish epigraph to his book, from Marya Konopnicka's poem "And When the King Went to War," casts the poet's journey in an ominous light: the gurgling springs and murmuring wheat and corn sympathize with the fallen soldier who dies far from his homeland so that the king may return victorious to his throne.[14] The "Yash" of Glatstein's titles seems to derive from another work of Konopnicka's, a popular Polish tale about the adventures of a little boy named Janek who goes far away from his mother's house before returning home again.[15] The name Yash, which appears nowhere else but in the title, is a version of Janek, which, along with Jas or Jasio, is a variant of Jan. Glatstein had entitled his first book of poems *Yankev Glat-*

shteyn, projecting the confidence of an integrated Yiddish author. But for this autobiographical fiction of the voyage home, *Yash's Outbound Journey*, he chose a Polish name, perhaps the one he had been assigned in adolescence before coming to America. He associated Konopnicka's poems with his childhood in Poland and Polish may have been the first language in which he had imagined himself a poet. Yash seems to be the displaced Polish Jew who will die unmourned on foreign soil.

Glatstein began writing this book with obvious chagrin about his prospects as a Yiddish author. The first installment, which appeared in October 1934, opens with a disparaging reference to the Yugoslavian American writer Louis Adamic, whose book *The Native's Return: An American Immigrant Visits Yugoslavia and Discovers His Old Country* had just become an American best-seller. Since the two contemporaries had arrived in America at almost the same time, Glatstein took note of how far he had fallen behind.

> Louis Adamic, a Yugoslav, arrived in America as a young man of sixteen and spent nineteen years in the land of blessed opportunity. He plowed with his nose, plowed through the entire country, until he made his way right up the ladder of fame.
>
> Last year he traveled home. Kindly Uncle Guggenheim paid his expenses and he came back to his parents as the "boy who made good."[16]

Supported by grants, hailed as a literary success, Adamic had enjoyed a royal reception both in his birthplace and in America. Not so the Yiddish writer! No rooster had crowed, no dog had barked when Yash arrived home after twenty years. The Yiddish writer was no one's native son: independent Poland was not the same country Glatstein had left. Moreover, who wanted to hear about Jewish Europe? "How can I serve up exoticism for a Jewish audience that already knows the shtetl too tiresomely well?" At the same time, Glatstein does not hide his contempt for Adamic's middlebrow pap. The Yugoslav may have won himself a huge audience by writing in English, but Glatstein knew the satisfaction of having mastered his native Yiddish, achieving a level of artistry he could never have matched in an adopted tongue. By the time Glatstein published *Yash* in book form three years later, he had deleted the whole comparison with Adamic and began his novel at the point of boarding the ship.

Before the *Olympic* even leaves the harbor, Yash is confirmed as its ideal passenger-observer. Once at sea, he exults at being able to meet so many strangers on equal terms. He converses about faith and literature with fellow Americans of various backgrounds, and because he also knows Russian, he spends hours chatting with a group of homebound Soviet citizens about politics and Revolution. One of the passengers later compliments him on his "golden ears." But, contrary to the expectations that he and the travel genre arouse in us by throwing strangers together, Yash has none of those intense, transforming interactions that threaten to change the direction of a life. Isaac Bashevis Singer complained that Jules Verne wouldn't have spent ten lines on so unadventurous and unromantic a trip.[17] The missing dramatic action of this novel takes place *in zikh*, within the narrator, between the middle deck where Yash moves by day and the cabin to which he retires by night.

Three short passages from the first section of the book illustrate how Yash's layers of consciousness constitute the main "action" of the novel. The first night out to sea in his narrow bunk, Yash is reminded of the "teacher Fishl Dovid who is going home for the holidays in a rowboat." This is the first Jewish reference in the book, and it appears without commentary, just as it emerges unbidden in Yash's mind. Fishl Dovid is the hero of Sholem Aleichem's "Home for Passover," a teacher from the *shtetl* Khatchevate who must earn his living in the distant city of Balta but who really lives for his twice-yearly visits back home with his family. The *melamed*'s journey is threatened, as happens so often in Sholem Aleichem, by a succession of obstacles that evoke the nightmare of Jewish life, ending with a trip across a thawing river in a narrow boat rowed by a sadistic Gentile ferryman. Yash's literary allusion connects the terrified Fishl Dovid, stretched out on the bottom of his potential coffin, with the dapper American poet who is being ferried across the water. Jewish apprehension overtakes the narrator at the boundary between wakefulness and sleep, anticipating the conclusion of this book that leaves us wondering whether Yash did, indeed, reach his mother before her death. Yash's identification with Sholem Aleichem's teacher is his first reminder that his birthplace is also the birthplace of Yiddish and Yiddish literature, hence his professional as well as physical home. The anxieties of Fishl Dovid, who left and returned to the same Jewish home, have been vastly compounded for Yash by the greater distance he has traveled, the permanence

of his settlement abroad, and the militancy of the antisemitism that now sweeps the world.

Meanwhile, the daytime Yash is conducting his homeward journey through real historical time. In the early hours of June 30, 1934, Hitler executed his former comrades among the storm troopers, and that slaughter, reported by the ship's bulletin on the third day out at sea, introduces a political anxiety that suffuses the book. Until that point, Yash enjoys conversations with Christian and Jew alike, pleased to shuck off, at least temporarily, his concerns for the Jewish people. But now the equanimity of his Gentile shipmates oppresses him:

> I realized that Hitler means something different to them and to me. Hitler is to them (with rage or without) the German dictator, and to me he means 600,000 German-Jewish brothers—my 17 million brothers and our hysterical fear of fascism; [. . .] Hitler is a paw forcibly writing chapters of Jewish history and so I have to pay bloody attention to him.[18]

The jolt of news sends him looking for his fellow Jews, who are either reluctant to be discovered or eager to talk. Of course, neither Yash nor any of the other Jews he meets has any notion of how to respond to Hitler's threat. The tension between politics and poetry that is central to this book has no practical issue.

Glatstein called this tension between self and society "the yearning of the poet and the journalist for one another." In an essay written concurrently with this novel, he argued that there was no necessary conflict between these opposing genres, that "modern journalism satisfies the elemental hunger for publicisitic expression and leaves to the true poet the difficult task of developing plain, momentary phenomena into new contemporary mystery."[19] Journalism registers the threat that poetry may surmount. Missing in between is the social fabric of realism, of a resident society, the stuff of which novels are usually made. In effect, the indeterminate shipboard community is the best Yash can hope for, since there is no other community he can call his own. In uncovering his absent society, Glatstein's experimental Yash novel demonstrates why the American Yiddish writer finds it so hard to write a novel.

Memory is the third and murkiest level of action. The poet composes

within his tradition of texts, the journalist is alive to people and events, and buried in the grown man are the formative impressions that only very occasionally bob to the surface. Thus, when Yash seeks his fellow Jews because he needs political reassurance, the sight of a pious Jew in bedroom slippers triggers a remembered sensation of his parents' Sabbath, a pure memory he could not have summoned up at will:

> The Jew exuded the atmosphere of Sabbath rest that hung like a secret in our home, when parents closed the door and went to lie down for a while after the *tcholnt* [baked stew]; a calm that was broken only when father removed the iron bars and unbolted the store. The smell of iron-rust, the frozen scrape of cold keys, and the first customer of the long week were the signals that God Abraham had turned on all the lights and Holy Sabbath had departed and the careworn week had returned.[20]

The Jew in slippers connects Yash's formative years at home with the present journey to see his mother, whose ears "are yellow as wax" according to his aunt's letter.[21] Only now, with this flash of memory, does he really begin to feel the magnetic pull of the still-living past. The mystery of Sabbath remains associated with the marvelous but impenetrable mystery of his parents' union, the erotic-sacred origins of his being that remain beyond his ken. There is something protective in this child's remembrance of the difference between sacred and profane, as though he recognized behind the door to life the promise of death. Glatstein is not inclined, nor does he have the artistic luxury, to enter a Proustian reverie. The poet works with fragments, not extensive narrative sequence.

The kaleidoscopic interaction among these strata of reflection, actuality, and memory shifts as the narrator approaches his destination. The closer Yash gets to home, moving by train from France through fascist Germany, the more the "flutter of talk" yields to "the sad tonality of home." By the time he enters Poland, Yash has to apologize to his train companion for his silence. He approaches Warsaw as though it were Zion:

> See, I have never been false to you. My tongue may be cleaving to my gums, but I have never forgotten you, my Jewish Poland,

> with all your terrors and sorrowful festivities. Do not forget my right hand, as I have not forgotten thee.[22]

The logic of his inward and outbound journeys brings him home to the land that is the crucible of his Jewishness. He has dedicated his right hand, his writing hand, to the Yiddish language that is cradled in Poland, so he must pray for continued inspiration from the sourceland of his devotion. Jewish Poland is to the Yiddish poet as Jerusalem is to the psalmist: Yash will reiterate a version of this pledge and prayer when he is about to take leave of Poland at the end of the second volume. Meanwhile, his journey ends where his life began, in Lublin.

BUT HERE IS SOMETHING STRANGE. Despite the organization of this planned trilogy around the return home of a native son, Glatstein's emphasis falls on the caesura, on the empty space between the anticipation and the aftermath of homecoming. His home itself is missing. Yash's reunion with his father and other relatives is not described. Only a preview encounter with his mother's sister on the way to Lublin and an account of his unpleasant negotiations with the burial society constitute the story of Yash's time at home. Instead of the social substantiveness of a reunion with members of his family, and perhaps with his fellow Yiddish writers, we next meet the narrator resting up from "several weeks in Poland" at a Jewish resort hotel that specializes in arteriosclerosis, a condition that betokens both the calcification of the arteries and a hardening of the brain. *When Yash Arrived* is the claustrophobic, insular sequel of its cosmopolitan predecessor. Unlike Thomas Mann's sanatorium for the treatment of tuberculosis, Buchhendler's Jewish hotel, situated on the margins of European society, holds out no expectation of cure, only such relief as the host can provide through his board and the guests can gain through the huddle of association. As the book opens, a charismatic storyteller is holding a group of random guests spellbound, like some latter-day Hasidim around their rebbe, but his stories and melodies reinvigorate the tatters of this community of faith only somewhat and temporarily. This ailing Steinman, who has an only unmarried daughter, soon locates in Yash his potential spiritual heir. The narrator, however, is destined to disappoint his hopes.

Ever the curious listener, Yash records encounters with remarkable personalities, but he can no more become their cultural spokesman than he could save his mother.

Glatstein casts his fictional self as Joseph from the land of plenty, approached by his starving brothers, "the community of the poor [. . .] their hands extended, addressing themselves not to me personally, but to me as the messenger holding out the promise of the mythical bread."[23] But unlike the biblical provider, the Yiddish poet controls no granary and can only become the conduit for Jewish suffering through the medium of this book. Yash's Benjamin is a sixteen-year-old Hasidic prodigy, a manic dreamer who wants to inspire a protean new Jewish literature that is like a "creative encyclopedia" containing everything in itself—poetry, prose, philosophy, drama, psychology, astronomy, epigrams, even the false messiahs who should not be penalized for having dreamed.[24] Lacking only the power to keep itself alive, Jewish Poland is rich in storytellers, wild geniuses, and an incredible past.

While the first Yash novel steers its course through international waters, the second is set in the context of history. Steinman, the guests of the hotel, and visitors whom Yash knew in his childhood—all reminisce about the past, and he, too, is prompted to recall sequences of his youth. This motif of historical self-knowledge gains prominence at the end of Yash's stay, when he accompanies the novel's only wealthy character, a retired lawyer named Neifeld, on an impulsive excursion to the town of Kazimierz. Neifeld enjoys the ambiguities of history embedded in this place where, according to legend, King Casimir the Great (1310–70) fell in love with a Jewish Esther and installed her in his palace. How delicious that the country's most popular tourist attraction should be the palace a Polish king built for his Jewish concubine! But the narrator finds that the ambiguity of the Polish–Jewish love affair is losing its charms to the blight of antisemitism. Neifeld admits that he has become a tourist in his own country and that this trip to Kazimierz is probably his last. Yash sees the wretched Jewish life at the foot of the palace hill, where Jewish artisans paint images of a dreamy past that belie the misery in which they raise their families. He sees the grotesque reality behind the exotic veneer: the warts on the restaurant owner's nose were not "the practical kind that sprout in later life so that one's eyeglasses may be held up by something. This woman's warts were on either side of a thick nose and gave it the look of some curious growth."[25]

Yash returns from his excursion to learn that Steinman lies dying, and this expiry of the soul of Polish Jewry on the eve of his own departure from Poland strikes so elegiac a note that the book seems to be folding up the Jewish tent. Steinman, who opened the book with a Yiddish *de profundis* ("Even from the *blote*, from the muck, do I sing to you, O Lord"), can barely get his "Hasidim" to hum the melody that he has taught them. During his sojourn at Buchhendler's, the poet has undergone a process of integration that has restored his broken connections with his youth and formative culture, but his deepened attachment only sharpens his foreboding:

> I remembered a Spanish book I had once read. The author, Ramon del Vale Inclan, divided the book into four "movements" corresponding to the four seasons. In the first part, the hero, a knight, is full with spring; in summer he is consumed with success like a Casanova; in fall his decline sets in; and in winter we find him lying with one hand shot off, waiting for the end.[26]

Yash fears he may be that knight, facing the winter of European civilization. "All of us—myself and everything I remembered, and everything I forgot—would soon find ourselves in winter with a hand shot off. That would be the hand which, I had vowed, I would let wither if I forgot thee, and thee, and everything that had ever been reflected in my eyes and in my brain."[27] The soldier of Konopnicka's poem who dies abroad is joined to this second image of the wounded warrior, this Yiddish poet-combatant in the ubiquitous war against the Jews. Memory, the Jew's primary weapon in exile, is concentrated in the psalmist's vow never to forget Jerusalem, and Yash had pledged to Jewish Poland this armed hand in its struggle for survival. But the last things Yash sees as he drifts into sleep at the dawn of his departure are the half-opened suitcases near his bed, "the sharpest and most solid objects in the room." These American grips will carry him off to safety, separating him forever from the Jews of Poland.

Glatstein sensed that he could not complete the task he had begun. When Yash sets out on his journey to Poland, he is as free as any man has ever been, the secular Jew free from observance, the American free from persecution, the citizen free to travel the world—and, in this book, even the writer freed from daily routine. Yash's freedoms are precisely the properties of Yiddish in America, liberated, just as the Introspectivists insisted,

from religious discipline, collective responsibility, and artistic conventions—but therefore also divested of power, community, and God. The Yiddish poet in America has neither shored up the influence that once allowed Joseph to help his brethren in Egypt nor invested the kind of trust in Divine Authority that would justify a prophecy of hope. Glatstein did not forget Poland. During and after the Hitler years, he wrote some of his most powerful poems of rage and quietude, poems of revolt and vengeance, an entire Holocaust psalter. The lyric from which the epigraph to this chapter is taken, dated June 1938, compresses into one evocative scene of "homecoming" the anxiety of the second Yash novel. In the perfect stillness of evening, mournful wagons return to town with no one there to meet them. As a few sickly Jews climb down from the wagons:

> *. . . a clever word falters*
> *In every brooding head.*
> *God, on your scale of good and bad,*
> *Set a dish of warm porridge,*
> *Toss some oats, at least, for the skinny mules.*
> *The deadness of the town grows dark.*
> *A cruel silence afflicts the Jewish beards.*
> *And each sees in the other's eyes*
> *A prayer of fear:*
> *When death comes,*
> *Let me not remain the only one,*
> *Do not pass over me with my thin bones.*[28]

For this observer-participant, fear of separation has displaced the fear of death. He is not anxious about confronting but about *escaping* the common fate. Glatstein himself returned to America to write the Yash books, but he failed to complete the story of the Yiddish writer.

Shmuel Yosef Agnon: *A Guest for the Night*

Throughout the foregoing discussion anyone familiar with Agnon's *A Guest for the Night* would have noted points of contrast between his work and Glatstein's.[29] Yash sets out for Poland as the consummate cosmopolitan; Agnon plunges his traveler directly into Jewish space and time:

> On the eve of the Day of Atonement, in the afternoon, I changed from the express to the local train that runs to my home town. The Jews who had traveled with me got out and went their way, while Gentile townsfolk, men and women, made their way in. The wheels rolled sluggishly between hills and mountains, valleys and gorges; at every station the train stopped and lingered, let out people and baggage, and started up again. After two hours, signs of Szibucz sprouted from both sides of the road. I put my hand to my heart. My hand throbbed against my heart, just as my heart throbbed under my hand.[30]

In the most charged hours of the Jewish calendar, the unnamed protagonist approaches his city of origin, where he plans to spend the ensuing year. The eve of Yom Kippur is for him not merely a date but the core of moral time. The pace of movement slows, *rallentando,* as the heartbeat picks up. The city he approaches in Gentile Europe bears the Hebraized name Szibucz, from the root sh-b-sh, "to make crooked or to spoil," being the moralized version of Agnon's native city Buczacz.[31] The uneasiness that overtakes Yash in his cabin at sea is here at the forefront of waking consciousness. As Yash rushes across the globe to rendezvous with his mother's still-beating heart, the Szibucz guest slows down for an appointment with himself. The missing ground of Glatstein's home is Agnon's exclusive location. The two Jewish narrators are not perched on the same axis: while the Yiddish writer balances on the horizontal tightrope between Gentile history and the Jewish experience of it, the Hebrew traveler stands on a vertical axis, between a weakened Almighty and a demoralized people. Already in the second sentence he accepts the distinction between Jews and Gentiles in the same uninflected way that he notes the gender separation between men and women. Agnon's narrator never experiences the freedom from Jewishness that liberates and then dooms his Yiddish counterpart. His freedom and anxieties are of another kind.

To say that this "man," as Agnon refers to him, enters Jewish moral time and space is of course not to suggest that he is returning to the *shtetl* or to the contained world of Tevye and his horse at the dawn of modernity. Such a faithful Jew and his horse do appear in Agnon's cast, but the horse (Henoch) and his master (Hanoch) freeze to death in the winter of this novel and pass into the realm of myth. Mutation, not familiarity, greets the

narrator from the moment he reenters his hometown. The town's skeptics tell him there may not be any suitable lodging for a Jew like him—one who keeps his head covered. His guide, Daniel Bach, has lost a leg and his faith and gets along as well as he can with man-made substitutes for both. That the narrator himself is not quite able to maintain the traditional life of yesteryear is signaled by his arrival at the inn too late to eat the pre-fast meal. Nevertheless, he is the most confident Jew in sight. Agnon's narrator is arriving from Jerusalem, and though he reports that his house there had been destroyed by Arab marauders, he projects the state of mind of someone who has a metaphysical as well as physical home.

Yom Kippur is the Day of Judgment. Agnon's fully cognizant Jewish narrator approaches the place and the moment of his reckoning as an informed participant, indeed, as the controlling author of his process, his *prozess*. He fashions his own key to the house of his fiction, he conducts his own prosecution and defense, he spins his own parables, and he provides his own commentary. The Yom Kippur liturgy is saturated with appeals to the King of Kings who occupies the Seat of Judgment. Despite his arrival at the eleventh hour, the dubious welcome he is accorded, and his unsettled status as a visitor in his altered home, the narrator *intercedes for* the God whose will he does not know:

> Does the king refrain from putting the crown on his head because it is heavy? On the contrary, he puts it on his head and delights in it. The king's reward for the crown being on his head is that everyone exalts and honors him and bows down before him. What good does this do the king? That I do not know. Why? Because I am not a king. But if I am not a king, I am a king's son and I ought to know. But this man has forgotten, he and all Israel his people, that they are sons of kings. The books tell us that this forgetfulness is worse than all other evils—that a king's son should forget he is a king's son.[32]

In *The Trial*'s parable of the priest, the ignorant man from the country waits a lifetime to be admitted to the Law, leaving his freedom untested. Agnon's narrator, using the familiar rhetoric of Jewish Midrash, stands like the gatekeeper between the man from the country and the Law, negotiating the traffic between them. The Jews as a people represent God's authority,

and should they abdicate their privilege—forgetting that they are the sons of a king—they reduce the moral potential of the universe. Agnon's self-accusation falls differently from Kafka's because he bears responsibility for his readership in a way that Kafka doesn't. K.'s anxiety is circumscribed by his isolation. Agnon's anxiety extends from himself to the Jews of Europe, to those beyond Europe to the world they inhabit, all the way to the Ruler of the Universe, who is in danger of being isolated from modern man. Far from diminishing anxiety, as some moderns assume that Jewish allegiance necessarily does, the cognizant Jew recalls the anxiety of the Hebrew prophets, who throb with the anticipation of a national catastrophe that they have the means only to foresee, not to prevent. Agnon has the temerity to be anxious on God's behalf.

AS COMPARED WITH the radical impersonality of Kafka's prose, Agnon's narrator experiences each and every moment according to an implicit standard. Yet in the following passage, the narrator's emphasis on close and patient scrutiny, the twice as long it takes him to do the ordinary, is complicated by the fact that he is inspecting only ruins and garbage, not a well-fashioned urn or a sacred place:

> It takes an ordinary man a half hour to walk to the center of town; carrying baggage, it takes a quarter of an hour more. I took an hour and a half: every house, every ruin, every heap of rubbish caught my eye and held me.[33]

The debased objects of his attention contradict our concept of value. Those who emphasize Agnon's modernism point to his "use of paradox, the fusion of antonomies, the breaking down of logically marked categories, the revelation of chaos in the belief systems of apparently naive legends whose heroes appear to be models of mental and spiritual integrity, and the subtle reversal of readings that he himself has constructed."[34] Situating Agnon among the modernists, however, should not negate his insistence on moral judgment that requires deliberate discrimination between good and evil. Agnon's narrator is morally overdetermined. When a friend invites him to stop off for a glass of ale, he gives two reasons for accepting: first, to please his friend and, second, to as-

suage his conscience, saying nothing about quenching his thirst. A hundred pages earlier he had tipped the postman but then told him not to squander the money on brandy, thereby inadvertently reducing the innkeeper's trade. He wants to repair that damage by going in for a drink, because a man cannot excuse having wronged one individual by the good he has shown another. This level of reckoning, however tongue in cheek, cannot leave a man with a clear conscience, because anyone with such a powerful awareness of his multiple motives will find the human flaw even in the most altruistic acts. Moral prose does not imply moral certainty. The complications in Agnon come from having full access to the Law but little trust in the man who tries to obey it.

Agnon's narrator is not a tourist. Like a Western hero, neither resident nor stranger, he comes to town attempting to relieve its residents from the evil threatening them. He remembers a better time, "when there was peace in the world, and joy, when a man had his victuals in plenty and his belly carried his legs."[35] But not being a gunslinger, the European Jew cannot shoot up the town to restore the forces of good. Politically handicapped and unarmed, he is limited to incremental cultural and economic improvements, such as reopening the house of study, dispensing charity, boosting the economy by buying and ordering local goods, and paying his upkeep at the local inn. All this time the surrounding "Indians"—the Gentiles—are sharpening their knives, and his money is running out. Recognizing from his own predicament that in order to cease being a guest one must have a house of one's own, he does what he can to inspire passion for the Land of Israel, knowing that most of the town will never reach it.

THE PHRASE "a guest for the night" has at least three referents. Its plainest allusion is to the narrator himself, a tantalizing blend of autobiography and invention. Born Shmuel Yosef Czaczkes in 1888 and raised in a traditional family that appreciated his precocity from an early age, Agnon assumed his literary name shortly after he arrived in Eretz Israel in 1907 as part of the Second Aliyah, when he published his first local story "Agunot." *Agunah*, the legal term for a deserted married woman who is neither divorced nor widowed, signifies a condition of tragic suspension that cannot be unilaterally dissolved. The adoption of this Hebrew name sug-

gests that the writer will always remain within the bounds of tradition but without full security, like that afforded a wedded spouse. The ambivalence signified by the choice of name seemed to express itself four years later when Agnon left the Land of Israel in 1913 to sojourn in Germany. There he secured his reputation as a Hebrew writer, married, and acquired a lifelong patron, the publisher Zalman Schocken. During his stay in Germany he visited his native Buczacz twice, once to see his ailing father and again to observe the week of mourning for him. In 1924, after a fire destroyed his home in Hamburg along with all his books and manuscripts, he settled with his family permanently in Jerusalem. Upon this second coming to Israel, Agnon adopted a religious way of life and built himself a house that figured prominently in his writings. His only extended trip abroad from that time on, triggered by the destruction of his house in the Arab pogroms of 1929, was a stay in Leipzig between March to September 1930, with a weeklong visit in August to the city of his birth, which became the kernel of this book.

Hence, the literal "guest for the night" is the one whose arrival in Szibucz opens the book at the beginning of the Jewish year 5689 (autumn 1929) and whose return to Eretz Israel concludes the book one year and eighty chapters later.[36] By slowing his narrative pace, just as he does in the description of the narrator's arrival, Agnon turned his weeklong visit to Buczacz (August 13–20, 1930) into his fullest autobiographical work, replete with information about his ancestry, his early life and works, childhood friends, and so forth. Yet the reliability of the novel as autobiography is called into question by the artistic manipulation of events. Like Glatstein, Agnon interprets himself as a character of fiction—the traditional modernist, transient native, artistic bourgeois, and sovereign subject of the Jewish God.

The designation "guest for the night" also emerges straight out of contemporary Polish–Jewish political discourse, describing the ambiguity of Jewish settlement on European soil. The Poles, eager for Jewish support of their reconstituted nation yet uncomfortable with the sizable Jewish community in a modern Polish republic, tried to emphasize the generous welcome they had once accorded the Jews even as they expressed their present resentment. The Zionist movement brought out the contradiction of Polish politics: while Polish nationalists agitated against the Jews and

even instigated pogroms as a way of driving them out, they simultaneously accused the Zionists who promoted emigration of having treated Poland as a "guest-house for the night."

Since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., Jews had founded their sacred communities wherever they settled, and the narrator's magnetic attraction to Szibucz dramatizes this spiritual affinity to his Jewish birthplace. Far from producing a nomadic tribe of wanderers, the Jewish concept of exile had encouraged the proliferation of autonomous communities (*kehilloth*) that substituted the Beit Midrash, the house of study, for the Beit Hamikdash, the Holy Temple. Doubled loyalty was the Jewish problem, because the Temple in Jerusalem had proven no more or less permanent than many a Jewish sanctuary in Asia and Europe and the Jew developed metaphysical as well as physical attachments to whichever place housed his study and prayer. When Agnon's narrator is persuaded to address local congregants one Sabbath, he elects to speak on the virtues of "the house of Israel" without specifying whether his text points to the newly reclaimed Szibucz house of study or to the newly reclaimed Land of Israel.

The political crisis of interwar Jewry is rendered in this novel more vividly than in any other I know. Agnon's contemporary Simon Halkin called it the new Midrash Rabbah on the Book of Lamentations for the way it communicated the "physical and spiritual sensation" of the destructive process that culminated in the Shoah.[37] Its individual testimonies of horror constitute a black book of 1914–29: Friede, the family nurse, recalls the rape and murder of her two daughters by a soldier who tricked them into his trust. Mrs. Zommer recounts how a farmer, pretending sympathy for her plight, sold her a sack of potatoes that turned out to be clods of clay. The narrator's childhood friend Schutzling learns that all three of his daughters were mowed down by soldiers when two of them came to prison to pick up their sister upon her release. These acts of sadism supplement a good deal of other incidents of random and explosive violence.

The narrator walks a political tightrope between urging immigration to Israel and cautioning against messianic expectations. Several times during the course of the novel, he is accused of having "misled" his fellow Jews on the question of Eretz Israel, either because he promised his listeners too much or because he encouraged them too little. Yerukham (Hofshi) Freeman, who had been inspired to move to Palestine by the example of the

narrator's *aliyah,* his ascent to the holy land, and by his maiden poems that rhymed *Jerusalem* with *heaven* (*yerusholayim, shomayim*), tells how betrayed he felt to discover that the narrator had gone back *down* from the holy land to Germany. That the poem Freeman quotes is Agnon's own aims the accusation through the narrator at the author. Contrarily, the narrator's childhood friend Dr. Jacob Milch bears him a grudge for having dissuaded him from emigration, advising him to "stay where you are and do not try to settle in the Land." Against this accusation the narrator replies that he who wants to come to the Land would not be put off by advice to the contrary.

Agnon's narrator passionately defends the Jewish settlement in Palestine against the barbs of its Orthodox critics and its disillusioned idealists. He imports the fragrance of Palestine to Szibucz through a crateful of oranges and forwards to Israel—on the grounds that there it will be more needed—a manuscript that is said to have powers of easing the travails of women in childbirth. All the same, the narrator reminds us that just before this trip to Szibucz his home had been destroyed by Arabs. Yes, it is far better to leave for Eretz Israel than to go on living in hate-driven Europe, but the narrator cannot guarantee the Jews a greater degree of safety there. Daniel Bach is still alive in Europe, despite his wooden leg, while his brother who had emigrated to Palestine was murdered by Arabs in his settlement at Ramat Rachel. The return to Eretz Israel never before brought Jews political security, and the realization that there may be danger inside as well as outside the land dare not slow the momentum that is driving the Jewish people back to Zion.

Without question, the condition of being a "guest for the night" points to the need for a Jewish homeland. At the book's conclusion, the narrator postpones his departure from Szibucz until the circumcision of the Freemans' son, whereupon he retraces his steps in leaving the city with almost ritual exactness.[38] The return to the Land of Israel with his family is described as a blessed return to a permanent home.

> Now let us see what happened to that man who will live in Jerusalem and what he did in the Land; or rather—since he is settled in the Land and is only a tiny grain of its soil—who will deal with a single grain when the whole Land is before him?
>
> The story of the guest is ended; his doings in Szibucz are done.[39]

This ending is precisely what Glatstein the American Yiddish writer could not provide—the formulaic inclusion of the individual within a people, the people within a land, in a language resonant with precedent and promise. During his first return to Europe in 1916, Agnon had composed a version of the legends "our fathers told us, how the exiles of Israel came to the land of Polin (Poland)." In quasi-biblical rhetoric, he rehearsed the story of how during their passage through the Polish forests the Jews discovered a tractate of the Talmud incised on every tree, prompting those who seek the origin of names to say, "This is why it is called Polin. For thus spoke Israel when they came to the land, 'Here rest for the night [*Po lin*].' And this means that we shall rest here until we are all gathered into the Land of Israel."[40] Now the man who had supplied the earlier legend was providing its sequel, for the time of removal to the Land of Israel had urgently arrived. The same person who is privileged (*shezakhah*) to live in Jerusalem becomes, in the destiny of the people and from the divine perspective, no more than a grain of earth. Yet compared with the drifting impermanence that claims the Jews of Lodz at the end of *The Brothers Ashkenazi*, the final resting place of this narrator, who may be a grain, is arable national soil.

The term "guest for the night" (*oreakh nata lalun*) also refers to a force beyond the narrator or the dislocated Jewish people's return to Zion. It was the prophet Jeremiah who used this expression to refer not to himself or the Jews but to Almighty God. Prophesying the drought that is about to descend on Jerusalem, Jeremiah reminds God that His reputation suffers whenever His people is punished:

> *Though our iniquities testify against us,*
> *Act, O Lord, for the sake of Your name;*
> *Though our rebellions are many*
> *And we have sinned against You.*
> *O Hope of Israel,*
> *Its deliverer in time of trouble,*
> *Why are You like a stranger in the land*
> Like a traveler who stops only for the night? *[oreakh nata lalun]*[41]

Jeremiah resorts to the Jews' strongest defense against their avenging Lord, namely, the warning that if they are to be judged by the strictness of His wrath, He will also be judged by their punishing fate. Agnon takes

this logic a step further, knowing that the Jewish God may be abandoned by Jews out of indifference. Displacement and exile have become so routine that there may be nothing left to warn against. After the catastrophes of his own lifetime, Agnon's narrator has no more outrage to expel against the people who inhabit the cities of slaughter, or against their Guardian. What is more, he fears that God may be eclipsed not only by the ruin of His people but also by Jews who insist they are redeeming Israel on their own. He is not afraid of God but afraid *for* God. Nothing is as contingent in the modern world as its Eternal Judge.

Thus, everything depends on that man in the middle, the narrator who forms an organic link between the Jews and the King of Kings, using the traditional language of their interaction to remind each of their interdependency. On the morning of Yom Kippur, the narrator notices that the Torah scrolls had been stripped of their sacred ornaments by soldiers who had seized them during the war to pay for their guns and ammunition:

> The Trees of Life, the staves on which the Scroll is rolled, protruded sadly, their faded color wringing one's heart. See how humble is the King who is the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, who said, 'Mine is the silver and mine is the gold,' but has not left Himself even an ounce of silver to adorn His Torah.[42]

Here, yet again, is the quotation from Haggai that was used by Tevye, this time with pathos directed toward the denuded Master of the Universe, who shares the humiliating fate of all Szibucz. The government's confiscation of synagogue property is noted by the narrator even as he observes that God "has not left Himself" the slightest adornment of his Law, as though there were no conflict between the political fact and the theological metaphor, as though one were expected to sustain two such contradictory views of life. This ontological irony readmits God into the modern text on the only basis possible, as an enfeebled authority who lives on human sufferance. Jeremiah anticipated this divergence between religious claims and political realities in his image of *oreakh nata lalun,* but whereas the biblical prophet remained in thrall to God's power, Agnon's narrator awakens compassion for the King who has been stripped of the divine right of kings.

AGNON'S VERY COMPLEX BOOK is organized, appropriately enough, around the symbol of a key—"that which opens up, discloses, or explains that which is unknown, mysterious, or obscure."[43] Like the title phrase, the key symbol figures substantially in the plot and virtually demands an exegetical process to interpret its many layers of reference. Thus, one recent psychoanalytic reading of the novel suggests that while the key functions on the manifest level in accordance with the Hebrew word *mafteakh,* from the root word "to open," the preponderance of Agnon's references to locked doors recalls the negative function of keys as represented by the German-Yiddish term *shlisl,* from the verb "to shut, close or lock."[44] According to this reading, while the narrator's attempt to hold the key to doors is obviously a redemptive effort to reopen the houses of study and the gates to Israel, his wish to repenetrate the security of his childhood is also a latent wish to regress into the womb, and an expression of the death wish and of an innate pessimism that runs parallel to the restorative endeavor.[45]

The Narrative Potential of Hebrew and Yiddish

Although it is true, as Robert Alter writes, that fiction offers "no solutions to the problems of existence, only the imaginative and linguistic means for thinking about the problems, for seeing them with a depth of vision," what Alter subsumes under the word *only* becomes in Agnon a powerful solution.[46] The Jewish way of life is also, when all is said and done, less an answer than a means for living with questions, and Agnon's narrator persuades us by example, precisely through the texture of his book, what advantages accrue to the person who experiences his life within its framework. The narrator often feels guilty because the money in his pocket and his home in Palestine give him an unfair advantage over the Jews of Szibucz, but his true advantage in the book is his proprietory right to the great chain of tradition and of its resonant literature. He explains that he is *not* a prophet: "a prophet knows nothing by himself and is only the agent of the Almighty, neither adding to nor taking away from the Almighty's message, and since the day the vision was blocked, prophecy has been taken away."[47] Yet why else disclaim prophecy but to remind us of its potential?

Here is how Agnon goes about trying to find lodging for the Divine Guest: There is no one in the novel whom the narrator dislikes as consis-

tently as Erela Bach. His aversion for this young woman is the more remarkable because, as he himself admits, it is independent of her achievements. She is not only the daughter of the Bach family, otherwise the most sympathetic family in the novel, but a teacher of Hebrew and a practical Zionist, both admirable from the novel's point of view. Why, then, does the narrator so strongly dislike Erela? "First, because of the way she articulates her speech, for she slices up her words as if with a sword, and second, because of the spectacles in front of her eyes."[48] The way she slices up Hebrew may refer to her ostentatious use of the Sephardic pronunciation that was taking hold among the young pioneers who wanted to distance themselves from the Ashkenazic Hebrew of their religious parents; the spectacles are the handicap she turns into a weapon, unlike her father's ironic acceptance of his missing leg. But elsewhere the narrator explains his dislike more plainly: "[Erela] boasts that she has no concern with anything that cannot be explained by reason alone."[49] As the purest rationalist in the book, she is the narrator's greatest enemy, for the Hebrew she teaches is deprived of its living resonance and her rational scrutiny pretends to heal the wound that it actually inflicts. She has stripped the Bible of its exegetical splendor, as the conquerors did the Torah scrolls in the synagogue. She has turned it into mere archaeology and literature.

Agnon's cast of Jews includes plenty of other problematic characters and opponents of Zionism. As the book nears its end, a number of characters voice despair. Schutzling says that we know what the generations to come will look like: one-third will be like Daniel Bach (who has a wooden leg), one-third like the train conductor Rubberovitch (who has an artificial arm), and one-third like Ignatz (who has a hole in the middle of his face where his nose used to be). A sweet-tempered scholar confesses:

> Sometimes . . . I come to the conclusion that it is not worth a man's while to live, for even if he does good and never sins, surely his very existence only brings about more evil and leads to sin, because his fellows have not reached this standard, and therefore they are compelled—both because they are evil themselves and because he is good—to do him evil.[50]

This may be a commentary on Agnon's own kind of Jewishness, which stirs more hatred by so strenuously trying to be good. But none of this

negativity arouses as much antipathy as Erela. The narrator reiterates his dislike for her without self-doubt or apology, as if to demonstrate that this is the only way the materialist worldview is to be resisted: viscerally, unequivocally, and on principle. Either the spirit will live free and breathe or it will be pinioned by spectacles and sliced up by reason's sword. Besides finding a home for himself and the Jews, the narrator seeks one for God, and in that endeavor no one is as harmful as the ideological materialist who has taken up the sacred language only to pervert the soul of Israel's schoolchildren.

In Agnon's prose, which is the antithesis of Erela Bach's, there is no such thing as a strictly denotive sentence, and while different levels of meaning may be distinguished, the text resists the separation of what is organically blended. The effect of totality that James Joyce achieves through stream of consciousness and a syncretic English (by describing Ireland in the fused language of European humanism) Agnon accomplishes through the interpenetration of symbolic, midrashic, homiletic, and realistic layers of narrative in the simultaneity of Hebrew. Agnon appears to be doing this naturally, because the Hebrew exegetical tradition has already read so many meanings into every word of the classical vocabulary. The style pits its congruence of spheres against the wreckage of postwar reality, so we experience the disintegration of a world in an integral, comprehensive language. Those who have a share in Agnon's tradition have said that he applies to modern fiction the rabbinic concept *hafokh ba v'hafokh ba,* the idea of delving into the mysteries of the Torah by turning over and over again its every jot and tittle because *everything* is to be found in it.[51] The result of so much compression is not necessarily comforting. The reader who follows Agnon to the heights and into the depths must consider God's agony of exile along with those of the Jews and the narrator.

AGNON AND GLATSTEIN had seized their freedom early on, each quitting his home while still in his teens, exchanging the place of his birth for the country of his choice, and assuming the kind of artistic authority in youth that most writers achieve only after half a lifetime. Each had insisted on the autonomy of the self, with a sense of separation from the community of fate to which he remained bound through language.

Their creative independence was so authentic that they had no fear of seeming reactionary when they enmeshed themselves again with Jewish Europe, returning to seek artistic nourishment from the place where they began. Each author, through his autobiographical narrator, attests to the grim condition of his people according to the logic of his language: Yash the Yiddish narrator discovers that the unparalleled freedom he attained in America has left him no secure future as a writer and no powers as a Jew. Agnon's Hebrew narrator is humbled by the realization that in a dying world his language has been reborn but is shorn of the holy grandeur that gave it glory.

31–32; translated as *Abyss of Despair* by Abraham J. Mesch (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1983): 43.

63. The term is Dan Miron's. See "Passivity and Narration:The Spell of Bashevis Singer," trans. by Uriel Miron, *Judaism* 41:1 (Winter 1992): 6–17.

64. Isaac Bashevis, "A Few Words About Myself" [in Yiddish], *Svive* (May 1962): 17.

65. Aaron Zeitlin writes, "In today's Yiddish literature, which faithfully submits to the harness of proletarian 'requirements,' works like Bashevis's are a *splendid anachronism* [emphasis in the original]." See foreword to 1935 edition of *Der sotn in goray*:vi. The sentence was deleted from the two subsequent Yiddish editions of the book, published in New York, 1943, and in Jerusalem 1972.

Chapter 5. A Farewell to Poland

1. Jacob Glatstein, "Vegener [Wagons]," in *Gedenklider* [In Remembrance: Poems] (New York: Farlag Yidisher kemfer, 1943): 46. Translated by Chana Bloch in *The Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse*, ed. Irving Howe, Ruth R. Wisse, and Chone Shmeruk (New York: Viking Penguin, 1987): 432–433.

2. Michael Andre Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). These phrases appear on pp. 95 and 2.

3. Thomas Mann, "The Making of *The Magic Mountain*" (1953), published as afterword to the novel in its reset edition (New York: Alfred. A. Knopf, 1955): 719–729.

4. Alfred Doblin, *Journey to Poland* [Reise in Polen], trans. Joachim Neugroschel, ed. Heinz Graber (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1991); Walter Benjamin, *Moscow Diary* [Moskaver Tagebuch], trans. Richard Sieburth, ed. Gary Smith (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986).

5. Shmuel Niger, "Concerning the Ethnonational Role of Yiddish and Yiddish Culture" [in Yiddish; 1950], reprinted in Joshua A. Fishman, ed., *Never Say Die! A Thousand Years of Yiddish in Jewish Life and Letters* (The Hague: Mouton, 1981): 137.

6. Jacob Glatstein, *Ven yash iz geforn* (New York: Farlag Inzikh, 1938). Translated as *Homeward Bound* by A. Zahaven (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1969); *Ven yash iz gekumen* (New York: Sklarsky, 1940), translated as *Homecoming at Twilight* by N. Guterman, with foreword by Maurice Samuel (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1962). References will be to *Yash* I and to *Homecoming*. Since the translation of *Yash* I is partial and not wholly reliable, I offer my own translations, sometimes based on Zahaven.

7. Dan Miron, Afterword to *Kesheyash nasah*, translation of *Ven yash iz goforn* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameukhad and Sifre Siman Kriah, 1994): 210. Glatstein's sketch in dramatic form— "Nakhman Watchmaker," described as "a fragment of *Ven yash is tsurikgeforn* [When Yash Returned], the third part of the trilogy in preparation" in the Tel Aviv literary quarterly *Di Goldene Keyt* 30 (1958): 256–261—does not really indicate in which direction this third novel would have gone.

8. For a longer introduction to Glatstein, see my review article "Found in America," in *The New Republic* (September 18 & 25): 52–57; Janet R. Hadda, *Yankev Glatshteyn*, (Boston:Twayne Publishers 1980).

9. From the manifesto "Introspectivism" in *In zikh* (New York: Max Maisel, 1920): 7–8, translated by Benjamin and Barbara Harshav in their *American Yiddish Poetry:A Bilingual Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986): 776.

10. Benjamin Harshav, *Language in a Time of Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993): 17.

11. A. Leyeles, "More About the Spelling of Hebrew Words" [in Yiddish], *In zikh* (October 1940): 188–-89.

12. Some recent discussions of the aesthetics of Inzikh and Glatstein can be found in Yael S. Feldman, "Jewish Literary Modernism and Language Identity: The Case of In Zikh," *Yiddish* 6:1(1985): 44–54; Benjamin Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990): 175–186; Abraham Novershtern, "The Young Glatstein and the Structure of His First Book of Poems," *Prooftexts* 6 (1986): 131–146; David G. Roskies, "The Achievement of American Yiddish Modernism," in *Go and Study: Essays in Honor of Alfred Jospe*, ed. Raphael Jospe and Samuel Z. Fishman (Washington, D.C: B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundations 1980): 353–368. The only book-length English study of the poet remains *Yankev Glatshteyn* by Janet R. Hadda.

13. Abraham Shulman, "Yankev glatshteyn's kritik [Glatstein's Criticism]," *Unzer Shtime* (4 January 1961): 3.

14. Marya Konopnicka, "A Yak Poszedl Krol . . .," in *Poezye*, ed. Jan Czubek (Warsaw: Gebethner and Wolff): vol. 3, 23.

15. I am indebted for this information about the link between Yash and Konopnicka's "O Janku Wedrowniczku" to Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, whose research into Yiddish and Polish literature is opening a badly neglected area of comparative study.

16. Jacob Glatstein, "Ven yash iz geforn," *Inzikh* 6 (September–October 1934): 178. The quote below follows on this page.

17. I [saac] Bashevis, "Jacob Glatstein's *Ven yash iz geforn*," *Tzukunft* (March 1939): 182.

18. *Yash* I: 37. The contraction God Abraham conveys the child's fused image.

19. Yankev Glatshteyn, "Zhurnalizm un poezye [Journalism and Poetry]," *Inzikh* 39 (October 1937): 71. The quoted phrase appears on p. 69.

20. *Yash* I:39.

21. Dan Miron draws attention to the connection between the author's golden ears and the mother's waxen ears in his Afterword, p. 217 ff. He also compares this novel with Agnon's and stresses the point I make about the absence of a homecoming scene.

22. *Yash* I: 222.

23. *Homecoming at Twilight*: 124–25.

24. Ibid.: 146.

25. Ibid.: 243.

26. Ibid.: 252.

27. Ibid.: 253.

28. See reference for the epigraph to this chapter.

29. Of the immense secondary literature on Agnon, I am particularly indebted to the essays on the novel by Shimon Halkin and Gershon Shaked, reprinted in *Sh. Y. Agnon babikoret haivrit*, Vol. 2: *Parshanut leromanim* [S. Y. Agnon, Critical Essays on His Writings, Vol. 2: Interpretations of the Novels] (Tel Aviv: Open University, 1992): 180–194, 195–227, and by Arnold Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare: A Study in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon* (Berkeley: 1968): 283–327, and to Dan Miron's discussion of the author in *Harofeh hamedumeh* [Le Medecin Imaginaire: Studies in Classical Jewish Fiction] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1995): 161–343.

30. Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *Oreakh natah lalun* (Jerusalem: Schocken, Books, 1976): 7. All references are to this edition and to the English translation by Misha Louvish, *A Guest for the Night* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968): 1. The shortened titles *Oreakh* and *Guest* are used in the following notes.

31. See Anne Golomb Hoffman, *S. Y. Agnon and the Drama of Writing* (Albany: State Uni-

versity of New York, 1990): 78, and Barukh Kurzweil, *Masot al sipure Sh. Y. Agnon* [Essays on the Stories of S. Y. Agnon] (Jerusalem: Schocken Books, 1970): 51ff. Gershon Shaked suggests that the wordplay illustrates the author's ambivalence toward the town, but in *Guest for the Night*, unlike the works of Hebrew Enlightenment fiction that routinely parodied locations through invidious fictitious names, it is not clear how much of the spoilage is attributable to the Jewish inhabitants and how much to the damage that has been done to it by others. See Gershon Shaked, *Shmuel Yosef Agnon: A Revolutionary Traditionalist*, trans. Jeffrey M. Green (New York: New York University Press, 1989): 21.

32. *Oreakh*: 33; *Guest*: 30.

33. *Oreakh*: 8; *Guest*: 2.

34. Nitza Ben-Dov, *Agnon's Art of Indirection: Uncovering Latent Content in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon* (Leiden, New York: E. J. Brill, 1993): 15.

35. *Guest*: 43.

36. For a full account of the visit, see Dan Laor, *S. Y.Agnon: New Perspectives* [in Hebrew]. (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1995): 154–174.

37. Shimon Halkin, on "Oreah Natah Lalun," [in Hebrew] in *S. Y. Agnon: Critical Essays on His Writings*, vol. 2 (Interpretation of his novels), ed. Avinoam Barshai (Tel Aviv: The Open University and Schocken Publishing House, 1992): 192.

38. Dan Miron points out that in this novel Agnon overcame his usual problems with closure. See his "Domesticating a Foreign Genre: Agnon's Transactions with the Novel," *Prooftexts* 7 (1987): 1–27.

39. *Oreakh*: 445; *Guest*: 477.

40. Agnon's version of the legend stands as the motto of *Polin*, the annual of studies in Polish Jewry begun in 1984.

41. The Book of Jeremiah 14: 7–8, *Tanakh: A New Translation of The Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985): 800–801.

42. *Oreakh*: 14; *Guest*: 8.

43. See *Oxford Universal English Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s. v. "Key." The Hebrew *Bibliography of Bibliographies* is called "The Key of Keys."

44. Yael Feldman, "The Latent and the Manifest: Freudianism in *A Guest for the Night*," *Prooftexts* (January 1987): 30.

45. Ibid.: 35.

46. Robert Alter, *The Invention of Hebrew Prose: Modern Fiction and the Language of Realism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 94–95.

47. *Guest*: 114.

48. *Oreakh*: 143; *Guest*: 149–50.

49. *Guest*: 136.

50. *Oreakh*: 383; *Guest*: 409.

51. Baruch Hochman arrives at this conclusion in his evocative memoir "An Afternoon with Agnon," *The American Scholar* (Winter 1988): 99.

Chapter 6. *Shoah*, *Khurbn*, Holocaust

1. Sh [merke] Kaczerginski, *The Destruction of Jewish Vilna* [in Yiddish] (New York: CYCO Publishers, 1947): 56–57.

2. Lawrence Langer writes, "Fifty years after the havoc, we have such an abundance of texts that Holocaust literature has grown into a genre of its own, needing neither excuse