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Time Gap:
Nostalgic Mode in Hebrew Modernism

In the late summer sometime in the early 1930s, a Hebrew writer arrived in his Galician hometown, where he was planning to stay only briefly, probably just as a guest for a night. Around the same time and the same year, a young Jewish woman, Nora Krieger, took a train from Berlin where she was studying archeology and traveled to her Lithuanian hometown Kovno to visit her family. While these fictional homecomings to Eastern Europe in the texts of Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888–1970), the Nobel Prize Laureate, and Lea Goldberg (1911–1970), the most influential female Hebrew poet of the twentieth century, take place approximately at the same time, an unbridgeable time gap lies between the years of the publication of the novels, 1938 and 1946. Whereas Agnon's novel *Oreakh nata lalun* (A Guest for the Night),¹ that appeared in Palestine on the eve of World War II, sought to come to terms with the impact of World War I on the Jewish life-worlds in his hometown, Lea Goldberg finished working on *Ve-hu ha-'or* (And this is the Light)² just about the time the Jewish community of her hometown ceased entirely to exist in the Holocaust. However, the decision of Agnon and Goldberg to write about fictional homecomings in the interwar period and during World War II respectively was not only induced by biographical circumstances of longing for a lost hometown, but was also a matter of aesthetical and political choice. It will be shown that for Agnon the aesthetic dimension of his literary choice is to be found in the breakup of duality (Eretz Israel versus Galicia) and the search for the space in-between, while a political dimension is constituted in the question of fusing the particular and the universal. For Goldberg, the question of rupture and continuity on both aesthetical and political levels was at the core of her representation of fictional homecoming. Thus, instead of concentrating on the autobiographical reading of both seminal Hebrew novels, this essay suggests to view the literary representation of longing in them as an epistemic bridge between the biographical and the fictional as

1 Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *A Guest for the Night*, trans. by Misha Louvish, Madison, Wis., 2004. All quotations are based on this edition of the novel.

2 Lea Goldberg, *And this is the Light*, ed. by Nili Gold and trans. by Baraba Harshav, New Milford, Conn./London 2011. All quotations come from the English version of the novel, too.

well as aesthetic “melting pot” through which these elements are transformed and amalgamated into the literary mode.

This essay argues that a crucial yet unexplored means for the understanding of the cultural history of Hebrew modernism is the language of nostalgia. It views the nostalgic discourse as a mode of representation that enables the simultaneous inhabitation of two different places in fiction, that is, the old homeland and the new home country. The comparison between *A Guest for the Night* and *And this is the Light* reveals, however, an essential difference in the function of the nostalgic mode. Exploring the shaping of the nostalgic mode in both novels, this essay builds on Svetlana Boym’s theory of nostalgia.³ Following Boym, nostalgia is conceived as a constellation of autobiographical experience and literary models that enable writers to move between individual and collective memory.

On the one hand, this essay will draw on Boym’s conceptualization of two modes of “giving meaning to longing,”⁴ restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia. Whereas restorative nostalgia strives to restore the lost home through memory, reflective nostalgia articulates the impossibility to return home and cherishes “shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space.”⁵ On the other hand, this essay suggests a modification of Boym’s theory of nostalgia, which was mainly founded on the analysis of Russian modernist writings, by putting it into another literary-historical context. In their novels, the Hebrew writers S. Y. Agnon and Lea Goldberg, contemporaries of Victor Shklovsky and Vladimir Nabokov, developed other forms of the nostalgic mode which incorporate multiple longings within the same fictional space. As will be shown here, Hebrew modern fiction proves to be an important case study for the understanding of nostalgia as a historical emotion engendered by and running counter to the experience of immigration, for both Agnon’s and Goldberg’s novels contain restorative and reflective nostalgias and seek to grasp the meaning of longing precisely through their juxtaposition and critical revision.

Nostalgia as a Hermeneutic Challenge

On 19 August 1930, Shmuel Yosef Agnon left Leipzig, where he had been supervising the first edition of his collected works by Schocken Publishing House for four months, and headed towards his homeland after not having

3 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York 2001.

4 *Ibid.*, 41.

5 *Ibid.*, 49.

visited it in seventeen years. During his journey across Polish territory lasting approximately one month, which started in Kraków and ended in Warsaw, Agnon spent a week in Buczacz, his Galician hometown. The writer's visit to the places of his childhood did not remain unnoticed – he was received with triumph by the local Jewish community, which took an immense pride in the fact that Agnon, at that time already a prominent Hebrew writer, was a native of Buczacz.⁶ It is this very same visit to his post-World War I impoverished and war-ravaged hometown, which had a deep impact on Agnon, as numerous studies of *A Guest for the Night* have shown, and has become the autobiographic core of the novel.⁷ The writer began to work on it eight years after his return from the Polish Republic; it was published in 141 parts in the daily newspaper *Ha'aretz* in 1939.⁸

Written in the first person, *A Guest for the Night* unfolds the story of the narrator's visit to his hometown Szibucz, a visit that begins on the evening of the Day of Atonement and lasts almost a year. The narrator, who was not in his homeland for many years, returns to Szibucz to find that his native town suffered irreparable losses in World War I: many of the town's inhabitants were killed, some of those who survived had been severely injured, and most of them were left destitute after the war. Facing this tragic reality, the narrator is also struck by the visible shrinking of Jewish religious life and the abandoning of the long-lasting tradition of Torah and Talmud study in the town. Presented with a key to the Old Beit Midrash that had not been used anymore by the local community up until his arrival, the narrator gradually devotes himself to the fostering of the place of his youth in which his worldview was shaped, hoping to revitalize the House of Study. At the beginning, the main reason for his journey to Szibucz, according to the narrator himself, is the destruction of his house in Jerusalem during the Arab revolts in 1929. However, as time passes, the narrator, who is giving the novel's reader a profound and detailed insight into his thoughts and the events during his stay from the first day on, discovers that this traumatic incident was only one of the reasons for his return and that, in fact, as this essay will show, the search for the meaning of this homecoming is, paradoxically, its main justification. To put it differently, it becomes one of the narrator's primary tasks to sustain the

6 On Agnon's visit to Poland, see Dan Laor, Mas'a we-shivro. Polin, Kaiz 1930 [The Journey and its Ruination. Poland, Summer 1930], in: idem (ed.), Shai Agnon. Heibetim hadashim [Shai Agnon. New Perspectives], Tel Aviv 1995, 154–174.

7 However, already back in 1968, Arnold Band sought to clarify “one crucial misunderstanding common in studies of the book” about the novel and warned that its narrative technique “should not be confused with autobiography.” See idem, *Nostalgia and Nightmare. A Study in Fiction of S. Y. Agnon*, Berkeley, Calif., 1968, 284.

8 On the history of the composition of the novel, see Stephen Katz, *The Centrifugal Novel. S. Y. Agnon's Poetics of Composition*, Madison, Wis./Teaneck, N. J./London 1999, 36–70.

nostalgic condition.⁹ Such an interpretation of *A Guest for the Night* stresses the irreducible epistemic difference between the biographical experience of the writer and the experience of the narrator in the novel. It suggests understanding the nostalgic mode as a strategy that enables Agnon to reflect upon his longing for home through the literary modus and at the same time on the meta-literary level to situate himself within modernist aesthetical space.

Due to the timing of the novel's publication in 1939, and Agnon's partially apocalyptic depiction of the decline of Jewish life in the fictional town of Szibucz, World War II became an epistemic and historical frame for some of the discussions of *A Guest for the Night*. Even though such interpretations did not claim that the novel has foreseen the tragic destiny of the Jewish communities in Eastern and Western Europe in World War II, they were still at least to a certain extent fueled by the foreshadowing of the Holocaust in Agnon's writings.¹⁰ In doing so, they have somewhat shifted the focus of the discussion from the representation of the impact of World War I on the Galician town in *A Guest for the Night* to the meaning the book had for the Jewish memory culture after World War II.

Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi has asserted that for Agnon, like his contemporaries, the experience of the catastrophes of the twentieth century "has a specific point of origin not in World War II or the Holocaust, but World War I."¹¹ This essay emphasizes the impact of the violence of war on the characters and their environment in *A Guest for the Night* not only in order to consider the historical context of the novel, following DeKoven Ezrahi, but also to argue for the essentiality of the historical dimension in Agnon's nostalgic discourse. In earlier studies on this novel, the first-person narrator's yearning for the world of his childhood, *id est*, the traditional life of Eastern European Jewry, has been read either almost exclusively within the frame of Jewish culture or through the autobiographical prism. It seems that the nature of Agnon's object of nostalgia and the specifics of his literary writing, which draws on a multi-layered dialogue with Jewish sacred texts, played a crucial role in the formation of the widespread view that in *A Guest for the Night* the lost Eastern European Jewish life-worlds and as such, a literary phenomenon utterly unique to Jewish culture, are most distinctly represented. Dan Miron even claimed that "basically any attempt to 'explain' Agnon by means of circumstances external to his work and his unique spiritual world will of neces-

9 Comp. this with Arnold Band's argument – "The nostalgia that inspired the visit dissolves, when confronted with reality, into nightmare," in: Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, 284.

10 See, for example, Baruch Hochman's argument: "Agnon's last novel of shtetl life, *A Guest for the Night*, published in 1939, reads like a prelude to the Holocaust." Idem, *The Fiction of S. Y. Agnon*, Ithaca, N. Y., 1970, 112.

11 Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, *Agnon Before and After*, in: *Prooftexts. A Journal of Jewish Literary History* 2 (January 1982), 78–91, here 81.

sity lead us to a dead end,” and even if we acquired the necessary knowledge of the historical and aesthetical context in which Agnon wrote in order to situate him in his time, it would not “account for his accomplishment nor define his autonomous singularity.”¹² However, this essay suggests, on the contrary, the need to step outside the hermeneutic circle of intra-textual interpretation of *A Guest for the Night* in order to gain a new understanding of the novel through its historical and methodic contextualization within the European literary tradition. Hence, the examination of Agnon’s nostalgic mode makes it possible to distance oneself from the biographical reading of the novel, while and at the same time revealing the uniqueness of his literary world.

Dan Laor’s biographical study of Agnon’s life makes clear that the twelve years Agnon spent in Germany starting from 1912 onward were formative for his general education and thus his literary writing. He maintains that thanks to his patron Salman Schocken who over the years sent to the young writer books to read, Agnon became gradually familiar with the German as well as the European literary canon of the eighteenth and nineteenth century.¹³ Thus, when he started working on *A Guest for the Night* in the late 1930s, he was on the same page with his European contemporaries, who were preoccupied in their writings with similar aesthetical and ethical issues posed by World War I. With so much attention paid to these issues, many writers considered a revision of the literary models developed in the nineteenth century and employed for the portrayal of war to be inevitable for their modernist texts.¹⁴ The settings in their novels were doubtless very different from that in Agnon’s novel, for they mainly addressed secular life-worlds, but in the end they all sought to process and articulate the ultimate loss of the “world of yesterday” that had been violently destroyed during the war. The longing for the past that cannot be retrieved, since the war had taken the lives of millions of people and the world they used to know, defined by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, had collapsed, was a sentiment shared by a whole generation of writers both of Jewish and non-Jewish origins. It is important to see how Agnon’s *A Guest for the Night* is constantly moving between the universal and the particular, without ever dismissing the singularity of the Jewish experience in

12 Dan Miron, Domesticating a Foreign Genre. Agnon’s Transactions with the Novel, in: Prooftexts 7 (1987), 1–27, here 18 f.

13 See Dan Laor, Agnon in Germany, 1912–1924. A Chapter of a Biography, in: Association of Jewish Studies Review 18 (1993), 75–93.

14 On the representation of World War I in European Literature, see, for example, Jay Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European Cultural History, Cambridge 1995, 178–223.

Galicia,¹⁵ which plays an essential role in his novel. According to Dan Miron, Agnon never entirely came to terms with the genre of novel – it was “alien” to him, “separated by a fundamental cultural-aesthetic gap from his own work and, likewise, from authentic Jewish literary tradition.”¹⁶ Hence, Miron explains, Agnon criticized the secular Hebrew literary culture because of its appropriation, too rapid, not reflective enough, of the European literary models. But if we come to think of a novel not so much as a static literary entity, but in Bakhtinian terms, as an uncompleted, ever-developing genre, which is able “to criticize itself,”¹⁷ an important insight into Agnon’s poetic world can be gained.

In his seminal essay on the prehistory of novelistic discourse, Mikhail Bakhtin describes the struggle between the centralizing and the decentralizing tendencies within the European languages. The novel, argues Bakhtin, places itself on the threshold between the dominant literary language and the extra-literary languages – what he terms heteroglossia.¹⁸ He attributes to the novel two opposite appropriation mechanisms of language – either through putting forward the “the centralizing tendencies of a new literary language in the process of taking shape” or by the renovation of “an antiqued literary language”¹⁹ that had remained outside the strata of the dominant literary language. Bakhtin, Agnon’s contemporary, had not been aware of the possibility that both tendencies could coexist within the same novel, as in the case of Agnon’s Hebrew poetic writing. For Agnon’s work should be understood within this genre, as an aesthetic dialogue with the European literary tradition and as its radical transformation through the incorporation of the Jewish textual tradition as one of the essential “novelistic” layers.²⁰ Furthermore, in the light of Bakhtin’s understanding of the modern novel as discourse which “senses itself on the border of time” and acquires a particular sensitivity to time’s shifts in language, to its past and future, *A Guest for the Night* should be conceived as a poetological seismograph which measures the motions of language and its different layers and registers the inner literary negotiations

15 See Frank M. Schuster, *Zwischen allen Fronten. Osteuropäische Juden während des Ersten Weltkrieges (1914–1919)*, Köln 2004, 111–128.

16 Miron, *Domesticating a Foreign Genre*, 19.

17 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Epic and the Novel. Towards a Methodology for the Study in the Novel*, in: Michael Holquist (ed.), *The Dialogic Imagination*, Austin, Tex., 1981, 3–40, here 6.

18 Compare with idem, *From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse*, *ibid.*, 41–83, here 67.

19 Idem, *The Epic and the Novel*, 67.

20 Comp. this with Anne Golomb Hoffman’s argument: “As a modern Hebrew writer, Agnon employs the sacred language in a fallen state. He must make us aware of its fallenness and of the pre-existing and timeless perfection of the language.” Idem, *Housing the Past in Agnon’s “A Guest for the Night,”* in: *Prooftexts 2* (1982), 265–282, here 270.

about the transformation of the sacred in the heteroglossic basis of the literary text.

This process of constant negotiation between the sacred and the profane within the text is already indicated by Agnon's choice of the title for the novel. The citation from the Book of Jeremiah, in which the prophet reproachfully compares God to "a wayfarer who turns aside to lodge"²¹ hoping to evoke his mercy for the Jews of Jehuda, gains in Agnon's text an additional meaning, also secular – this time it is not God, but the narrator of the novel who becomes a "guest for the night." By alluding to these sacred verses in the profane wording of the title, Agnon not only signalizes the literary transformation within the text, but also the interplay between the vectors of nostalgia in his literary universe. Because more than any other modern Hebrew novel, *A Guest for the Night* represents the coexistence of two contesting nostalgias, the longing for Zion and the nostalgia for the Eastern European hometown, within the same textual space.

It is first the sound of the name of the town, and then its peculiar odor that immediately confronts the narrator with the weight of longing upon his arrival in Szibucz on the eve of the Day of Atonement. "It was many years since I had heard the name of Szibucz coming from the lips of a man of my town. Only he who is born there and bred there and lives there knows how to pronounce every single letter of that name," (1) explains the narrator only to discover few minutes later that nothing in his hometown remained the same – "every place was changed – even the spaces between the houses." (2) The environment he finds himself in now has nothing to do anymore with his childhood memories or with what he imagined in his dreams. There are neither relatives nor friends left to welcome him – "Whoever had not died in the way of nature had died in the war; and whoever had been left alive by the war had gone away to some other country." (260) What is left of the town besides its name is its odor – "the odor of millet boiled in honey."

Instead of following one of the common paths of nostalgic writings at this point, namely the account of childhood memories, Agnon's narrator mentions the acoustic and olfactory dimensions of nostalgia only to leave them at the margins of his story. Seldom does he devote himself to the rather Proustian search for the lost time of his childhood, precisely because of his acknowledgment of the fallibility of memory. As the narrator explains right at the beginning of his story, his memories are mostly perceived as false or invented stories by the inhabitants of Szibucz, so that he chooses instead to concentrate on the here and now of the nostalgic feeling: "At first I tried to

21 In the original version, the Hebrew quotation from the Book of Jeremiah and the title of the novel are identical, "Oreakh nata lalun" [A Guest for the Night].

tell them the truth, but when I found that the true truth deceived them, I left them with the imaginary truth.” (23) This is why the narrator’s characterization of his storytelling should also be understood as an intriguing description of the nostalgic recollection of the past, namely the imaginary truth.

Agnon’s novel suggests not to rely on memory but rather to move within the nostalgic space containing various fragments of the past. Nostalgia serves Agnon as fictional memory through which he addresses the past but also the present of longing. In one of the key passages of the novel, the narrator reflects on the complexity of his nostalgia: “I am given to two places: I live abroad and I dream in the Land of Israel. The Land of Israel that shows itself to me in dreams is not the Land as it is today, but as it was years ago, when I lived in Neveh Zedek.” (92) The temporal and spatial asymmetry between the two *lieux* manifests itself in these sentences twice – as living in Szibucz and dreaming in Eretz Israel while at the same time dwelling in two places and in two temporal spaces. But the narrator does not stop here – a few sentences later he mentions Jerusalem, “which the Almighty sifted out from His Land beautiful and pure and perfect,” only to say almost in the same breath that he thinks about Jerusalem, not because of its sacred value but because his home is there, “and a man is likely to think about his home.” (93) If until this point the narrator seemed to operate within the dichotomy of sacredness and profanity applying it to different vectors of his nostalgias – Galicia versus Land of Israel, Neveh Zedek versus Holy City, Jerusalem as city of God versus the everyday Jerusalem – he now adds another dimension to his nostalgic discourse, which undermines the binary structure implied earlier in the text. He recalls one of his dreams in which he was walking in the streets of Jerusalem and entered a bookstore. Invited by an old shop owner to accompany him to his house in order to go through some books, the narrator is brought to a place “that was like a burial vault.” (93) But he cannot see the house anywhere for it is invisible. In this invisible house, after experiencing a peculiar condition of ceasing to be and nevertheless feeling pleasure, the narrator is given a book by the old man with the seal of the Old Beit Midrash in Szibucz. Suddenly the narrator is struck by a perplexing thought in his dream – if his hometown has always been beautiful in his eyes, for otherwise he would not have gone back, why had he left it in the first place and “gone up to the Land of Israel?” (94)

By creating the spatial overlapping of Jerusalem and Szibucz within the space of a dream, Agnon illustrates the twofold character of his nostalgic writing. A strict division between the sacred and the profane is being challenged at this point through the changing vector of nostalgia. One of the paradigmatic manifestations of this interchangeable epistemic motion can be found in Agnon’s narrator notion of exile (*galut*). Beside the common usage of *galut* for the indication of Jewish diasporic life outside the Land of Israel,

the narrator also uses this charged word to describe his parting from his hometown – “since the day he was exiled from his father’s house.” (264) The impossibility to return to his father’s house and to the world embodied in it is experienced by the narrator as an irreparable loss, which cannot be compensated by his life in Jerusalem.

Thus, the nostalgic mode enables the writer to weave together various forms of longing, stressing each time a different layer of the nostalgic web; therefore Agnon employs the interconnectedness between the two poles of nostalgia as the basic structure in his text.

The fragments of the nostalgic discourse can be found everywhere in the novel. Agnon also introduces the whole spectrum of everyday memories of smells and sounds of the lost worlds, which in the logic of the novel always evoke a relation between the sacred and the profane. So, for example, while enjoying fresh strawberries with cream served by his new friend Yeruham, the narrator is asked by his host “When you were in the Land of Israel didn’t you long for strawberries and cream?” “Long?,” asks the guest. “What does not the man long for?” To which Yeruham replies: “I talk about strawberries and he answers with metaphysics.” (301) The ironic comment of the narrator’s interlocutor points to the existence of two poles of longing in Agnon’s literary “encyclopedia” of nostalgia, stressing their interconnectedness as well as the constant movement between the particular and the universal dimensions of the same feeling.

This aspect of multiple layers of the nostalgic discourse is articulated by the narrator and performed simultaneously in one of the central parts of the text. Passing by the post office, the narrator suddenly remembers the days of his youth. While being nostalgic for the prewar times in his hometown, when “a Jew could live like a human being” (182), he traces the genesis of his longing for the Land of Israel and calls it “gracious melancholy, like a grace of a man who has longings for something he loves.” (182) The idea to regard the nostalgia for Zion as a part of diasporic existence but not as its negation, reappears closer to the end of the novel, this time formulated by an old friend of the narrator who immigrated to America – “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.” (314)

Agnon constitutes the nostalgic discourse in *A Guest for the Night* as a hermeneutic challenge that cannot and should not be resolved. Hence, the nostalgic mode serves Agnon as a literary device through which his text can manifest the condition of being “on the border of time”; for as a spatio-temporal phenomenon, the nostalgic discourse is itself a representation of time shifts condensed in language. Being “given to two places” means for Agnon’s narrator to be constantly engaged in the process of interpreting his own nostalgic condition for “no one is in two places at the same time.” (299)

Being “a guest for the night,” as the narrator himself suggests, means to be “here today and elsewhere tomorrow.” (31)

The narrator encounters this hermeneutical challenge both on the existential level and as a problem of representation on the meta-poetical level, for as the reader discovers closer to the end of the novel, the narrator is also a writer, so that in his text “in part the illusion of spontaneity is maintained,” as Anne Golomb Hoffman notes, “by diminishing the role of the retrospective narrator.”²² On the meta-poetical level, the impossibility of “being in two places” employs the nostalgic mode to depict the Galician hometown destroyed by war on one hand, and to show the loss of sacred wholeness, as Golomb Hoffmann explains, for Torah “as the locus for that vision of wholeness”²³ on the other.

After “confessing” his occupation as a writer, the narrator articulates the duality of his literary occupation of *sofer* indirectly when he states: “Originally, the word denoted the scribe, who wrote the words of Torah. But since everyone who engages in the craft of writing is called a writer, I am not afraid of arrogance in calling myself a writer.” (448) Suggesting the secondary nature of modern writing by defining the original meaning of the word *sefer*, Agnon stresses the poetic challenge embodied in the quest for modern forms of representation, in this case a representation of the consequences of the war, which at the same time can contain his striving to place the text within the Jewish tradition of writing.²⁴

In the light of Agnon’s epistemic and literary quest, it does not seem to be a mere coincidence that most of the central stories related to traumatic experiences of World War I are told by female characters in the novel. These include the recollections of the wife of the hotel’s innkeeper who had to flee Szibucz with three little children during the war, the experience of the narrator’s friend’s wife Mrs. Bach who escaped to Vienna and had to provide for five people while her husband was away at war, as well as the terrifying story of the old Freide, “the Kaiserin,” who lost six of four sons and two daughters. As to why there is such a strong focus on women and their experience the narrator explains: “Most of the people in the town who survived the war never mention it – though their wives recall those days on every possible occasion.” (130) However, Agnon and his narrator were doubtlessly aware of the dozens, if not hundreds, of novels written by male European writers about the war. His choice to picture the war through the eyes of female protagonists can be interpreted as a strategy which enabled Agnon to channel his narration, in a

22 Golomb Hoffman, *Housing the Past in Agnon’s “A Guest for the Night,”* 269.

23 *Ibid.*, 266.

24 Comp. this with Dan Miron’s argument: “Agnon wanted to write within the tradition and not in conflict with it nor through the nostalgic appropriation of it (such as evident in much modern Hebrew literature before him).” Miron, *Domesticating a Foreign Genre*, 23 f.

way that he could attribute the profane, or in this case, the European literary discourse, to female voices in the novel, while at the same time leaving the literary space of the sacred to the narrator. Furthermore, this attribution of the sacred to the narrator and of the profane to women is strengthened in the novel through the implicit usage of different languages, Yiddish and Hebrew. Whereas the women in the novel recall the horrors of war in their mother tongue, the everyday Jewish language, the narrator gives an account of their stories in Hebrew. At the same time, precisely through this act of translation, the European literary discourse enters the space of the sacred language.

In *A Guest for a Night*, there is only one place in which the opposite vectors of nostalgia, the longing for the prewar life in the Habsburg Empire and the yearning for the lost wholeness of the Torah world can paradoxically cohabit: in the Old Beit Midrash. As a remnant of the destroyed world, the House of Study in which the narrator spent his childhood and youth studying Talmud and Midrash, becomes the main locus for containing an articulation of nostalgia as a hermeneutic problem. Because despite his longing for the revival of the Old Beit Midrash, a task the narrator tries to undertake for almost a whole year until he finally admits his failure, he acknowledges just as well the limited significance of his efforts due to his return to Jerusalem. Guided by a restorative nostalgia, Agnon's narrator is longing to restore the spiritual life in the House of Study and, thus, to prevent historical time from entering the space of Jewish tradition. At the same time, being a reflective nostalgic urges him constantly to articulate the impossibility of a homecoming and to contend with the results of the war.

The narrator recounts with great astonishment how on the Day of Atonement shortly before the closing service, the *Ne'ila*, he was given the key to the Old Beit Midrash by some members of the community. Already at this point, the key is perceived by the narrator as a symbolic metonymy for Jewish knowledge. Thus, both the real and the symbolical act of granting the protagonist the right to open the House of Study with the key coincide with the liturgical act of the concluding service which historically signifies the closing of the Temple gates on Yom Kippur and allegorically marks the sealing of the Gates of Heaven.

Given a unique opportunity to guard the House of Study, the narrator nonetheless soon loses the key and has to replace it. He takes care of the Beit Midrash for almost a year, both by studying there and being persistent in his endeavor to recover the role of the old House of Study as the most central and vivid locus of Jewish life. But his success during the wintertime, when people gathered there to find a shelter from the freezing weather, proves to be a temporary one and he starts to admit that his efforts were in vain. However, nothing is keeping him in Szibucz anymore once he realizes that his return to Jerusalem is still being stipulated in Kafkaesque manner by the fate of the

key. Postponing his return again and again, the narrator finally leaves the key in the hands of a newly born boy named after him, Shmuel. But the old key, as the reader learns from the final pages of the novel, was never really lost, and the narrator discovers it upon his return to Jerusalem. Agnon opens the story with the key to the Old Beit Midrash and locks it with the same key at the end of the novel. Thus, the simultaneous presence of the keys in two different places undermines (plot-wise) the possibility of untying the knot between the two vectors of nostalgia.

By representing the House of Study as a space where different nostalgias can coincide, Agnon provides the reader with a hermeneutic key to the novel, a meta-literary act which emerges as an exact replica of the narrator who has been given the key to the Old Beit Midrash right after his arrival in Szibucz. That is why the very act of interpretation of the key's function within the structure of the novel as its main plot device on the meta-poetic level clearly reveals the main function of nostalgic mode in *A Guest for the Night*. In Agnon's novel, the House of Study is preserved in its original function, as a focal point of hermeneutic activity, at least for the narrator, who studies Talmud during his stay in Szibucz. The act of interpretation is always an "act of translation," as Wolfgang Iser puts it,²⁵ as a result of which the liminal space "between the subject matter to be interpreted and its translation into a different register"²⁶ is necessarily created. Summarizing the studies on Midrash, Iser concludes that the House of Midrash might be understood as a first major attempt to grasp the liminal space.²⁷ It seems that precisely for the same reason, the Old Beit Midrash in *A Guest for the Night* is represented as the locus of nostalgia, for it stands metonymically for the hermeneutic quest of the novel. Through the engagement of the narrator in continuous reflection of his own twofold, or even multi-layered, nostalgic condition, Agnon constitutes the nostalgic discourse in the novel as a hermeneutic problem which demands interpretation. Thus, on a meta-literary level, the nostalgic discourse points to the existence of a liminal space created in the process of literary negotiation between the representation of the Galician hometown and Jerusalem, between modern writing and Jewish textual tradition, and at the same time seeks to fill in the gap between them.

25 Wolfgang Iser, *The Range of Interpretation*, New York 2000, 5.

26 *Ibid.*, 19.

27 *Ibid.*, 21.

Nostalgia as an Epistemic Challenge

Lea Goldberg, unlike S. Y. Agnon and his main protagonist in *A Guest for the Night*, never returned to her Eastern European hometown, Kovno, after her immigration to Palestine. However, she had already experienced homecoming twice in her life before – the first time as a child, in 1919, when she returned with her parents from Russia, where the tsarist government had forced them to stay during World War I, and the second time in the 1930s, as a young woman visiting her hometown during her studies in Germany.²⁸ An attempt to represent and to reflect on these two very different but formative anti-nostalgic experiences within fictional space lies at the core of Lea Goldberg's novel *Ve-hu ha-'or* (And this is the Light), which appeared in 1946 and was the first Hebrew post-World War II novel written by a woman.

It is striking that Lea Goldberg's novel, on which she worked during the war, has not until today been read against the backdrop of Agnon's novel. However, the juxtaposition of these two literary texts enables an important insight into the essential difference in the functioning of the nostalgic mode in Agnon's and Goldberg's writings.

And this is the Light depicts a visit of a few months by the main character Nora Krieger, a twenty-one-year-old student of archeology, to her Lithuanian hometown in which she arrives from Berlin. During the summer months of the semester break, Nora undergoes a series of psychological and intellectual transformations. She is forced to come to terms with crucial changes in her family: the divorce of her parents and the new living arrangement for her mentally ill father. She falls in love with an old friend of her father, Albert Arin, which remains unrequited, only to discover later that Albert suffers from the same psychological disease as her father. Finally, at the end of her visit, Nora realizes that Berlin, a city which symbolizes for her personal freedom, and to which she is about to return, has ceased to be a place where she could belong due to the political changes in Germany.

This analysis suggests focusing on a central aspect of *And this is the Light* that has not yet been addressed by research, namely, on the creation of the anti-nostalgic discourse in this novel and its transformation into a nostalgic mode. Such discursive transformation made it possible for Goldberg to reflect upon questions of homecoming and homesickness, as well as to explore the complex relation between longing and belonging.²⁹ Despite the

28 On the "German" period in Lea Goldberg's intellectual and literary biography, see Yfaat Weiss, *Lea Goldberg. Lehrjahre in Deutschland 1930–1933*, trans. from the Hebrew by Liliane Meilinger, Göttingen 2010.

29 Since its publication, the novel has been examined from several theoretical angles: the historical-biographical as a kind of Goldberg's personal *Bildungsroman*, the psychoanalyti-

fact that unlike Agnon's novel, *And this is the Light* was fully embedded in European modernist tradition, the genre of the novel, though for different aesthetical and historical reasons than in Agnon's case, became if not alien to Goldberg, nonetheless in need of revision after World War II. It seems that in fact, she was one of the first Hebrew writers to point out, at least indirectly, the epistemic limits of the modernist modes of representation after the Holocaust. In *And this is the Light*, the question of genre is entangled in the question of Jewish belonging in such way that one could speak about "generic belonging."

Since the novel's publication, the question as to which genre *And this is the light* belongs to has been raised by literary critics. In her days, Goldberg was "accused" by some of her professional readers to have written a "novel in disguise" instead of an autobiography, which according to the dominant literary standards of Hebrew literature in the Yishuv, was conceived as an inferior genre insufficient to bear a universal aesthetic value.³⁰ In the last decade, Goldberg's novel has been viewed by most researchers as an autobiographical novel, for example, in the essays by Nili Gold, Tamar Hess, and Yfaat Weiss,³¹ while Menahem Peri³² and Allison Schachter read it as a genuine novel. Since in both cases the question of genre was not discussed explicitly, the difference between reading *And this is the Light* as an autobiography or as autobiographical novel is yet to be addressed.

The reflection on the role of autobiographical elements in *And this is the Light* also appears to be crucial because of the historical context in which the novel was written. On the one hand, the novel embodies Goldberg's poetic

cal, as Goldberg's attempt to face her own anxiety of inheriting the mental illness from her father; from the feminist angle, as Goldberg's self-positioning as female modernist writer, and finally as Goldberg's farewell to her father, who remained in Kovno and was murdered by German soldiers. See Nili Scharf Gold, Rereading *It is the Light*, Lea Goldberg's only Novel, in: *Prooftexts* 17 (1997), 245–265; Ariel Hirschfeld, Al-mishmar ha-naiwijut. Al-tafkido ha-tarbuti shel shirat Lea Goldberg [On Guard of Naïvety. On the Cultural Role of Lea Goldberg's Poetry], in: Ruth Kartoon-Blum/Anat Weisman (eds.), *Pgishot im meshoreret. Masot we-mehkarim al-yezirata shel Lea Goldberg* [Meetings with the Poet. Essays and Research on Lea Goldberg's Works], Jerusalem/Tel Aviv 2000, 135–151; Tamar S. Hess, Onsham shel ba'aley-dimyon. Al Ve-hu ha-'or, hitkablut, tsiyonut, u-migdar [The Punishment of Imaginative People. On *And this is the Light*, Reception, Zionsim and Gender], in: Yigal Schwartz/Yehudit Bar-el/Tamar S. Hess (eds.), *Sifrut ve-chevra ba-tarbut ha-ivrit ha-chadasha. Ma'amarim mugashim le-Gershon Shaked* [Literature and Society in Hebrew Modern Culture. Articles Delivered for Gershon Shaked], Tel Aviv 2000, 274–286; Allison Schachter, *Diasporic Modernisms. Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford 2011, 121–152; Weiss, Lea Goldberg, 147.

30 For the reception history of the novel, see Hess, *Onsham shel ba'aley-dimyon*, 274 f.

31 Weiss, Lea Goldberg, 28 f.

32 See the afterword to the novel Menahem Peri, *He'arot al Ve-hu ha-'or* [Remarks on "And this is the Light"], in Lea Goldberg, *Ve-hu ha-'or*, Tel Aviv 2005, 221–232.

approach to her most traumatic post-World War I experience: the arrest of her father at the end of the war by Lithuanian soldiers who suspected him of being a Bolshevik spy and staged his execution day after day. In the novel, this trauma, which eventually led to Abraham Goldberg's mental disease, is ascribed to the main character's father. However, eight years beforehand, in 1938, Lea Goldberg revealed the same childhood memories publicly in her programmatic essay *Yaldut* (Childhood).³³

It seems that the transformation of these memories into fiction through the usage of a third-person narrator enabled her to stress the paradigmatic nature of this recollection standing for the childhood experiences of the whole generation to which Goldberg belonged, or as Nora Krieger puts it in the novel: "I always remember so many things. My generation here – my childhood started with the war." (57) Moreover, it comprises the possibility as such to represent this event, no matter how horrifying it was. In that context, it has to be stressed that had Goldberg's decision to write about the Jewish life of her hometown that had vanished after the Holocaust in present tense, placing it back in the 1930s when it still existed, underlines the fictive dimension of the novel and marks the unbridgeable caesura between the experiences of World War I and the Holocaust.

Goldberg challenges the dichotomy between fictional versus biographical and points out the necessity to transform the genre of the autobiographical novel. Written after the Holocaust, this new literary form would not only have to acknowledge the fallibility of memory, but it would have to cope with the epistemic rupture caused by the Holocaust.³⁴ Despite the fact that it took another thirty years until such a literary genre, the *autofiction*, was suggested by the French Jewish writer Serge Doubrovsky, Goldberg's novel anticipated one of its main features, namely, the ambiguous ontological status of the text.³⁵ Writers of autofiction as well as researchers of the subject emphasize the relation between this modus of writing and the experience of Holocaust, thus seeing in Jewish writers as Primo Levi, Jerzy Kosiński, Romain Gary and others the forerunners of the new literary genre. "Seen historically," explains Pierre Lepape, "the autofiction stands in conjunction with experience of and the writing about Shoah. It provides an answer to the impossibil-

33 On the important difference between these two versions and on the mechanism of the "aesthetic compensation" that Goldberg develops in the second recollection of the event, see Hirschfeld, *Al mishmar ha-naiwijut*, 142 f.

34 On the epistemic rupture, see Dan Diner, *Rupture in Civilization. On the Genesis and Meaning of a Concept in Understanding*, in: Moshe Zimmerman (ed.), *On Germans and Jews under the Nazi Regime. Essays by three Generations of Historians*, Jerusalem 2006, 33–49.

35 On the definition of autofiction, see, for example, Elizabeth Houston Jones, *Spaces of Belonging. Home, Culture, and Identity in the 20th Century French Autobiography*, Amsterdam/New York 2007, 90–99.

ity of tying an 'I' to the experience and the writing of the absolute turpitude."³⁶ Even though Goldberg surely does not relate to the Holocaust explicitly in the novel, she implicitly produces in the novel her own wartime experience, creating an early version of autofiction. On a meta-literary level, this manifests itself as a caesura in time, between the narrated time and the time in which the novel was written.

This particular mode of writing was not a means by which Goldberg could invent a new life, but rather a way to imagine and to reflect on the different routes that the lives of Eastern European Jews could take. By using elements of autobiography and fiction, Goldberg could juxtapose various trajectories of longing that coexist in the same narrative space through which her own nostalgia is expressed in the novel. In a way, the novel offers the reader a sort of laboratory of nostalgia, in which different vectors of *nostos* (returning home) are represented and studied simultaneously: the longing of Albert Arin, the old friend of Nora's father, who immigrated to America for twenty-five years and explains the reason for his return to Kovno as "something like missing the old homeland and old friends" (35), Nora's yearning for an opportunity to leave the provincial town in order to study in Berlin as well as her dreaming about Eretz Israel. But what becomes clear in the process of reading Goldberg's novel is that for all characters coming back home is only temporary, and that each of them is after all on a constant search to belong. Nora's father could not stay at his house due to his mental disease and was relocated to a village to stay with a Christian family who would take care of him, Arin severed all connections with America, but could not find rest in Europe either, and Nora is forced to admit that the presence of all these brown uniforms in Berlin makes it impossible for her to accept the city as her new home. Furthermore, by placing in the center of the novel Nora's recount of the traumatic event experienced by her family while returning home from Russia right after the war, Goldberg undermines the possibility of the "successful" homecoming, one which is not connected to loss and painful memories.

The themes of dislocation and failed homecoming serve Goldberg to address the limits of nostalgic discourse, its incapability to assist in returning home. In this context, Nora's future-oriented romantic longing for Eretz Israel appears to mark one of the vectors of nostalgia without necessarily achieving a status superior to other forms of nostalgia in the novel. It seems that each of the protagonists in the novel grows disillusioned about the nature of longing for homecoming of any kind, but in the end it is Nora who articu-

36 Pierre Lepape, *Au-delà de l'autofiction*, in: *Le Monde*, 6 November 1998, 21; cit. in Birgit Schlachter, *Schreibweisen der Anwesenheit. Jüdisch-französische Literatur nach der Shoah*, Köln 2006, 57.

lates one of the main potential shortcomings of nostalgia – the idealization of the past that might be attached to it. Moreover, unlike the main character of Agnon’s novel, Nora is neither nostalgic for her past nor for her hometown. It is only because she does not have to live in Kovno anymore, she explains to Arin in one of their conversations, that she can find some beauty in it – “It’s good that I’m only here on vacation. I hate these little towns, this life. If you knew how much I want to escape from here! Now I love this forest and everything in it and around it, because I know it’s only a temporary stop. In two and a half months, I’ll get up and go.” (68) Unexpectedly, Nora’s reasoning as to her changed perception of this familiar surrounding provides an interesting insight into one of the possible explanations for the narrator’s prolonged stay in his hometown in Agnon’s story, and at the same time stresses the crucial difference between *As a Guest for the Night* and *And this is the Light*. One could argue that it is precisely the temporary character of the narrator’s homecoming that makes him want to prolong his visit in order to be able to dwell in the nostalgic feeling. In other words, there is an interrelation in Agnon’s novel between the nostalgic experiences of the town, as it is lived through the memory of the past, and the frame of time that is limited. On the other side, in Goldberg’s world of fiction, Nora who is longing to leave her hometown undergoes a process of revision of the nostalgic feeling towards Berlin, so that in the end she becomes an accomplished anti-nostalgic. In one of the key passages of the novel the narrator addresses this transformation directly, that is the radical change in Nora’s memory:

“Until that moment, she was sliding over her memories, memories of the year of her salvation, as a passenger in a night train passing lights and stars and crescent moons, and here, all at once and urgently, the train stops at a station lighted with a bright yellow light. And there are no more charms of movement to cover the reality. And there are only details of things, and they’re all filthy. That is how the train of Nora’s memories now stopped.” (168)

The sudden stop of Nora’s memory train results in her recollection of one specific encounter with two German friends in her furnished room in Berlin, Rüdiger and Antonia, telling Nora about their visit to his parents and how already from far they saw the swastika flag waving on the roof of the house. Rüdiger, who is studying music, tries to reassure Nora that, unlike his sister who intends to vote for the Nazis (so in the text), he would “pick up and escape across the Polish border [...] if they win.” (169) Nora is brought back to the present with a disturbing thought that would not allow her anymore to yearn for Berlin – “If they win, thought Nora now. If they win.” (169) She is suddenly sure that her friend is deceiving himself, that he will not run away but “be one of them.” (170) What Nora could not possibly know in 1931 was already entirely obvious to Goldberg by the end of the war.

Not only is this passage essential for the novel as a whole, it also becomes a key point in Goldberg's strategy of backshadowing on the meta-literary level. For this part of the novel marks the fundamental gap in time as well as in historical knowledge between Nora Krieger and Lea Goldberg. If at the beginning of her work on the novel, in 1940, Goldberg probably thought that she could relate to the current war through the representation of the experience of World War I, she later on realized that the historical time in which she was writing and the time narrated in the novel were unbridgeable. The ambiguous "generic belonging" of *And this is the Light* enabled Goldberg to apply the reflective nostalgic mode in a certain way – to relate to the historical present in which the novel had been written by pointing to the existence of a caesura in time. This epistemic process of transformation of literary space through intrusion of historical time is already evoked by the title of the novel. The line from Moshe Ibn Ezra's poem *And He is the Light*, in which the medieval Spanish Hebrew poet refers to God as a source of light in human's life, receives its new meaning during the same nightmare-like night in which Nora is suddenly confronted with her own memories about Berlin. In fact, Nora's reading of Ibn Ezra's poem and her attempt to grasp the meaning of the lines "It is the light that goes on glowing through my youth / And glows yet brighter as I grow old. It must be of the substance of God's light, / For otherwise it would be fading / As my years and strength decline." (167) triggers these memories. While wondering about the meaning of these lines "detached and cut off from the logical connection of the religious poem" (ibid.), Nora applies these lines to her own life. For her the poem gains an existential meaning – the light as the life itself that one has to live. Simultaneously, on the meta-poetic level, Goldberg's secular appropriation of the religious poem alludes to the historical and aesthetical context of her literary project. That is to say, for Goldberg the meaning of "the light" is the very act of writing a modernist Hebrew novel which reflects its historical condition and preserves some remnants of Jewish literary tradition.

Being narrated from Nora Krieger's point of view, *And this is the Light* constructs Kovno as anti-nostalgic chronotope of the Eastern European Jewish life-world. In order to follow the crucial transformation in the novel of the anti-nostalgic discourse into a nostalgic one, this essay draws on Nicholas Dames' theoretical insight about the spatio-temporal relation in the nostalgic discourse. Dames suggests grasping narratives of nostalgia through the Bakhtinian prism of thinking and to study the spaces in which certain languages of time appear.³⁷ According to Dames, the nostalgic chronotope thus should be understood as a set of sites and temporal processes "that reflect, and manage

37 Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves. Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810–1870*, Oxford/New York 2001, 11.

dislocation – experiences of dissonance, disconnection, separation from past space.”³⁸ Nora’s confrontation with the world that she had been dreaming to escape from since her childhood is reflected in her encounter with her dying aunt Zlata, to whom she pays a visit during her stay. Nora is haunted by the “bad memories of a suffocating girlhood, of a loathsome life she had wanted to escape but which pursued her.” (106) Feeling ashamed of the uneasy feelings towards her aunt, Nora tries to evoke in her mind a distant memory of beautiful times with her uncle and his wife, “from depths of childhood, some Sabbath morning, and the house of that aunt when she still lived across the river – the broad, clear river with green banks, a slope of bare stones.” (106) But even while recalling this moment from the past, her memory focuses on the sight of the river rather than on the inhabitants of the house. Although Nora tries to remind herself that her aunt was good to her, she does not manage to overcome the alienating feeling which prevents her from being if not warm but at least compassionate towards the sick person. The tiny apartment full of dusty furniture and the smell of medicine, where Nora finds aunt Zlata, lying in bed, embodies for her a micro-cosmos of Jewish petite-bourgeois life.

Borrowing one of Osip Mandelstam’s central poetological concepts, Goldberg’s anti-nostalgic site can be understood as a Hebrew version of “Judaic Chaos.” In his autobiographical work *The Noise of Time* (1925), Mandelstam recounts one of his visits to Riga, to his religious grandparents who hardly spoke any Russian. It is in the context of this overwhelming encounter with a Jewish religious world, foreign to a child who grew up in St. Petersburg in a secular Russian-Jewish family belonging to the first generation of Russian-Jewish intelligentsia, and who is not able to communicate with his grandparents in his mother tongue, that Mandelstam juxtaposes the European culture to which he longs to belong and the Jewish traditional world – “All the elegant mirage of Petersburg, was merely a dream, a brilliant covering thrown over the abyss, while round about there sprawled the chaos of Judaism – not a motherland, not a house, not a hearth, but precisely a chaos, the unknown womb world whence I had issues, which I feared, and about which I made vague conjectures and fled, always fled.”³⁹ It seems that Nora’s urgent wish to leave the room of her aunt, to avoid the feel of suffocation, which the narrator describes as “the desperate, heavy *longing* of one who can’t escape” (109, italics added), is Goldberg’s novelistic transformation of Mandelstam’s autobiographic statement. Despite the fact that Lea Goldberg started learning Hebrew and Yiddish from the age of nine and was much more familiar with

38 Ibid., 12 (italics in the original).

39 Osip Mandelstam, *The Noise of Time*, in: idem, *The Prose of Osip Mandelstam*, trans. by Clarence Brown, Evanston, Ill., 2002, 67–119, here 76 f.

the world of Jewish tradition, it seems that Nora's flight from aunt Zlata's flat is much closer to Mandelstam's autobiographic statement than to similar attempts of Jewish male protagonists to escape from the *shtetl* life in Hebrew novels written by authors who received a traditional Jewish education in their childhood.⁴⁰ Goldberg in her modernist usage of Hebrew language in literary writings shared with Mandelstam his nostalgia for world culture. However, if in 1925 Mandelstam could transform his flight from the Jewish traditional world into one from the essential structures of his poetological universe, thus preserving the "Judaic chaos" within the autobiographical text which was fueled by nostalgia for the world culture, to Goldberg this creative solution was only partially available twenty years later. For by the end of war, the Eastern European Jewish town Nora Krieger wanted to flee from had literally ceased to exist, hence the motif of impossible homecomings in the novel had an additional explanation on the historical-biographical level – there was simply no home left to return to. It is within this unbridgeable epistemic and temporal chasm that the nostalgic chronotope of the novel is constituted.

"A modern nostalgic can be homesick and sick of home,"⁴¹ argues Boym, pointing to the ambivalent character of the reflective nostalgic mode. Lea Goldberg, who developed the reflective nostalgic discourse at the beginning of the war, had to face a moral dilemma in her writings – is it moral to be sick of home also when it had vanished, when most of the Jewish inhabitants of this provincial town were murdered? And how then can one continue to be a modern nostalgic after the Holocaust? Goldberg reflects on this crucial ethical and poetical issue on the meta-biographical level evoked once again by the hidden backshadowing to the Holocaust that the reader is supposed to detect. In the same nightmarish night in which Nora is being confronted with her suppressed memories about the political situation in Germany, she is suddenly struck by "the fear of Nazis" (171) and the sense of guilt towards her hometown:

"Where did I run away to? To whom and from whom [...]. Your poor, Israel, your poor. The little ones, huddled, wretched, who say 'Hear O Israel' every single day. And their toil, and their toil, you, you young lady, have no part of it. Ungrateful, boastful. Bragging! Who taught you to read with square letters if not that town and its Jews?" (170f.)

Read retrospectively, this confession-like passage gains an elegiac, and even more importantly, a liturgical power. It is also through the remnants of liturgi-

40 In her reading of the novel, Allison Schachter makes an important point about the difference between the homecomings of Jewish male protagonists and Nora Krieger. Whereas the characters in the novels of Yiddish and Hebrew writers return to the *shtetl*, Nora is going back to a modern city. See idem, *Diasporic Modernisms. Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century*, 125 f.

41 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 50.

cal discourse that the “Judaic chaos” becomes a nostalgic site in the novel. Once Goldberg’s poetic language approaches the delicate subject of death, it marks a certain lacuna. The language of prose ends and makes room for another form of language which belongs to another discursive field. Created within the time gap, Goldberg’s nostalgic discourse acknowledges the impossibility of bridging over the epistemic rupture. At the same time, it does not collapse into the abyss, insisting instead on marking the gap between the present and the past through the careful interweaving of fragments of memory and fractions of “Judaic chaos” within literary space. Thus, Goldberg’s nostalgic mode in the novel should be understood as “cracked reflective nostalgia” which is manifested in the texts through the various shifts or fractures of discourses: from prosaic to lyrical, from prosaic to liturgical.

Conclusion

At the end of the novel, the narrator of *A Guest for the Night* comes back to Jerusalem to reunite with his family. But despite his return, the narrator realizes once again that his nostalgic condition cannot be resolved because sometimes, while talking to his friends, Szibucz would appear before his eyes and he would close them and “walk in among its ruins.” (472) Unlike Agnon’s novel, *And this is the Light* does not end with Nora Krieger’s arrival, suggesting instead to readers to accompany the protagonist in her departure from Kovno. On her way back to Berlin, Nora will try not to look back at her hometown, thinking instead of the future, and so the ruins of Kovno which Lea Goldberg probably had in mind when she was finishing the novel in early 1946 in Tel Aviv are left outside the text.

At the core of both novels there is a poetic attempt to come to terms with the representation of Eastern European Jewish life-worlds lost in two world wars. Both novels, which are embedded in two different literary paradigms, the Jewish textual tradition and the modern secular writing, employ the nostalgic mode in order to negotiate between the two poetic spaces and two homes. Whereas in Agnon’s novel the nostalgic mode is constituted as a hermeneutic challenge, in Goldberg’s postwar novel which marks the unbridgeable time gap, it emerges as an epistemic problem. The exploration of the encyclopedia of nostalgia in *A Guest for the Night* revealed the juxtaposition of restorative and reflective nostalgia within the novel as well as their different roles in mediation between the universal and the particular. The examination of the laboratory of nostalgia in *And this is the Light* showed how the transformation of anti-nostalgic discourse into the nostalgic mode enabled Goldberg to mark the epistemic and the aesthetical rupture in modernist lit-

erature. Hence, the two novels do not only epitomize the Hebrew nostalgic mode, but also offer a different vantage point from which the nostalgic mode in modern literature can be interpreted. By alluding to the existence of opposite vectors of longing, or of contesting nostalgias within the same literary space, the reading of Agnon's and Goldberg's novels provides the theory of nostalgia with the crucial insight into the necessity to understand the spatio-temporal constellations of nostalgic discourse both synchronically and diachronically.⁴²

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