From "A City of the Dead" to *A City in Its Fullness*
Evolving Depictions of Buczacz in the Long Agnonian Arc

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This essay offers careful examination of the often overlooked early works of S. Y. Agnon and offers insight into the original raw material from which he crafted a literary universe over his long career. Elements of Agnon's adolescent writing in Yiddish and Hebrew prior to his departure for Erets Yisrael *in 1908, aged nineteen, would be rearranged in stories, novellas, and novels from the moment his career is conventionally considered to have begun, with his arrival in Jaffa, up to and including material he was working on shortly before his death in 1970. Through an analysis of an almost completely overlooked 1907 story, "The City of the Dead" (translated and annotated in the article's appendix), we see how Agnon already saw himself as the chronicler of his native Buczacz in ways that occupied the author for over six decades in a long artistic arc that led to the culminating project in the posthumously published* A City in Its Fullness.

> Dr. Langsam returned for one of his stimulating talks. These chats must have stimulated the doctor, too, for the more he said, the more he had to say. In fact, though he had spent only the first twenty years of his life in his native town, a thousand years seemed not long enough to tell about them. Sometimes he repeated old stories to Hirshl and sometimes he related new ones. Though he had studied in famous universities, lived in great metropolises, and frequented celebrated theaters and opera houses, all these places might as well never have existed: nothing had remained in his memory, it seemed, but the little town he grew up in.
>
> — S. Y. Agnon, *A Simple Story*

Cosmology, the study of the origin and evolution of the physical universe, posits that every observable thing in creation can be traced back to events that took place in the earliest moments immediately following the Big Bang. The seed for

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Figure 4: The Jewish cemetery in Buczacz. Credit: Wendy Zierler.

all material objects originated with the formation of the first light elements—hydrogen and helium—out of primordial energy during the first three minutes of creation, a theory popularized by the Nobel physicist Steven Weinberg.[1]

Rarely can the roots of literary or artistic creations be analyzed with the same type of scientific precision. However, careful examination of the often overlooked early works of S. Y. Agnon offers crucial insight into the original raw material from which he crafted a literary universe over his long career. Agnon's adolescent writing in Yiddish and Hebrew prior to his departure for *Erets Yisra'el* in 1908, aged twenty, are the protons and neutrons he would rearrange in stories, novellas, and novels from the moment his career is conventionally considered to have begun, with his arrival in Jaffa, up to and including material he was working on shortly before his death in 1970. As a young teenage author whose ambition was outstripped only by his talent, Agnon already saw himself as the chronicler of his native Buczacz. Understanding the writings of young S. Y. Czaczkes (his name prior to adopting his pseudonym) is essential for understanding the mature author.[2]

Agnon seems to have been self-conscious of the weaknesses in his early works, those published while still living in Galicia and even some early material composed after his aliyah. With time, he came to moderate the excesses of his immature, romantic narrative voice in favor of a style marked by "a singular stillness, by an absence of pathos and exaltation […] free from even a trace of expressionistic hysteria," as described by Gershom Scholem, who noted the "profound influence" of the "extraordinary sobriety of rabbinic prose" on Agnon's writing.[3] He certainly came to recognize that his strength was as a prosaist, not as a poet, and assessments of his adolescent verse (and its shortcomings) bear out the wisdom of this artistic choice. Indeed, A. M. Habermann's bibliography of the early writings of Czaczkes, almost none of which were later included in the various editions of collected works, is a reader's guide of material Agnon chose to leave behind.[4]

In fact, in what seems to be a clear autobiographical projection, the Guest in *A Guest for the Night*—returning to his hometown as a now middle-aged, accomplished author—is embarrassed when Yeruham Hofshi declaims the Guest's early poetry. The doggerel's cheesy rhymes such as *Shamayim* and *Yerushalayim* or *Qodesh* and *Ḥodesh* cause him to beg for the younger man's silence:

> [Yeruham] placed his two hands on his heart, and repeated melodiously:
>
> Devotion faithful unto death
> I've sworn to thee by God above,
> For all I have in Exile here
> I'll give, Jerusalem, for thy love.
>
> …"If you are not silent I will leave you and go," I said to Yeruham. He paid no heed but recited:
>
> And though the tomb may close me in
> With all the dead beneath the ground,
> In deepest pit thou art my strength,
> O fortress city, world-renowned.
>
> "I know you don't like this poem," said Yeruham. "Your taste has improved and you are sick of rhyming "God above" and "Jerusalem's love."[5]

Agnon's dismissal of his adolescent writing aside, there is value in turning our attention to a remarkable and largely overlooked item in the catalog of early works. This is the short piece, "ʿIr hametim" ("The City of the Dead"), which appeared in the Lvov Hebrew newspaper, *Haʿet*, on March 14, 1907, and was signed with the pseudonym Eḥad min Haʿir ("One of the City" or "A Man of the City," which I presume was a salute to Aḥad Haʾam, as well as a claim of rootedness in the locale he was coming to document).[6] The work is hard to categorize. It is a string of vignettes about the history of Buczacz, around 1,450 words long, presented as reportage of the type he had been publishing in Galician newspapers for about three years.

Had young Czaczkes entered the family fur trade or the rabbinate (as his father and grandfather might have hoped), or if, God forbid, the ship carrying him to Jaffa's shores had never reached its port, we would little note nor long remember "ʿIr hametim." The importance of this story, perhaps more than any other publication prior to the colossal success achieved early on with "ʿAgunot," first published in *Haʿomer* in October 1908, is in the cataloging of a variety of themes and plots in miniature, which Agnon would rework over the next sixty years, culminating with his monumental *ʿIr umeloʾah* (whose major stories have now been published in English as *A City in Its Fullness*). The sheer artistry of "ʿAgunot" (even in its first edition; it was substantially

revised in 1921, then again when included in the collected works), is remarkably advanced relative to his pre-aliyah works published only a number of months earlier. One wonders what—aside from the proverbial "air of *Erets Yisraʾel*"—caused such an accelerated maturation in the artist as a young man.

In February 1907, young Czaczkes answered the call of Gershom Bader to move to Lvov and serve as assistant editor at his newly launched *Haʿet*, which styled itself as a thrice-weekly "political and literary newspaper."[7] Yitzhak Bakon observed that this short period in Agnon's career marks the earliest emergence of what would later evolve into his distinctive "narrative voice."[8] Part of the assistant's job must have been to provide much of the copy himself. As was common in small newspapers of the day, one writer would publish under a variety of pen names in order to give the impression that a small paper with an even smaller staff was serviced by a team of journalists. (Eḥad min Haʿir was only one such pseudonym used by Czaczkes at that time.) However, *Haʿet* was not long for the world, and, after only six weeks, the newspaper went out of business. After his abbreviated stint in the big city, a center of Hebrew and Yiddish publishing and journalism, where he came into contact with literary circles unimaginable back home, it must have been a bitter disappointment to return to Buczacz, unpaid for his efforts, for Passover 1907. It is not surprising that he could not be kept down in the town after he'd seen grand Lvov, or, in Arnold Band's terms, "perhaps the contrast between the big city and the provincial town made him more aware of the failings of the latter."[9] Presumably this contributed to his decision to set out once again within a year—this time bound for Erets Yisraʾel.

"ʿIr hametim" was overlooked because the newspaper *Haʿet* has remained largely unavailable to researchers. Having ceased publication after only a few weeks (only twenty issues were ever released), it disappeared from view. To the best of my knowledge, the National Library of Israel possesses the only microfilm copy, and it is incomplete and of exceedingly poor quality. Band was the first scholar to discuss the piece, fifty-seven years after its publication, and he reported that Agnon himself had brought it to his attention, telling him that it had aroused some controversy in Buczacz when published in 1907.[10] Band cites the opening of "ʿIr hametim," quoting only the first two paragraphs (about 18% of the whole), with a brief discussion of its themes. Almost all subsequent writers who deal with the text do so

secondhand through Band's presentation of it.[11] However, at least one print copy of the entire run of *Haʿet* remains in existence: all twenty issues in a bound volume, property of Agnon himself. Upon his death, this volume was gifted, along with his manuscripts, to the National Library of Israel, where it resides as part of the Agnon Archives. However, it is uncatalogued and unavailable to general researchers due to its extremely brittle state, so it remains under the radar. Through the generosity of the archive's legendary director emeritus, Rafi Weiser, I have come into possession of the complete text of "ʿIr hametim."[12]

Upon full examination, we quickly assess the article's significance. In it, Agnon surveys a number of themes that would occupy him for years to come, some of which were part of the town's indigenous folklore, others actual history, and presumably much drawn from his own imagination. As I hope to demonstrate in the coming pages, and as should be clear from a reading of "ʿIr hametim" (appended in an annotated English translation below), these aspects of the story are recast in a more mature voice throughout Agnon's later writings, culminating in *ʿIr umeloʾah*.

Among the later works that inherit elements first presented in "ʿIr hametim" are the Gothic story "Toitentants" in Yiddish, probably written around the same time as "ʿIr hametim" and published in subsequent Hebrew iterations as "Meḥolat hamavet" ("The Dance of Death") and "Aggadat hasofer" ("The Tale of the Scribe"); an array of short stories such as "Earth of Israel" ("ʿAfar Erets Yisraʾel"), "In the Depths" ("Bimetsulot"), "Ḥuppat dodim"; two novellas, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight* and "The Outcast" ("Hanidaḥ"); *A Simple Story* (*Sippur Pashut*; see especially chapter 15) and *A Guest for the Night* (*Oreaḥ nata lalun*), in which the themes of physical and spiritual decay are brought to novel-length perfection; and, of course, more stories in *ʿIr umeloʾah* than can be listed here. (The specific elements reprised in each work are enumerated below and in the annotations to "ʿIr hametim.") In a different but perfectly applicable context, Gershon Shaked stated that this early work "serves as the seed for later works and contains within it developments which would only reveal themselves later in Agnon's writing—in the manner of 'a bit that contains the abundant' or a type of foundation story. Later stories become variations [of these themes] or transformations and inversions."[13]

"ʿIr hametim" begins with a description of the earliest Jewish graves in the town, and the omnipresence of death is presented as a macabre point of pride—Jews are

literally dying to get into Buczacz. The obsession with graves as a sign of Buczacz's death urge, leading to a type of eternal memorialization in the object of the grave and basis for the connection of the residents to their town, is recycled in conversations of the Guest and his friend Schutzling, depicted powerfully in *A Guest for the Night*:

> "It is the tragedy of my life that I do not live in Szibucz," [said Schutzling. The Guest replied:] "Do you love Szibucz so much?" said I. "When a man sees that there is no place in the world that he loves, he deceives himself into thinking he loves his town. And you, do you love Szibucz?" "I? I haven't thought about it yet." My friend took my hand, and said, "If so, let me tell you that all your love for the Land of Israel comes to you from Szibucz; because you love your town you love the Land of Israel." "How do you know that I love Szibucz?" "Is it proof you want? If you did not love Szibucz, would you be dealing with it all your life? Would you be digging up gravestones to discover its secrets?"[14]

The morbid atmosphere is further marked by the halakhic question regarding ritual defilement of *kohanim* who walk the streets where death is underfoot at each turn.[15] These sentiments reappear in the persons of Yona Toyber in *A Simple Story* and Akavia Mazal of "In the Prime of Her Life" ("*Bidemi yamehah*"), both of whom fancy themselves historians of the town who know the bedrock of that history is in the graveyard. "'Ir hametim" reports:

> To this day there is a street called by everyone "Shul-gas" [Synagogue Street], even though there is no sign of Judaism or Jews there. In fact, when a Jew wishes to remove himself from the community, he rents a house on that street. Yet it is reported that once a grand synagogue stood there… [O]ne of the [church] walls is at a slant, and is the remnant of the synagogue upon which their church is built. The wall stoops in great sorrow in mourning for the desecration of its holiness.

This desecrated synagogue makes cameo appearances in any number of stories; the old Jewish neighborhood now abandoned by members of the faith becomes

the refuge for Jews wishing to live on the periphery, such as Yeruham and Rachel Hofshi (in *A Guest for the Night*) and Akavia and Tirtza Mazal ("In the Prime of Her Life") who are later joined by their housemaid, Blume Nacht (*A Simple Story*).

The banishment of a Hasidic master by the town's anti-Hasidic leadership (among whom was counted Agnon's maternal grandfather), is repurposed as the opening of "The Outcast," setting that novella's plot in motion. The late novel *In Mr. Lublin's Store* contains the surrealistic intrusion of old Mr. Jacob Stern, in a scene that could have been perfectly placed in Agnon's *Sefer Hamaʿasim* cycle of stories. Stern and the narrator sit in the empty Leipzig store in the final days of World War I reminiscing about their common Galician town. Recollecting the cemetery and an episode of the surprising discovery of two old graves, in a manner identical to "ʿIr Hametim." sends them on an imaginative journey back to the unnamed "our town" (which readers immediately recognize as Buczacz)—one in which they are transported from Germany to Galicia and from present to nostalgic, idealized, and mythologized past. Once again, now at the opposite end of his career, Agnon depicts gravestones and morbidity as touchstones for memory, but his tone had shifted dramatically over the ensuing decades.

In *ʿIr umeloʾah* that church on Shul-gas takes on a mystical air as the walls of the "once grand synagogue" weep.[16] The legend of the jealous and vain count who erects Buczacz's monumental town hall and then murders the master builder "so that he would never be able to construct such a building anywhere else" is spun into one of *ʿIr umeloʾah*'s most well-known tales: a Judaized Icarus myth of the builder Theodor (known as Fedor), which also generates the origin myth of the nearby Fedor Hill, later the site of the mass extermination of thousands of Jews at the hands of the Nazis, the resting place of at least 13,670 martyrs in fourteen mass graves. In doing so, the kernel of the story from "ʿIr hametim" takes on mythical depth as it foreshadows the final destruction and casts an eerily prescient light on Agnon's depiction of a town riddled with unmarked graves.[17]

It must, however, be noted that, aside from the shift in tone between "ʿIr hametim" and these later works that bear resonance with that 1907 text (and these are but a sample of the intratextual links within his writing), there is an even more striking difference. "ʿIr hametim" is marked by an almost complete absence of the intertextual matrix for which Agnon was famous, his Hebrew prose being a richly woven

tapestry of allusions to and wordplays with rabbinic literature. This intertextuality, which later becomes almost the very subject of his writing, was not yet in place in the earliest publications.[18]

The most significant *intra*textual connection between "ʿIr hametim" and Agnon's later writing is situated at the very end of the piece. The main part of the concluding vignette reads:

> One of the founders of Hasidism in town was a learned Torah scholar, the father of the man Yekele, who was eventually executed by hanging at the command of the head of the community. This Yekele, son of the first hasid in town, was executed 82 years ago having been charged on suspicion of theft and found guilty. At the moment they brought him up to the gallows the hangman, who was an apostate Jew from Czernowitz, said to him: "Make confession in the name of the God of Israel." He confessed many misdeeds, but denied any responsibility regarding this theft. A moment before they slipped the noose around his neck he declared that he had not committed this sin. In fact, this man was killed because of the wrath of the communal leader, who had a gripe against him and feared him. A few days after he was hanged, a court order arrived absolving him of all punishment—but it was too late as the deed was done. On the day they took Yekele to the gallows all the townsmen left the city, wandered the fields and forest in tears, stretched out their hands towards heaven, and cried out: "Our hands have not shed this blood!"[19]

This passage is a précis of what would become two parallel stories, "Yekele I" and "Yekele II," published posthumously in *ʿIr umeloʾah*.[20] Agnon's daughter and literary executor, Emuna Yaron, discovered the manuscripts for these stories among her father's files for the work in progress. Unable to determine which was meant to be the final version, she made the unconventional decision to publish them both, assigning them subtitles "*Nusaḥ eḥad*" ("One Version") and "*Nusaḥ aḥer*" ("Another Version"). Alan Mintz, James S. Diamond, and I decided to style the translated titles with roman numerals. This is a decision I now regret, because the use of numbering inadvertently telegraphs a sense of sequence, that version I was the draft, later revised as version II. In light of comparison to the much earlier source material in

"ʿIr hametim," I now believe that the opposite is true, as I will demonstrate momentarily. I should state that Yaron's decision at the time was perfectly reasonable; neither manuscript is a first draft, as is clear from the minimal amount of correction and revision on each, both were rewritten by Agnon in his own hand in preparation for later typing, and they appear to have been transcribed around the same time, on identical paper stock. Both are titled "Yekele," with no subtitle or indication of which was intended for publication.[21]

As the twinned stories grow from the seed in "ʿIr hametim," the issue around which their common plot revolves becomes the challenge to Jewish legal authority once Galicia comes under Austrian rule with the first Partition of Poland in 1772. Aside from ritual matters still adjudicated by a local *beit din*, rabbinic authority, or the power of the Jewish communal leadership headed by a *parnas*, authority had been largely ceded to and usurped by the civil authorities. This results in the question: How do you solve a problem like Yekele? How can the Jewish community rein in an insolent youth or a juvenile delinquent, especially an orphan without parents to have guided him in his growing up? The most significant transformation that the story undergoes from 1907 to its expanded versions published in 1973 is the identification of the anonymous "head of the community" (*rosh haqahal*, *parnas*) as none other than Reb Yisrael Shlomo—a character from Agnon's *The Bridal Canopy*, described by Dan Miron as that novel's "most vivid and interesting character, and one of the best portrayals of a pathological narcissist in all of Hebrew literature." Yosef Dan said, "It would be hard to find a more negative character in *The Bridal Canopy* than Yisrael Shlomo."[22] This legendary *parnas* of Buczacz is the hero of three long stories in *The Bridal Canopy* (book I, chapters 11–13), told as stories within the story, as he is now long dead but related to the assembled listeners by his namesake, another Yisrael Shlomo (just one more example of the doppelgänging for which that novel is famous). The most important of these stories, "Meḥamat hametsiq" ("From the Wrath of the Oppressor"), has been called the best precursor to Agnon's later stories collected in *ʿIr umeloʾah*.[23] If so, then it draws attention to the first appearance of its main character in "ʿIr hametim" and further strengthens the importance of that early work as being connected to the late *magnum opus*. The novella is a kind of Agnonized Pygmalion story, in which Yisrael Shlomo, in a cruel practical joke, attempts to pass off a poor, young ignoramus as a learned scholar and

marriage prospect for the daughter of his rival. In the end, Yisrael Shlomo is hoisted on his own petard when the unlettered fellow has improved himself from the time spent as an "imposter" in the *beit midrash*, and, by the time the wedding arrives, he has, in fact, been transformed into an authentic, fêted *talmid ḥakham*!

"Meḥamat hametsiq" opens with a portrait of the *parnas* as a high-handed, thin-skinned communal leader who subjects his opponents (if they are sufficiently lower class that he can get away with it) to humiliation via public punishment. In this case, a young man has been placed outdoors in the pillory on a freezing cold winter day. Such punishment was deemed appropriate for the "crime" of public insolence (chutzpah) toward the wealthy head of the town. This characteristic is instantly recognizable to us from its earliest kernel in "ʿIr hametim" and in its later reappearance in the "Yekele" stories.[24]

In the "Yekele" stories, the confrontation between the *parnas* and the delinquent remains the focus. Yekele is suspected, presumably falsely, of a robbery and attempted murder, leading to his execution, which conveniently ameliorates Yisrael Shlomo's egotistical annoyance at the young whippersnapper's presence. Among the essential differences between the two versions of the story is that Yekele is the center of his own story in version I; Yisrael Shlomo is the focus of version II. In both, however, we encounter, in Mintz's synopsis, "the story, in short, of a lopsided duel between a powerful oligarch and a boy who refuses to acknowledge his authority. Cowed and enfeebled, the community fails to play a mediating role in the confrontation."[25]

The salient plot differences between the two versions of the story are as follows: In version I, Yisrael Shlomo passively enables Yekele's execution through silence; in version II, Yisrael Shlomo plays a more active role, moving "quickly to bring the matter to the attention of the regional judges, and he was not satisfied until they condemned Yekele to the gallows." In version I, the whole town, as well as we the readers, are aware that Yekele was present at a communal celebration of the Burial Society during the crimes of which he is accused, giving him a solid alibi against claims that he was the perpetrator; in version II, his whereabouts on the night in question are unclear.

Version II contains a lengthy roster of the many charitable institutions in the town, over twenty organizations that care for the sick, clothe the orphans, feed the

needy, and the like. It comprises approximately one-third of the story and, in honesty, taxes the reader's patience. Agnon's purpose in describing these charities was to highlight the gap between Buczacz's ideals and their execution in practice, shining the spotlight on the spilling of innocent blood because of the egos and arrogance of the wealthy and the inability or unwillingness of the townsmen to push back against such wickedness.[26] This section is completely absent from version I.

In version II, the hangman imported from out of town to carry out the execution is an apostate Jew, an element missing from version I of the story.

In version I, the townsmen go to the outskirts to proclaim, "Our hands have not shed this blood!" while Yekele's body is being lowered from the gallows, at which point "a runner arrived from the court in Stanislav. In his hand was a letter from the court officials to the emperor's deputies. The letter said that Yekele, the son of Moshe, was not to be given the death penalty." In version II the tardy stay of execution arrives "a few days later" (from an unspecified court).

A half-century after "ʿIr hametim" was published, it seems clear that Agnon had that copy of *Haʿet* in front of him as he sat down to compose what would become the two versions of "Yekele." In light of these textual differences, it becomes clear that what we titled "Yekele II" is in fact Agnon's first iteration, his initial version of an expanded Yekele tale on the skeleton outlined in the concluding section of "ʿIr hametim." He spun the 1907 version of the story, only a few short paragraphs, into "Yekele II" (totaling 3,754 words in Hebrew). A perusal of "ʿIr hametim" shows a high level of correspondence between that early text and details in "Yekele II," including, among others: Yisrael Shlomo's more activist position in the story, the identification of the hangman as an apostate, and the arrival of the court messenger a few days after Yekele's death (instead of having the horses gallop up as he's being lowered from the noose). In the rewriting of the story as (what we called) "Yekele I," we witness a tightening of the text (it weighs in at only 2,662 words). Agnon excised the lengthy listing of the charitable associations, aware no doubt of how it slowed the story's pace. The drama is heightened by the arrival of the messenger just a moment too late to spare Yekele's neck (instead of "a few days later"). These are the types of revisions for which Agnon was famous, polishing his prose toward greater artistry. Perhaps most significantly, "Yekele I" elevates the rascal's role as the victim,

unsympathetic a character as he may be. Only in this version do we the readers know he is indubitably innocent of the crime for which he swings.[27] This resonates perfectly with the themes of the section of *A City in Its Fullness* in which the story is situated. Compare Yekele (in version I) to Dan in the neighboring story, "Disappeared" ("Hane'elam"). They are both expositions on the theme of how the communal authorities misuse the limited autonomy and power granted to them under their non-Jewish hosts to police members, and neutralize young men (through the noose or military conscription) who have become inconvenient. To accomplish this the "Yekele" story had to evolve with the boy at the center. (Yisrael Shlomo, who has his own star turn in *The Bridal Canopy*, appears here in a supporting role, either as a character or mere typology.) Interestingly, "Disappeared" contains a different variety of a second version, in which the tale is recounted through the point of view of the Polish noblewoman, the story's villain, in an account appended to the main narrative.

I am further convinced that "Yekele I" was Agnon's intended telling of the tale for public consumption when we consider one other story, wholly overlooked in any analysis of "Yekele." In the portion of *A City in Its Fullness* that contains our story, "Disappeared," and others, we find a brief interstitial section entitled "Shivḥah shel 'irenu" ("Our City's Praise").[28] It is part of a cycle of short stories in book III called "The Upheavals of Time" that portray the city in decline. In passing, the narrator summarizes the plot of "Yekele," telling us that it is "a story he has written in detail, in his possession in manuscript." In other words, "Shivḥah shel 'irenu" postdates "Yekele," but its plot summary aligns completely with our "Yekele I." The narrator concludes the rehearsal of the story with:

> I will add here, *after they lowered Yekele from the hanging tree* [i.e., on the same day, unlike version II] a speedy messenger came from the high court in *Stanislav* [a detail only present in version I] with papers to the local judge in Buczacz informing him that the ministers of the high court examined the case of Yekele and found him innocent of the crime.

This latter recounting of the "Yekele I" plot confirms the final trajectory of the story begun in "'Ir hametim."

Taken as a whole, the presence of these many foreshadowings of later works in the adolescent "ʿIr hametim" testifies to how long Agnon carried these stories in his mind throughout his life. It also undermines the common notion that only late in his career, with the compositions that would become *A City in Its Fullness*, did he make the conscious decision to undertake his chronicling. The awareness that his home town was on the verge of collapse, spiritually as well as physically, and the impulse to document Buczacz in literature was obviously deeply rooted in his childhood experience. In fact, from his first years as a writer he had already set this as one of his areas of focus, although his narrative voice would mature and, indeed, sharply transition over the ensuing decades. In 1956, when his published output had slackened, he answered Baruch Kurzweil's inquiry as to where he was focusing his energy with: "I am building a city—Buczacz!"[29] Mintz carefully observed that this statement was the

> proprietary stamp of a veteran writer who writes using an established repertoire of modernist techniques. Reimagining Buczacz through the filter of this imagination that abandons nothing from the toolkit of modernism must of necessity mean creating something new, a new city. The bricks and mortar may be taken from the historical record, but the building will be a new creation. No other writer in modern Jewish culture has attempted a project of similar scope or ambition."[30]

This last point has become clearer especially in this past decade as *ʿIr umeloʾah* has begun to receive the level of critical attention it deserves, in no small measure thanks to the scholarly work of Mintz. *ʿIr umeloʾah* was Agnon's epic literary memorial to Buczacz. Published in 1973, the book was largely overlooked, partially due to the bad timing of appearing on the eve of the Yom Kippur War, but more so due to the lack of appetite of that generation's Hebrew readers for old world stories.[31] Nevertheless, Yaron asserted that, "To my mind *ʿIr umeloʾah* is the best and most important of the volumes I published from my father's estate… One should read the book as my father intended: As a monument to Polish Jewry which was destroyed in the Holocaust."[32]

However, the arc of writing from "ʿIr hametim" to *ʿIr umeloʾah* is long, and it bends toward nostalgia, creativity, and memorialization. Agnon's early writings are marked by a harsh critical eye, spotlighting hypocrisy and deception, especially relating to financial matters and social injustice. Consider the short story "Ger Tsedeq," written around the same time as "ʿIr hametim," in which a crafty Jew disguises himself as a Russian prince converted to Judaism to defraud the entire community.[33] Only as Agnon matures is his focus on physical poverty (which admittedly remains ever present in his writing) overtaken by a portrayal of the spiritual poverty of Buczacz, as a synecdoche of Jewry writ large.

The cynical feel of "ʿIr hametim" is palpable. Compare it to another relatively early work, "Old and Young Together," which was first published in 1920 but set in Buczacz in 1907 (the very year "ʿIr hametim" is written).[34] This story, Agnon's first substantial literary treatment of his Galician youth, presents a satirized depiction of an array of personalities, institutions, and issues of the day. Among the objects of his humor (which fluctuates from gentle mocking to acerbic biting) are the pompous windbags who pass as Zionist leaders and the cowardice behind their words; the internecine fighting about the purposes of Zionism (whether to ameliorate Jewish suffering in Europe or to build a new Jewish settlement in Palestine); literary figures with inflated egos; the Yiddish versus Hebrew language wars; arrogance, ignorance, and hypocrisy of rabbis, Hasidim, and *maskilim* alike; and the perennial penchant for Jews to act as their own worst enemies despite the external threats of anti-Semitism. Yet the reader still senses the love for the world coming under critique at the tip of the author's pen. In addition, perhaps for the first time, his critique is not pitched exclusively toward the town. The narrator, Ḥemdat (universally understood to be Agnon's autobiographical projection of himself into his fictional universe), is himself the target of the novella's scorn. His self-depiction introduces a well-intentioned youth, hungry for fame yet seemingly incapable of any effective action. An ancillary cause for self-flagellation is his depiction of the generational divide represented by the conflict between himself and both his father and grandfather, who disapprove of his lax religious commitments and his Zionist affiliations. Ḥemdat's desire to gain glory as a writer, like that of his author-creator, prevents the fulfillment of his family's aspirations for him as a Torah scholar and rabbi. *A Simple Story*, similarly set in Buczacz/Szybusz during the first decade of the twentieth

century, serves as an additional example of the more muted criticism diluted with nostalgia, conveying the warmth he feels for the town. Dr. Langsam's longing for the *alte heim*, cited in the epigraph above, could have been written by Agnon about himself. (In fact, I presume it was.)

A penchant for self-mockery (especially by a middle-aged writer of his adolescent self), does not imply that Agnon lost or abandoned his critical perspective on his hometown as he aged. This was an authorial voice not available to a teenager unable to feel nostalgia for a town he had not yet left! Agnon departed Buczacz at age twenty, and, aside from two very brief visits, he essentially never returned—yet his literary imagination is never far from the hometown, as if to say, "you can take the boy out of Buczacz, but you can't take the Buczacz out of the boy." Similar observations can and have been made about other great novelists: Mark Twain, James Joyce, William Faulkner, and Philip Roth all come to mind. Aharon Appelfeld's appreciation for what he learned as a young author from Agnon expresses this quite precisely:

> Most of my generation [of fellow authors] invested a huge amount of effort into suppressing and eradicating their past. I have absolutely no complaints against them; I understand them completely. But I, for some reason, didn't know how to assimilate into the Israeli reality. Instead, I retreated into myself. For this, Agnon served as an excellent role model. It was from him that I learned how you can carry the town of your birth with you anywhere and live a full life in it. Your birthplace is not a matter of fixed geography. And you can extend its borders outward or raise them to the skies. Agnon populated his birthplace with everything the Jewish people had created in the past two hundred years. Like any great writer, he wrote not literal reminiscences of his town, not what it actually was, but what it could have been. And he taught me that a person's past—even a difficult one—is not to be regarded as a defect or a disgrace, but as a legitimate source to be mined.[35]

All this suggests that Agnon had to "leave his country and his homeland and his city and ascended to Erets Yisraʾel to build it from its destruction and to be rebuilt

by it," so that he could turn his attention back to that city of Buczacz to rebuild it in literature. Dov Sadan observed that "the difference between what the author knew about his town while he was a young man residing there and what he came to understand over the course of the rest of his life was akin to the difference between a puddle and a raging river."[36] We might amend this statement to read: It is akin to the difference between "A City of the Dead" and *A City in Its Fullness*.

This is not to say that Agnon ever abandoned his critique, nor that he was unable to retain his cynicism as he aged. Indeed, *ʿIr umeloʾah* is awash in such social criticism, bordering on outright indictment of the communal leadership and the corrosive effects of vanity and power on Jewish life. Among the objects of particular concern are the oppression of the poor and the gap between the town's expressed ideals as a religious community versus its sometime shoddy application in practice—or the widening chasm between ideal Buczacz and real Szybusz. The book bears a dedication to a city that "was full of Torah, wisdom, love, piety, life, grace, kindness and charity"; its content often tells a different tale (alternatively with acid or good humor). The essential difference between early and later career is how Agnon learned to temper the youthful critique. He did this out of artistic impulse: writers who cannot evolve past the persona and voice crafted by their teenage narrators tend not to be recognized by the Nobel committee. But it was also a desire not to be a shill for the old world, nor attempt to deconstruct it. The proclivity of an author to venerate or alternatively satirize a world he depicts does not, in and of itself, indicate his stance vis-à-vis that world. In the case of Agnon, it was neither one nor the other but a desire to simultaneously skewer and sacrilize and, in so doing, ask what that world of the past has to say to the present and future.

Agnon expressed pride in his ability to walk this careful line, especially as it distinguished him (in his own mind at least) from earlier giants of Jewish literature, figures he often saw as role models against whom to compete:

> Consider what I did with the pauper Reb Yudel Hasid in my novel *The Bridal Canopy*. I created him as a person of substance, with charm after his own fashion, despite the events that befell him. What would our other writers have done with a character like this? Mendele would

> have made him ridiculous, in order to twist and poke; Sholem Aleichem would have made him the object of simple mockery. I sweetened the bitterness of Reb Yudel's poverty, removing the ridicule, making the pauper a more perfect character.[37]

Agnon's particular mode of balancing the critical and the self-critical with the nostalgic was, in his own eyes, part of what set him apart from other authors. He saw himself as an inextricable part of both the good and the bad that was Buczacz's reality and legacy. Many have wondered at what it was that made him so successful and well received in Jaffa and Jerusalem of the Second Aliyah, as well as in the early state, despite his focus on the old world of Eastern Europe. Perhaps it was precisely these intertwined threads of the self-consciously self-critical and the respectful distance that made him acceptable to his early readers.[38]

Agnon's long career can be traced as an arc from youthful, almost cynical focus on death and decay to a more mature and creative form of writing. With tragic irony, this later voice was surely informed by the knowledge of Buczacz's final destruction but was already formed prior to the Holocaust. The unripe narrator of "A City of the Dead" had to give way to enable the formation of the canon of Agnon's work, leading to the culminating project that took shape in *ʿIr umeloʾah*. Because Alan Mintz viscerally understood the power of Jewish literature and culture as a reviving force in Jewish life, he recognized the creative achievement of *A City in Its Fullness*. This enabled him to read and analyze Agnon's entire literary output through the lens of his late masterpiece and present it to us as an "imaginative chronicle.... [A]n alternative to forms of memorialization that brought destruction and loss to the forefront. For Agnon the path was not lamentation, martyrology, theodicy, or conventional forms of consolation but the re-creation in words of what was lost in fact."[39]

Appendix
"The City of the Dead"

Translated and annotated by Jeffrey Saks

Buczacz, in Galicia, is a city of the dead in every way. Not merely because wherever one excavates he finds human remains and dead corpses, or because a halakhic inquiry has already been posed to the leading authorities if it is permitted for *kohanim*, men of priestly lineage, to reside in Buczacz and to walk her streets.[40] Rather, it is a city of the dead due to the absence of life within it. If you wish to know how fond Buczaczers are of death, listen to the legend that circulates in town about the first grave in the Jewish cemetery: An important person was passing through Buczacz and saw men digging. When asked what they were doing, they answered that they were digging graves for the local Jews. The man envied the good fortune of those Jews, who would merit eternal rest in those graves, and he longed to dwell in this place as well. He died at that very moment and was buried in that graveyard, with a large monument erected over his plot. They engraved his name as "Wayfarer Ḥayyim," that is, "a passerby whose name was Hayim, who passed this way unto the light of Eternal Life." His tombstone is the oldest in the graveyard of the holy community Buczacz.[41]

The Jews of Buczacz yearn so much for death that they hark back to a legend about a wayfarer who wanted to die. Furthermore, as soon as any Jews settled there, they immediately dug themselves graves. Who knows how many years the wayfarer was the only one interred there and how much money the community spent to pay a cemetery watchman so that he would not lie alone in the grave. Who knows whether those Jews had died of natural causes or whether the local count had thrown them into the river, as he did many times. Once, when a wagonload of Jews traveled to town, he gave orders to hurl them into the Strypa River.[42] Consequently, we don't know when the first congregation was established in Buczacz. There are,

to be sure, several ancient tombstones sunk into the ground, but it is impossible to read them and to grasp their content, not because reading graves with raised lettering causes forgetfulness, but because the inscriptions are worn away and illegible.[43]

Yet one tombstone remains legible, in particular its date: Year 91 AM [=1331 CE], although it is unclear if the final letter of the preceding word belongs to the numeral itself, making it 491 AM [=1731 CE] instead.[44] Local scholars insist that the correct date is 91 AM, demonstrating the importance of the city as among the most ancient. However, according to the historical facts available to us, and according to the local traditions, we cannot deduce anything about the founding of the Jewish community from this cemetery, since it has been demonstrated that this was not the town's original graveyard.

Apparently, the Jewish community was originally situated in a different neighborhood. To this day there is a street called by everyone "Shul-gas" [Synagogue Street], even though there is no sign of Judaism or Jews there. In fact, when a Jew wishes to remove himself from the community, he rents a house on that street. Yet it is reported that a grand synagogue once stood there, and the local chroniclers decided that the location where their church now stands was previously occupied by the Jews' Great Synagogue. And this on account of the fact that one of the walls is at a slant and is the remnant of the synagogue upon which their church is built. The wall stoops in great sorrow in mourning for the desecration of its holiness.

The Great Synagogue we possess today is distant from that "Shul-gas."[45] It is built in the same style as their church, and it is even said that the same builder built both. This builder also constructed the Town Hall, with its marble masonry and magnificent statues. These statues were quite well known throughout the surrounding villages, and when a villager would visit Buczacz and return home, no sooner would he be greeted by his friends than they would ask: And how are the Town Hall statues faring?

And just like all legends that circulate in other towns, it was told in our town that after the builder did all this, when he completed his labors and finished his work, the Count brought him up to the top of the tower and cast him down to the earth, so that he would never be able to construct such a building anywhere else.[46]

One way or another, it seems that the Jewish street in Buczacz was originally in a different location, in the place called "Shul-gas." This can be determined by a

variety of factors, including, as is known, that when a town is first established they would build it near the water, and not far from the castle.

Buczacz was apparently not among the more prominent Jewish communities in the area and was not well known among them, for in the writings of the great rabbinic sages we find it referred to as: "Buczacz, nearby to Yazlovets"—and Yazlovets is a very small town.[47] In the responsa of another distinguished rabbi: "Buczacz, nearby to Barysz"—and Barysz is so small, that for years it has not even ranked as a village.[48]

Buczacz has been known as a city for 800 years. In the thick woods is the ruin of a monastery, which housed monks 600 years ago and was destroyed in the war of the Tatars against the Poles. While the monks were hiding there, a certain gypsy betrayed them, and the Tatars slaughtered them to the last man. Even now one can see red grass growing by the entrance to the monastery—stained red with the monks' spilled blood.[49]

To this day the remains of the monastery still stand: tall, ruined walls. A spring bubbles forth from that spot, its waters trickling through the forest.

On "Shul-gas" is the castle of the Polish lord, but it was destroyed by the lord himself, forced by the Tatars so that the Poles would have no secure hiding place when they refused to pay the tribute tax imposed on them by the Tatars. Many times he had refused to pay the required tax. This was the Tatars' strategy: teams would enter Buczacz, uproot trees from the forest, and dam the waters and lay a bridge. When they ascended the hill to the castle where the lord resided, boiling millet was cast down upon the heads of the Tatars, forcing them to flee.

Once when the Tatars overcame the Poles a conditional peace treaty was signed, forcing the Poles to destroy their own fortress so they would have no place of support or base for rebellion. This treaty is known in the annals of Poland as the "Shameful Peace."[50] To this day the ruined castle stands outside of the city limits, surrounded by a fence, and the treaty is housed there in an iron chest. An elderly cook reported that his father, who had died at age ninety, had remembered that at the edge of the mountain where the ruined castle stands were two tombstones with Hebrew inscriptions, but the waters overran them and washed them away.

A notable figure in the kingdom—that is, a Jewish turncoat in the old lord's castle—told me that he had heard with his own ears that which was read from the

old town chronicles: "And now it is permitted for Jews to settle here," and the first area listed was the one next to the castle.

No written chronicle of the Jewish community survives, and we know nothing for certain, only hearsay. For example, we do not know which rabbi served the holy community Buczacz with honor prior to Rabbi Tsvi Hirschele, author of *Neta' Sha'ashuim*,[51] the father-in-law of the Tsaddiq.[52] However, the elders relate that they themselves had seen the seal of a rabbi in the old chronicle about testimony regarding set places in the Great Synagogue, and it was signed "Avram, that is Avraham."

We know nothing more about this rabbi, for he is not buried in the Jewish cemetery here, and in the villages none remember his name. Perhaps something was written of him in the communal chronicle, but that chronicle was destroyed in the great fire over thirty years ago.[53] Or perhaps that generation's community elders were guilty of destroying it, not wanting to leave evidence of their vile and ugly deeds, some of which we have heard reported by word of mouth.

However, in the introduction to the book *Zikhron Devarim*[54] the author mentions a certain Rabbi Eliyahu, who had also served as rabbi in Zlotchov,[55] yet he tells us nothing about when he lived, nor if he served first in Buczacz and afterwards in Zlotchov, or vice versa.

Buczacz was, however, a city full of Torah scholars, as is recorded in the introduction to *Sefer Haberit* by Rabbi Eliyahu Pinḥas.[56] He spent a period of time in Buczacz and praised the city, its scholars and students of Torah.

The author of *Penei Yehoshu'a* [57] also lived for a while on Moldy Lane, on account of which everyone called it Gold Street.[58] On that same street lived Rabbi Meshulam of Pressburg,[59] author of *Igra Ramah*, who served as rabbi in Pressburg prior to Rabbi Moshe Sofer, the great genius, who eulogized him and published the eulogy in his book *Ḥatam Sofer*.

In Buczacz they told of the arrival of Rabbi Meshulam to our town. His father was a simple Jew from a nearby village, who brought his son to our town so he might study Torah. He toiled away at his study until his reputation as a scholar became well known. It is also said that the father of Rabbi Meshulam is buried in the Buczacz cemetery, but we do not know the location of the grave.

A community of Hasidim was founded in Buczacz before the arrival of the Tsaddiq Rabbi Avraham David, of sainted and blessed memory, the renowned

author of many talmudic works. He instructed that during the recitation of the Incense Offering Passage one ingredient, whose pronunciation was unclear, be read "*hakosht* or perhaps *hakost*"—not wishing to decree a bad end on transgressors, for just as "one who omits even one of its ingredients is guilty of a capital offense" so, too, one who should mispronounce one of the ingredients.[60] That is why he decreed that we recite: "*hakosht* or perhaps *hakost*."

Ten Hasidim separated themselves from the Jewish prayer-house and built themselves a sanctuary of their own, making a Hasidic minyan, and imported a certain rebbe, but their opponents in town banished him with derision. The *khsidim-shtibl*, that is, the Hasidic house of prayer, is to this day called the *leytsim-shulekhl*—"The Clowns' Shul."

One of the founders of Hasidism in town was a learned Torah scholar, the father of the man Yekele, who was eventually executed by hanging at the command of the head of the community.[61]

This Yekele, son of the first hasid in town, was executed 82 years ago,[62] having been charged on suspicion of theft and found guilty. At the moment they brought him up to the gallows, the hangman, who was an apostate Jew from Czernowitz, said to him: "Make confession in the name of the God of Israel."[63] He confessed many misdeeds but denied any responsibility regarding this theft. A moment before they slipped the noose around his neck, he declared that he had not committed this sin.

In fact, this man was killed because of the wrath of the communal leader, who had a gripe against him and feared him. A few days after he was hanged, a court order arrived absolving him of all punishment—but it was too late, as the deed was done.

On the day they took Yekele to the gallows all the townsmen left the city, wandered the fields and forest in tears, stretched out their hands towards heaven, and cried out: "Our hands have not shed this blood!"[64] [In order to cleanse themselves of responsibility, they contemplated performing the ritual of the "broken-necked calf," but they feared provoking the fury of the head of the community.][65]

NOTES

Forming a connection with Alan Mintz z"l was surely one of the most pleasant and beneficial surprises of joining the community of Agnon scholars. His warm

friendship and wise counsel informed the fifteen volumes in the Toby Press S. Y. Agnon Library, and the chavrusashaft we shared in coediting *A City in Its Fullness* was a source of particular joy and learning for me. Alan's legacy remains his deep belief in the power of Hebrew literature, and Agnon's writing in particular, to inform and invigorate Jewish life and learning. This essay was first presented at a session of the Galicia Group at the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies, convened by Alan at Hebrew University in June 2016. The ideas behind what I write here came about through my work with Alan and James S. Diamond z"l on *A City in Its Fullness* and were sharpened through Jim's penetrating insights and gentle encouragement only two weeks before his own tragic death. May the memories of Alan and Jim, and the memory of their teachings, remain blessed. For their friendship and advice in preparing this essay I am grateful to Omri Ben Yehudah, Yitzhak Blau, Gila Fine, Steven Fine, Rhonna W. Rogol, Wendy Zierler, and especially Rafi Weiser z"l.

The epigraph is from S. Y. Agnon, *A Simple Story* (New Milford, CT: Toby, 2014), 196.

1 Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes: A Modern View of the Origin of the Universe* (New York: Basic, 1977).

2 The most trenchant treatments of Agnon's early writings are Yitzhak Bakon, *ʿAgnon hatsaʿir* (Beersheba: Ben Gurion University, 1989); Arnold Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare: A Study in the Fiction of S. Y. ʿAgnon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 29–53, which is an expanded English version of Band, "*Agnon lifnei heyoto ʿAgnon*," *Molad* 175–76 (1963): 54–63; Dov Sadan, *ʿAl Shai ʿAgnon*, 1st ed. (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1959), 125–54; and Shlomo Zucker, "*Sippurei Czaczkes vetiqqunei ʿAgnon*" in *Shai ʿAgnon: Meḥqarim uteʿudot*, ed. G. Shaked and R. Weiser (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1978), 11–29. In 1958, Sadan had already speculated whether it would have been possible to predict Agnon's later greatness from his earliest work. For his felicitous metaphor of distinguishing kittens from lion cubs see Sadan, *ʿAl Shai Agnon*, rev. ed. (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1978), 57.

3 Gershom Scholem, "S. Y. Agnon—The Last Hebrew Classic?" in *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis* (New York: Schocken, 1976), 106–7.

4 A. M. Habermann, "*Shmuel Yosef Czaczkes: Ḥomer Bibliografi*," *Gilyonot* 7, nos. 4–5 (1938), 471–72. While Agnon did recycle certain themes or plotlines from the adolescent works (e.g., the 1907 "*Hapanas*" is an early iteration of the themes found in "*Meḥolat ḥamavet*"), only three very short stories were reworked and salvaged in any recognizable way in the later collected works: "Or Torah" (1906), "Hapinkah

hashevurah" (1906, retitled "Yatom veʾalmanah"), and "Ger Tsedeq" (written prior to Agnon's departure from Buczacz, publication was delayed until 1910 in the first issue of the Zloczow newspaper, *Hatsaʿir*). All of these stories today appear in *Elu veʾelu*. Habermann's bibliography was later slightly expanded by Band, *Nostalgia*, 525–26 as Appendix I (Hebrew works, 1903–8) and Appendix II (Yiddish works, 1903–7).

5 S. Y. Agnon, *A Guest for the Night* (New Milford, CT: Toby, 2014), 97–98. This early poem of the Guest had in fact been published by Czaczkes in the Kraków newspaper *Hamitspeh* (July 15, 1904)! The treatment of Agnon's early poetry in Sadan, *ʿAl Shai ʿAgnon* (1959 and 1978) remains the most insightful.

6 S. Y. Agnon, "ʿIr Hametim," *Haʿet* 19 (March 14, 1907), 2–5. Y. L. Peretz published a Hebrew story by the same title in the Warsaw newspaper *Hatsefirah* 164 (August 5, 1892) and 165 (August 7, 1892), then published an expanded Yiddish version as "Di Toyte Shtot" in 1895. The Yiddish version was collected in his *Shriften* 4 (Warsaw, 1901), 138–48 and translated by Hillel Halkin as "The Dead Town" in *The I. L. Peretz Reader,* ed. Ruth R. Wisse (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 162–71. It is possible that young Czaczkes had read the story in either Hebrew or Yiddish by 1907. While our story does not appear to be in dialogue with that by Peretz, nor are there explicit thematic resonances aside from the title and a general description of a town in decay, future comparison of the two tales may provide further insight.

7 Gershom Bader (1868–1953) was a Hebrew and Yiddish author, editor, and journalist. For more on Bader and on this particular chapter in Agnon's life see the depiction in S. Y. Agnon, *Meʿatsmi el ʿatsmi* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 2000), 29 and Dan Laor, *Ḥayyei ʿAgnon* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1998), 34–39.

8 Bakon, *Agnon*, 78.

9 Band, *Nostalgia*, 38.

10 Band, "*Agnon*," 61 n. 19.

11 Some writers even err in their bibliographical citation of "ʿIr hametim": adding the subtitle "Toledot haʿir Buczacz" ("A History of the Town Buczacz") reveals their knowledge of its existence only through the bibliographies by Habermann and Band, which carried these words as a descriptor of the content, not as part of the title.

12 An annotated English translation is appended to this article; the Hebrew text, with my introduction, appeared in *Haʾarets: Tarbut vesifrut* (July 20, 2018), 4.

13 Gershon Shaked, "*Kabtsan mul shaʿar naʿul*," *Biqqoret ufarshanut* 35–36 (2002): 75. Shaked's remark concerned Agnon's first novella, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight*, published just five years after "ʿIr hametim."

14 Agnon, *Guest*, 339. Szybusz, an anagramic pseudonym for the town Buczacz, was used often by Agnon in his pre-Holocaust writings to depict the town as a place of confusion, muddle, and breakdown (all meanings of the Hebrew root *shin-bet-shin*).

15 *Kohanim*, male members of the priestly class, are under biblical injunction against the ritual impurity brought about by close exposure to human remains (Leviticus 21:1).

16 "Letorah uletefillah," in S. Y. Agnon, *ʿIr umeloʾah* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1999), 14–15.

17 "The Great Town Hall," in S. Y. Agnon, *A City in Its Fullness* (New Milford, CT: Toby, 2016), 192–99. On the executions and mass graves on Fedor Hill, see Omer Bartov, *Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town Called Buczacz* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018), 179–82, 277–80.

18 Another distinguishing feature of the style of "ʿIr hametim" is an excess of commas and an unfortunate number of typographical errors (presumably at the hands of the editor and typesetters, respectively). These were two things Agnon was insistent, almost obsessive, about avoiding, often imploring his editors and publishers to take special care in this regard. His lifelong distaste of editorial meddling can be seen in his response to the addition of a concluding sentence to "ʿIr hametim" by Bader; see n. 65.

19 See annotations on the passage in the translation of "ʿIr hametim."

20 In Hebrew in Agnon, *ʿIr umeloʾah*, 516–33; in English in Agnon, *City*, 427–52. On the Yekele stories see Alan Mintz, *Ancestral Tales: Reading the Buczacz Stories of S. Y. Agnon* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 279–90.

21 A facsimile of the opening page of "Yekele II" from the Agnon archives (AC4025) at the National Library of Israel can be seen in Agnon, *City*, 437.

22 Dan Miron, *Histaklut Baravnekher* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1996), 82 and Yosef Dan, "*Shivḥei Hamarish*," in *Hanokhri vehamandarin* (Ramat Gan: Masada, 1975), 181. Both of these works present extensive treatments of Yisrael Shlomo (as he appears in *The Bridal Canopy*).

23 Avidov Lipsker, *Maḥshavot ʿal Agnon*, 2 vols. (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2016), 1:101. For "*Meḥamat hametsiq*," see S. Y. Agnon, *Hakhnasat kallah* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1998), 99–118 and Agnon, *The Bridal Canopy* (New Milford, CT:

Toby, 2015), 155–83. "*Meḥamat hametsiq*" was originally published in the Warsaw periodical *Haʿogen* 2 (1917) and then as a freestanding novella by Jüdischer Verlag (Berlin, 1921), before it was subsequently incorporated as part of the novel *Hakhnasat kallah* (1931). On this novella, its publishing history, and the character of Shlomo Yisrael, see Lipsker, *Maḥshavot*, 1:99–126.

24 I agree with Dan, "*Shivḥei Hamarish*," 183, who acknowledges the chronological difficulties with fitting Yisrael Shlomo into these different stories: "*Meḥamat hametsiq*" places him as a well-established, adult *parnas* at the final session of the Council of Four Lands in 1764; this segment of "ʿIr hametim" and presumably the Yekele stories are set in 1825. Nevertheless, in order to resolve the anachronism, Dan suggests that Agnon is painting him as a universal type (linked through the name), the kind of reviled communal leader who could have been found in each generation. See also Lipsker, *Maḥshavot*, 107. In all cases, "Yekele II" offers a resolution by explaining: "There was in our town a *parnas* who had no equal, neither among those who preceded him in that position nor among the provincial leaders [….] His name was R. Yisrael Shlomo, named after the pride of the family, the first Yisrael Shlomo, of blessed memory, who we have often mentioned" (Agnon, *City*, 438).

25 Mintz, *Ancestral Tales*, 289.

26 For further analysis of this section of the story see Yosef Dan, "*Panim aḥerot leBuczacz*" in *Hanokhri vehamandarin* (Ramat Gan: Masada, 1975), 193–97.

27 Admittedly, version II *implies* Yekele's innocence and concludes with an ironic postscript encouraging restraint in storytelling from showing deeds in a negative light, but only version I provides the reader with the solid alibi that not only establishes the fact but also indicts the fellow townsmen, who should have spoken out in his defense but were intimidated by Yisrael Shlomo.

28 "Shivḥah shel ʿirenu" in Agnon, *ʿIr*, 511–12. Like the Yekele stories, this was not published in Agnon's lifetime. Unfortunately, a translation of the story was not included in Agnon, *City*.

29 *Kurzweil-Agnon-U.Ts.G.: Ḥilufei iggerot*, ed. L. Dabi-Guri (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1987), 56.

30 Mintz, *Ancestral Tales*, 2.

31 For a survey of the reception history of the book, see Mintz, *Ancestral Tales*, 20–28.

32 Emuna Yaron, *Peraqim meḥayyai* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2005), 221–22.

33 On "Ger Tsedeq" see n. 4.

34 In Hebrew as "Bineʿarenu uvizqenenu" in the volume *Al kappot hamanʿul* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1998), 215–74, available in English in *The Orange Peel and Other Satires* (New Milford, CT: Toby, 2015), 1–120. See also my forward to that volume, "The Metaphysics of Agnon's Political Satire," vii–xvii.

35 Aharon Appelfeld, *The Story of a Life* (New York: Schocken, 2014), 153.

36 Dov Sadan, *Ḥadashim gam yeshanim*, 3 vols. (Tel Aviv: ʿAm ʿOved, 1987), 1:43.

37 Cited in A. M. Habermann, *Massekhet soferim vesifrut* (Jerusalem: Reuven Mas, 1977), 129.

38 My thanks to Sheila Jelen for suggesting this observation to me. For more on the reception history of early Agnon, see Yehudit Halevi-Zwick, *Reshitah shel biqqoret ʿAgnon* (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 1984).

39 Alan Mintz, "Between Holocaust and Homeland" in *Translating Israel* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 109.

Annotations to "The City of the Dead"

Appeared in Hebrew as Eḥad min Haʿir (pseudonym), "ʿIr hametim" in the Lvov newspaper *Haʿet* 19 (March 14, 1907), 2–5 and republished with an introduction in *Haʾaretz*: *Tarbut vesifrut* (July 20, 2018), 4.

40 See n. 15. The halakhic question to which Agnon alludes was discussed by R. Avraham Teomim, rabbi of Buczacz from 1853 until his death in 1868. See his responsa *Ḥesed leʾavraham*, *Yoreh Deʿah* 107–10. Three years earlier, Agnon wrote in the Kraków newspaper *Hamitspeh* (June 10, 1904), 4: "Last week they excavated in our town and found three human remains buried in lime. It is said these were victims of the Black Plague."

41 The legend of "Wayfarer Hayim" reappears in Agnon's early story "Haḥuppah hasheḥorah" (1913); substantially revised and retitled "Ḥuppat dodim" in *ʿAl kappot*, 336–50. Band, *Nostalgia*, 83 suggests that this piece of local folk legend may have shared a "common ancestor" with the Yiddish *Der Yored* (1855) by Isaac Meir Dick, which in turn may have served as source material for Agnon's later *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight*.

42 On the legend of Count Potocki's slaughter of the Jews as they crossed the river, see, e.g., "In the Depths," in S. Y. Agnon, *Forevermore and Other Stories*, ed. Jeffrey Saks (New Milford, CT: Toby, 2016), 171–77, and Agnon, *Simple Story*, 143–44.

43 A variety of things that cause forgetfulness, are listed in b. Horayot 13b, including "one who reads the writing that is on the stone of a grave." R. Isaac Luria limits

this to a case where the letters of the inscription are raised (not sunken or engraved into the stone); Arizal, *Sha'ar Hamitsvah*, *Va'etḥanan* 13.

44 The lack of clarity is due to the fact that the year is represented in *gematria*, which assigns numerical value to letters, instead of Arabic numerals. The question is whether the final letter *tav* (whose value is 400) in the word "Shenat…" ("In the year…") is part of the numeral. It is either folklore or fantasy to imagine that there was a Jewish grave in Buczacz in 1331, as by all historical accounts the Jewish community dates from around 1500. In the short news report he filed in *Hamitspeh* (see n. 40) Agnon claimed, "In the cemetery I found an ancient gravestone, sunk into the ground, from the year 91 A.M. [1331 C.E.] (?)."

45 The Great Synagogue of Buczacz was constructed in 1728 and demolished in 1950; see "The Great Synagogue," and a variety of stories which follow it, from Book I of Agnon, *City*, starting on 38–39.

46 Buczacz's town hall, completed in 1751 and still standing today, was commissioned by the Polish nobleman Mikołaj Bazyli Potocki and designed by the renowned rococo architect Bernard Meretyn. The story of the murdered builder took on greater depth (and a Jewish backstory) as Agnon expanded it as "The Great Town Hall" in Agnon, *City*, 192–99; see also "The Partners" in Agnon, *City*, 201–23 (in Hebrew as "Beit hamo'etsot haggadol" and "Hashutafim").

47 Yazlovets (or Jazłowiec in Polish) is a village about 16 km south of Buczacz.

48 Barysz is a village about 14 km southwest of Buczacz.

49 The trope of grass stained in perpetuity with martyrs' blood appears in a variety of places in Agnon's writing; see, e.g., Agnon, *Simple Story*, 144.

50 Treaty of Buczacz (signed October 18, 1672). "Shameful Peace Treaty" works as a Hebrew wordplay that would have delighted Agnon: the word *buz* ("shame," "disgrace") resonates with Buczacz. Agnon errs here: The treaty ended the first phase of the Polish-Ottoman War (not a war with the Tatars). The Tatars and Cossacks had previously aligned with the Ottoman Empire against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the Polish-Cossack-Tatar War of 1666–71.

51 R. Tsvi Hirsch ben Yaakov Kra (1740–1814), rabbi of Buczacz from 1794 until his death. He appears in Agnon, *City* in various stories, including but not limited to "Feivush Gazlan," "In Search of a Rabbi," "In a Single Moment," and "The Frogs."

52 The Tsaddik of Buczacz was R. Avraham David ben Asher Wahrman (1771–1840), author of the halakhic works *Da'at qedoshim* and *Eshel Avraham*, who served as rabbi of the town from the passing of his father-in-law in 1814 until his own death. He

appears in Agnon, *City* in, among other stories, "The Hazzanim," "Feivush Gazlan," and "The Earliest Hasidim." A list of the known rabbis of Buczacz (from the seventeenth century until the Holocaust) can be found in the appendix to Agnon, *City*, 606–8.

53 Buczacz suffered an extensive fire on the Sabbath before Tishah B'Av in 1865; its long-lasting effects are described in "In a Single Moment" in Agnon, *City*, 455–97.

54 By R. Aleksander Sender Safrin (1770–1818), founder of the Komarno Hasidic dynasty.

55 In Polish, Złoczów, a town 110 km northwest of Buczacz.

56 R. Eliyahu Pinhas Hurwitz (1765–1821), rabbi and mystic, student of R. Hayim of Volozhin, lived for a few years in Buczacz where he began composing his *Sefer haberit*, a wide-ranging work of halakhah and ethics (published anonymously in 1797).

57 *Penei Yehoshuʿa* is the halakhic work by R. Yaakov Yehoshua Falk (1680–1756), later rabbi of Lvov, Berlin, and Frankfurt am Main. He lived in Buczacz between 1720 and 1730, while his father-in-law, R. Aryeh Leibush Auerbach, served as the town's rabbi.

58 In Hebrew the name of the street is given as "Meʿupash," meaning "rotten" or "moldy," perhaps a now forgotten nickname from an unpleasant odor due to proximity to the bend in the river. In the short story "ʾOr hatorah," Agnon, *ʿIr umeloʾah*, 201 adds to this description of R. Falk's residence: "His home was in the upper part of town, on the road leading out to Podheitz. Today the place is called after the *kloiz* of the Chortkov Hasidim. In the past it was called Gold Street, on account of the light of Torah that would shine forth like fine gold from that great rabbi's window. One night, a band of thieves exiting the tavern saw the light and said, 'An alchemist is spinning gold! Let's go and fill our sacks with his gold.' Before they could even break into his front door they dropped dead in a pile of corpses." That street leading northwest out of town toward Podheitz (Pidhaytsi) is today called, in Ukrainian, Pidgayetska Street. The street is also mentioned as the residence of famous rabbis in the opening chapter of "The Outcast" ("Hanidaḥ"). Elsewhere Agnon mentions that the street was named after R. David Halevi Segal, author of *Turei zahav* (*Rows of Gold*); see S. Y. Agnon, "Mitsnefet hashabbat" in *Takhrikh shel sippurim* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 2001), 96. For more on this rabbi's connection to the town, see "The Rabbi Turei Zahav and the Two Porters of Buczacz" in Agnon, *City*, 175–80.

59 R. Moshe Meshulam Igra (b. Buczacz, 1752–1801), talmudist and halakhist, served as rabbi in Buczacz until 1794 when he decamped to the Hungarian city of Pressburg (today, Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia). Agnon describes him in "ʾIgra Ramah"

in Agnon, *ʿIr*, 204–6, and he appears in the stories "Disappeared" and "In a Single Moment" in Agnon, *City*.

60 The ingredients of the temple incense mixture (known as "Pittum haqetoret") are outlined in b. Kerithot 6a, the recitation of which makes up part of the liturgy (the recitation of the offering taking the place of the actual temple service). Lack of clarity about the pronunciation of one particular ingredient leads to a case of doubt, which caused R. Avraham David Teomim (see n. 40) to suggest reading both possibilities, a sh or s consonant depending on the undifferentiated letter *shin/sin*. This is recorded in Avraham David Teomim, *Birkat Avraham* (Kolomyia, 1888), 3b. This ingredient *kosht/kost* has been identified by some as *costus speciosus* (crape ginger).

61 The story of Yekele was expanded in two versions which appeared posthumously; see Agnon, *City*, 427–52.

62 Namely, in 1825. To the best of my knowledge, this story has no corroborating historical evidence.

63 Cf. Joshua 7:19 and b. Sanhedrin 43b.

64 Deuteronomy 21:7, a line from the ritual of the *ʿeglah ʿarufah* ("broken-necked calf") which allows a town to make expiation for an unsolved murder or unexplained death, as outlined in Deuteronomy 21:1-9. The reference here is ironic: this ritual is performed in the case when the identity of the guilty party is unknown, yet the townsmen know precisely who is responsible for Yekele's death: Yisrael Shlomo!

65 The final sentence ("In order to cleanse…") was not authored by Agnon. In Agnon's personal copy of *Haʿet*, housed in the archives of the National Library of Israel, he marked the sentence in pencil with square brackets and wrote in the margin: "This was added by the editor"! The editorial amendment implies that the townsmen would have performed the actual *ʿeglah ʿarufah* ceremony, absolving them of blame in Yekele's death (instead of merely evoking the theme through the associated verse), were they not cowering before Yisrael Shlomo. I am certain Agnon resented Bader taking this liberty with his story, for artistic concerns, as well as for its lack of authenticity. Agnon would have known that the *ʿeglah ʿarufah* ritual had been abrogated already in the mishnaic era (see m. Sotah 9:9), and in all cases was never in effect outside of Erets Yisraʾel (Sifre, Shoftim 62 and Maimonides, *Hilkhot Rotseaḥ* 10:1).