
STEPCHILDREN
OF THE SHTETL

*The Destitute, Disabled, and Mad of
Jewish Eastern Europe, 1800–1939*

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there is not all that much separating "ordinary" people from pauperdom. In essence, Abramovitsh is saying: the vast majority of Russian-Polish Jewry is poor, living off of the community, other people's hard work, or even, from time to time, charity. Thus it often seems as though we are all beggars, which is exactly why most Jews want nothing to do with the marginal folk and look down upon them with such disgust—because they fear *becoming* them! There but for the grace of God go I.

Agnon's hekdesht: bodily putrefaction and sexual shame

Some three decades later, the eminent Hebrew writer S. Y. Agnon (1888–1970) offered a fictional portrait of a traditional hekdesht that bears a striking resemblance to Abramovitsh's in its resonances of fleshly decay and sexuality. Agnon, who devoted much of his oeuvre to fictional reworkings of his hometown shtetl of Buczacz, Galicia, and of traditional Jewish society more broadly, touches on themes relating to marginal people in his story "Ovadiah the Cripple" (*Ovadiah ba'al mum*). Its narrator describes the old hekdesht of Ovadiah's town as "the place for all the contemptible and worthless people as well as for brigands who wander from land to land and for the chronically ill [*holeh muhlat she-ein lo takanah*]."81 As is always the case with Agnon, the Hebrew phrasing here is rich with nuance and intertextuality. *Kol tsaru'a ve-khol zav*, Agnon's "contemptible and worthless people," is a phrase from Numbers 5:2 in which God instructs Moses to have the Israelites "remove from camp anyone with an eruption [or "anyone who is leprous"] or a discharge and anyone defiled by a corpse" (NJPS). Since the *tsaru'a* is a leper (in the traditional understanding of the skin affliction called *tsara'at*) or someone with an eruption of the skin, while the *zav* is a person suffering from sexual discharge, Agnon's "worthless people" are not only chronically ill, possibly disfigured, and physically repulsive, but also perceived as impure and thus liable to defile others. For that reason, they must be put out of the camp, isolated from the body of the people—a fate true of both the context of biblical Israel and of modern eastern Europe. In the former, however, the *tsaru'a* and *zav* could hope to regain purity and be welcomed back into the camp once the skin eruption or discharge had passed; it is very doubtful whether anyone in the hekdesht could be so optimistic about a change in his or her status.

As for the chronically ill, when the story was first published Agnon

used the phrase "every sick person who had lost hope" (*kol holeh asher avdah tikvato*), but in the final version he substituted *holeh muhlat she-ein lo takanah*—chronically and incurably ill person. Perhaps Agnon was suggesting an intertextual reference to a Talmudic story (BT Sanhedrin 75a) about the intersection between illicit sexual activity, death, and sin. A certain man fell in lust with a particular woman to the point that he became deathly ill, and a debate ensues between doctors and sages, with the former urging that the man be allowed to have sex with the woman: "And the doctors said: He will have no cure [*ein lo takanah*] until she engages in sexual intercourse with him" (they later temper their prescription to the condition that the man at least be allowed to see the woman naked, and then that he be permitted to converse with her through a fence).⁸² The sages insist in all these cases that the man must rather die than be permitted to assuage his lust, which the Gemara ultimately questions: why is this necessary? Rav Pappa answers that it is because of the danger of bringing shame on the woman's entire family. It is not the details of the story and the debate around it that are relevant to the hekdesh but the conceptual associations and connotations. The chronically ill people in the hekdesh—and by extension, all marginal people—are associated not only with death but also with illicit sexual activity, nudity, shame, and the crossing of borders (the conversation through the fence).

Agnon's subsequent portrayal of the inglorious end of the hekdesh—after the authorities declare its compulsory closure, the community pulls it apart bit by bit and its constituent components are cannibalized for use in other building projects—also hints at the character of the institution:

The roof started to sag and the walls started becoming unsteady [*ad she-makh ha-mekareh va-yerofefu ha-ketalim*], and the authorities declared that it must be closed. And from then the building was deserted. Whoever built a house in that neighborhood took some stones and columns, chopped up the hekdesh doors and took away the cornices [*atarot*] and the engravings [*pituhim*] and the threshold [*asqopah*] and the crevices [*sheqifim*] until the great fire came and burned up the remainder and nothing remained of the building but a pile of stones.⁸³

Three of the Hebrew terms for architectural elements—*atarot*, *pituhim*, *sheqifim*—are used in the Mishnah's discussion of what conveys impurity within a

building (m. Ohalot 14:1). The fourth, *askopab* (threshold), is a clear reference to liminality.

The first sentence in the passage above also lends itself to intertextual exegesis. The first phrase is a reference to Ecclesiastes 10, a comparison of wisdom and folly with frequent mention of the fool (*sakhal* or *kesil*). The specific verse from which the phrase "the roof started to sag" is borrowed reads, "Through slothfulness the ceiling sags; through lazy hands the house caves in" (10:18). Is this Agnon's way of gesturing at the frequent characterizations of marginal people as idlers, while simultaneously hinting that the truly lazy are the community members who did nothing, or next to nothing, while their coreligionists rotted away in the hekdesch? "The walls started becoming unsteady" alludes to Job 26, which begins with a reference to Job's (and by extension, God's) support of those without strength or wisdom.⁸⁴

In Agnon's telling, the hekdesch was eventually replaced by "something like a hospital for the poor"—not a true hospital, but a place where the chronically ill with connections among the institution's trustees could find a bed and some kind of treatment until death. The efficacy of that treatment is revealed by the mortality rate in the hospital: "Once daily the town doctor came to visit his patients and twice or thrice weekly the beadles of the *hevra kadisha* came to prepare the dead for burial"⁸⁵—an echo of Fishke's reference to the hekdesch doctor who did "everything he could."

Conclusion

These rich literary sources provide profound insight into the nature of the hekdesch and its function in Jewish society. The hekdesch was both a physical and imaginary locus for the grotesque, the uncanny, and the shameful in the Jewish collective unconscious. And just as Alter Yaknehoz recognizes that the story of the marginal people to which he has been listening is actually his own, the contemporary reader will grasp one of the central ideas in Abramovitch's text: that the marginal individual is not out there "somewhere" but instead is an integral part of the Jewish narrative. In fact, the line between ordinary poor Jew and pauper or beggar is so fine that it is only because the former is in such great need of reifying it that it exists at all. This circumstance also helps to explain why at times the Jewish mainstream is seemingly

so eager to displace onto its marginals the opprobrium heaped upon Jews by antisemites.

That is also the ultimate lesson of the dybbuk tale of Piesk and Most. The protagonist of the story represents the undesirables of Jewish society in all their guises: as the orphan in the *hekdesch*, a member of the Jewish community by birthright but neglected and spurned because of his condition; as informer, an internal enemy who threatens the very existence of the community; and finally and most powerfully, as dybbuk—an entity that possesses from within, threatening to take over the Jewish collective's very essence, its very soul. There could hardly be a more eloquent articulation of the deep-seated fears of the Jewish societal mainstream vis-à-vis its marginal people.

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has, it seems, ended the cycle of marginality. But at what cost? Rive-Zisl, now employed as a "helper" in the orphanage, is near her children, but she surely cannot function as a normal mother if her children are in the care of an institution. Thus, in order for the children to thrive, she must endure the severing of the mother-child relationship. Nor is the legacy of marginality completely erased: the last thing that the memoirist tells us about the family is that Nochim's younger siblings, who go unnamed in her account, are developmentally disabled ("retarded"). We hear nothing more. Is the lesson here that, no matter the good intentions of the Jewish community to aid its outcasts—here rewarded by the happy case of Nochim—marginality will always breed marginality?

"Ovadiah the Cripple" (1921)

S. Y. Agnon offered a more optimistic statement about the new national Jewish welfare and its transformative impact on Jewish marginals in a short story published soon after the war. A marginal character is the protagonist of Agnon's story "Ovadiah the Cripple." Compare this to Abramovitsh's *Fishke the Lame*, for example: while one might argue that Fishke is the protagonist, he is not really the hero of his own story. Abramovitsh attempted to make Fishke a full person with a true interior life, but ultimately Fishke remains secondary to the Mendele frame story.¹⁰¹ By contrast, the character Ovadiah is drawn with great attention to his inner life and psyche; indeed, much of the story unfolds there.

A cripple and a hunchback, Ovadiah Halbleyb ("Half-life") earns his living as a water carrier. The story begins in this way: "Ovadiah the water carrier never complained about his lot [lit., against heaven]; to the contrary, he found a reason to give praise for his deformity, for if he had been like all other men, would he have gotten engaged to a young woman who was gossiped about?"¹⁰²

His name is fitting. Its meaning is "servant of God," but is this a servant in its secular sense? In other words, is Ovadiah a peer of his fiancée, the servant Sheyne Serl? Or is his being called a servant of God a suggestion that his true nature places him far above most of the other residents of his town? Agnon ironically dubs him *ba'al mum*, "the cripple," an allusion to the physical defects that make a priest ineligible to offer sacrifices (Lev.

21:17-20), which in the traditional sense would exclude him from divine service—whereas his given name suggests him to be *more* worthy of serving God, rather than less. Still, there is no denying the fact that Ovadiah is stricken with at least two of the bodily defects that Leviticus lists: he is lame (*pise'ab*) and a hunchback (*giben*). We shall soon see that the last defect in the list—*meroah asbekh*, crushed testicles—may also apply, if only symbolically. Moreover, with only one chapter, Obadiah is the shortest book in the Bible, perhaps an oblique reference to Ovadiah's marginal status in the town.

From the start, we are given to understand that Sheyne Serl deserves to be the subject of gossip, since she is a shameless and rather dissolute young woman who is happy to flirt with other men even after she becomes engaged to Ovadiah. The expression Agnon uses to describe her is *shifhab harufah*, a Talmudic term referring to a strange situation suggested by a phrase in Leviticus 19:20: a woman who is a half-slave. The situation arises because she has two masters, one of whom has freed her, while the other has not. Thus, a Hebrew slave may marry her, but is technically only marrying the half of her that is free. The term can also mean, more simply, a female slave who has been given in marriage to another of her master's slaves.

The use of the term *shifhab harufah* shows Agnon's mastery of irony in his use of biblical and rabbinic allusions. The early chapters of the story make it clear that Ovadiah will only ever be marrying half of Sheyne Serl at most, since she is so clearly interested in dallying with other men. This circumstance makes the fact that his name means "servant" even more significant. Also, since Sheyne Serl ends up having an affair with Reuben, a servant in the same household, the term in its second meaning turns out to be quite prescient.

Early on in the story, Ovadiah acknowledges Sheyne Serl's questionable moral reputation to himself, but he comes to terms with the situation by placing the two of them on similarly low positions: "Right now I am only an insubstantial and inferior creature and she is a *shifhab harufah*," but when they marry he will be transformed into a householder, an independent man, the master of his own house (*ba'al bayit*), and she will become the mistress of the house (*ba'alat bayit*).¹⁰³ However, the narrator immediately intervenes and begs to differ, informing the reader in somewhat crass terms that Sheyne Serl may not be so easily transformed from the *shifhab harufah* that she is

now into a proper wife: "As soon as a man gets himself a bed, he also gets himself fleas. So it was with Ovadiah: he got himself a bride, and everyone else got her too [*zakkah kalah, zakhu bah aberim*]."104 Thus Ovadiah is seemingly destined to be a cuckold from the start, an important building block for Agnon's shaping of the role of gender in the story.

There follows a wrenching scene that takes place in the town dance hall. After having hesitated for some time about whether or not to go to the hall and tell Sheyne Serl that he no longer wants her to frequent the place, Ovadiah finally picks up the courage to enter, despite the fact that he senses that he may be bullied. Aware that he looks like a pauper—even with clothing and shoes, he is described as "naked" and "barefoot"—he nonetheless summons enough self-confidence and gumption to ask himself, "Should I be ashamed in front of those beggars?"105 (And indeed, the reader wonders: who is worthy of scorn in this scene—the marginal person, or those who treat him as less than human?) After he has delivered his message to Sheyne Serl, who promptly turns her back on him, the lads in the dance hall "gathered around him, mocking and taunting him, and knocked his crutch from his hands. He leaned over to pick it up, and as he leaned, he almost lost his balance and fell over." Then it is the girls' turn to taunt him by mock-arguing over which of them will win him as a dance partner, one pulling him this way and another that way.¹⁰⁶ Singing a ditty ridiculing him, the young men then hoist him up on his crutch. Ovadiah flails about and is finally let down, only to have Reuben grab his crutch, attempt unsuccessfully to break it, and then throw it into the fire. Ovadiah thrashes "like a drowning man," collapses, and is taken to the hospital. Here as elsewhere in the story, Agnon contrasts the moral ugliness of the shtetl with the innocence and purity, perhaps even childlike nature, of the marginal hero; we shall see this contrast again in the fiction of Joseph Opatoshu and Israel Joshua Singer.

This shocking incident is nothing less than Ovadiah's public symbolic emasculation, perhaps even castration. Having been publicly scorned by his fiancée, he is violently made to lose hold of his crutch—a clear phallic symbol, as Gershon Shaked points out—and is later made a figure of fun as he is forced to keep his balance while sitting astride the crutch.¹⁰⁷ It would seem, then, that the biblical defect of crushed testicles does, in fact, apply to Ovadiah, at least from the point of view of the townspeople. Moreover, while it is

Sheyne Serl who becomes pregnant and gives birth, Ovadiah is described in similar terms: in the hospital, he lies "like a woman giving birth." And later, after Ovadiah is released from the hospital, a man whom he encounters in the town tells him, "You disappeared all of a sudden. We were sure that you had gone to Brody and found employment as a wet nurse."¹⁰⁸ The reader is left to wonder if Ovadiah's hope to be the master of his household can ever actually be realized. Is he even a real man? Agnon deliberately leaves the definition of masculinity in question all the way until the very end of the story.

Established by a young Zionist doctor who was appointed chief doctor of the decrepit institution after the death of his senior colleague, the hospital to which Ovadiah is taken is a successor to the hekdesch and the so-called hospital for the poor that we saw in chapter 3. The young doctor instituted so many far-reaching changes that it eventually became a new thing altogether—a modern hospital that "became a blessing for the town." Here, treated with kindness, Ovadiah marvels at the expert medical care, the food, the clean sheets, and the clothing.

It is modern philanthropy in a nationalist key, then, that lifts the marginal figure up and restores his humanity to him. Upon arrival, he is convinced that the Christian nurse who speaks compassionately to him has mistaken him for someone else because he is not dressed in his usual rags, and that the next day she will realize her error and reproach him. "She had glanced at the chair, surely intending to look at his clothing, for she would be able to judge his character from his clothing."¹⁰⁹ But the staff's empathy is real and unceasing—indeed, "not a day passes without their doing him a kindness."¹¹⁰ During his long stay in the hospital, which Agnon describes in great detail, Ovadiah's body undergoes changes that diminish some of the unattractive physical aspects that denoted his marginal status: toothpaste whitens his teeth and freshens his breath; the cream he is given softens his hands, smooths his wrinkles, and makes his sores fade away; his new rubber-tipped crutch makes no noise when he walks; and "even his hunch did not weigh so heavily on his back and did not pull him downwards, as if the tip of it had been lopped off and a bit of had been tossed away."¹¹¹ If we see this as a symbolic circumcision, Ovadiah has, in effect, undergone a rebirth. Just before his release from the hospital, he goes for a walk, and while he still limps, "his gait now was not like it had been before. Before he entered the hospital, he

would move jerkily and creep [*zobeł*] like a cripple [*ke-va'al mum*], but now he walked like a refined person [*ke-istenis*]."¹¹² At one point, the doctor pats him on the back—his back, the site of his disfigurement!—and says, "Today you have become a man, Ovadiah."¹¹³ Perhaps being treated like a human being has also restored the masculinity that was so cruelly taken from him through his abuse at the hands of the townspeople.

After he finally and somewhat reluctantly leaves the hospital, Ovadiah seeks out Sheyne Serl, not knowing of course that while he has been in the compassionate hands of the doctors and nurses at the hospital, her lot has worsened considerably. He finds her sitting on a stoop, having been thrown out of the house where she served. In her arms is a newborn baby, the result of her affair with Reuben: "She pushed her nipple into the baby's mouth and screamed, 'Here you go, bastard, suck and choke!'"¹¹⁴ Afraid to give Sheyne Serl candies he has bought for her, Ovadiah bends down and puts them in the baby's hand—not only balm for Sheyne Serl's constant rage but, no less important, a symbol of his own readiness to care for a child that is not his own. Ovadiah thus becomes the embodiment of compassion, grace, mercy, love—all gifts showered upon him during his stay in the hospital, which immersed him in the humanistic ethos at the heart of its mission. Even more important, Agnon suggests, all those traits are part of the complex admixture that is Ovadiah's masculinity—yes, together with fearfulness, hesitancy, and timidity.¹¹⁵

Ovadiah is still a cripple and a hunchback, but perhaps not *ba'al mum* in the same way as before—he sees himself differently now, and others (or at least some others) do too. This is the true regeneration, Agnon suggests, not the erasure of all bodily weaknesses and flaws promoted by some strands of Zionist ideology but the lifting up of the individual and his self-esteem. Nor does this renewal demand conventional bourgeois masculinity, but rather an expression of gender that crosses traditional boundaries. On the national plane, this corresponds to a restoration that is not a total remaking of the nation but a reconciliation with weakness and infirmity—both physical and psychic—until the point is reached where, while the nation's flaws do not define it, they are not denied either.

Ironically, the Zionism that endorsed the kind of transformation that Ovadiah undergoes in this story as the key to the regeneration of the Jewish

people often ended up reproducing in its discourse of transformation the stereotypes that it sought to overcome. The diaspora Jew deformed by centuries of unnatural living, the neurotic Jew sickened by persecution and self-hatred, the weak ghetto Jew estranged from the land, the effeminate Jew alienated from true masculinity—all these images of degeneration were reified in arguments like the one that Max Nordau made so famously in his "Muskeljudentum" speech at the Second Zionist Congress in 1898 and that Max Mandel'shtam, a prominent ophthalmologist and Zionist leader in Kiev, made (somewhat less famously) at the Fourth Zionist Congress two years later.¹¹⁶ A suitable foil for Nordau's call for physical regeneration, Mandel'shtam's speech described at length the bodily degeneration from which East European Jewry suffered: Jews' bodies were less developed and more susceptible to disease, and their overdeveloped brains predisposed to neurosis and mental illness.¹¹⁷ "The muscle Jew was a paradoxical figure of regeneration," Todd Presner writes. "It epitomized the rebirth of the strong Jew as drawn from Jewish history and mythology; but, at the same time, many of the anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jewish degeneracy were internalized in its conceptualization."¹¹⁸ Would the Zionist movement place the same emphasis on internal, emotional rehabilitation that accompanies Ovadiah's physical regeneration? And what if Ovadiah had exited the hospital renewed spiritually but unchanged physically? Would that have been sufficient or satisfying for Agnon's readers?

New interest in Jewish marginals at home and abroad

Historians also began to take an interest in the margins of Jewish society.¹¹⁹ Veteran historians such Majer Bałaban and Ignacy (Yitskhok) Schiper included the *hekdesh*, paupers, and beggars in their studies, while younger scholars, many of them fervent socialists, were often dedicated to understanding the experience of the poor Jewish masses in history.¹²⁰ Emanuel Ringelblum was particularly interested in bringing to light "the Jewish dregs," to quote the title of one of his sketches of little-known episodes and figures in Polish Jewish history.¹²¹ His short study of Jewish beggars, which attempted to understand the roots of the widespread problem of Jewish beggary and destitution in late eighteenth-century Poland, was one of the first works of Jewish history to approach the subject of the socially marginalized

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Hermeneutics on Esther," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 30, no. 2 (September 25, 2014): 85.

66. Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 123, 148.

67. Stavroula Constantinou, "Grotesque Bodies in Hagiographical Tales: The Monstrous and the Uncanny in Byzantine Collections of Miracle Stories," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 64 (2010): 46.

68. Gershon Shaked, "Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and Mendele's *The Book of Beggars*," in id., *The New Tradition: Essays on Modern Hebrew Literature* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2006), 174.

69. *Novoe Vremya*, August 29, 1888, cited in Emile Joseph Dillon, *The Jews in Russia* ([London], 1890), 26.

70. Shaked, "Dickens' *Oliver Twist*," 174.

71. *Ibid.*, 181.

72. Gershon Shaked, "Three Kalikes: A Comparative Study of Mendele, Agnon, and Bashevis," in id., *New Tradition*, 185.

73. Gershon Shaked, "A Groan from a Broken Heart: Mendele's *Fishke the Lame* as a Demand for Responsibility," in id., *New Tradition*, 205.

74. *Ibid.*, 206–7.

75. Gershon Shaked, *Bein sehok le-dema: iyunim be-yetsirato shel mendele mokher-sefarim* (Tel-Aviv: Agudat ha-sofrim be-yisra'el le-yad hotsa'at masadah, 1965), 107.

76. Dror Mishani, "Kol yisrael kabtsan hu—huts meha-soharim, ba'alei ha-bayit vekha-yotse ba-eileh: he'arot le-shihzur ha-dibur ha-ma'amadi be-'sefer kabtsanim," in *Sifrut u-ma'amad: likrat historiografiyah politit shel ha-sifrut ha-ivrit ha-badashah*, ed. Amir Benbaji and Hannan Hever (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute and Ha-kibbutz ha-meuhad, 2014), 105.

77. *Ibid.*, 108. Mishani unfortunately undermines his own argument by citing historical works on Jewish socialist movements that are almost four decades old and unrepresentative of more recent trends in the historical scholarship.

78. Abramovitsh, "Fishke the Lame," 237; id., "Fishke der krumer," 82.

79. Translation based on S. Y. Abramovitsh, "Fishke the Lame: A Book of Jewish Poorfolk," in *Tales of Mendele the Book Peddler: Fishke the Lame and Benjamin the Third*, ed. Dan Miron and Ken Frieden, trans. Ted Gorelick (New York: Schocken Books, 1996), 154.

80. Abramovitsh, "Fishke the Lame," 238–39.

81. Shmuel Yosef Agnon, "Ovadia ba'al mum," in id., *Kol sipurav shel shemu'el yosef agnon* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1967), 2: 413.

82. BT Sanhedrin 75a, William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noé Talmud, with commentary by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz, "Sefaria," www.sefaria.org/Sanhedrin.75a?lang=bi (accessed December 6, 2019).

83. Agnon, "Ovadia ba'al mum," in id., *Kol sipurav shel shemu'el yosef agnon*, 2: 413.

84. Job 26:2-4, assuming as many scholars do that these words are actually addressed to Job by Bildad; 26:11 contains the phrase "The pillars of heaven tremble."

85. Agnon, "Ovadia ba'al mum," in id., *Kol sipurav shel shemu'el yosef agnon*, 2: 413.

Chapter 4

1. J. N. Hays, *Epidemics and Pandemics: Their Impacts on Human History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 272.

2. Ibid., 194. The literature on cholera is vast. Among the most important works are Louis Chevalier, ed., *Le choléra, la première épidémie du XIXe siècle* (La Roche-sur-Yon: Impr. centrale de l'Ouest, 1958); Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Roderick McGrew, *Russia and the Cholera, 1823-1832* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965); R. J. Morris, *Cholera, 1832: The Social Response to an Epidemic* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1976); Michael Durey, *The Return of the Plague: British Society and the Cholera, 1831-2* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan; New York: Humanities Press, 1979); François Delaporte, *Disease and Civilization: The Cholera in Paris, 1832* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986); Richard J. Evans, *Death in Hamburg: Society and Politics in the Cholera Years, 1830-1910* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Frank M. Snowden, *Naples in the Time of Cholera, 1884-1911* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Elisabeth Mühlauer, *Welch' ein Unheimlicher Gast: Die Cholera-Epidemie 1854 in München* (Münster: Waxmann, 1996); Pamela K. Gilbert, *Cholera and Nation: Doctoring the Social Body in Victorian England* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008); and Christopher Hamlin, *Cholera: The Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

3. Asa Briggs, "Cholera and Society in the Nineteenth Century," *Past & Present*, no. 19 (April 1, 1961): 79.

4. See, e.g., Nancy M. Frieden, "The Russian Cholera Epidemic, 1892-93, and Medical Professionalization," *Journal of Social History* 10, no. 4 (1977): 546.

5. Richard J. Evans, "Review Article: Blue Funk and Yellow Peril: Cholera and Society in Nineteenth-Century France," *European History Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (January 1, 1990): 120; Gilbert, *Cholera and Nation*, 18.

6. See, e.g., Stephen Halliday, "Death and Miasma in Victorian London: An Obstinate Belief," *BMJ: British Medical Journal* 323, no. 7327 (December 22, 2001): 1469-71.

7. Donald F. Stevens, "Eating, Drinking, and Being Married: Epidemic Cholera and the Celebration of Marriage in Montreal and Mexico City, 1832-1833," *Catholic Historical Review* 92, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 78.

8. Hays, *Epidemics and Pandemics*, 217.

9. Durey, *Return of the Plague*, 164-70, 184; McGrew, *Russia and the Cholera, 1823-1832*, 109-11.

10. David Craigie, "On the Progress of Cholera through the West of Russia to

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94. Avrom Levinson, "A natsionaler khov," in *Dos elendste kind*, ed. M. Shneyorson (Warsaw: CENTOS, 1927), 8.

95. Smith, "Charity and Poor Relief," in *Encyclopedia of European Social History*, ed. Stearns, 3: 461.

96. Zahra, "Each Nation Only Cares for Its Own," 1382.

97. Mikhail Beizer, *Relief in Time of Need: Russian Jewry and the Joint, 1914-24* (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2015), 97-104; Leon Shapiro, *The History of ORT: A Jewish Movement for Social Change* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), 132.

98. Beizer, *Relief in Time of Need*, 104-6, 136-37.

99. Hayim Wolnerman, "Benevolent Societies," in *Oświęcim; Auschwitz Memorial Book (Oświęcim, Poland)*, ed. Aviezer Burstim, and Meir Simon Geshuri, (translation of *Sefer Oshpitsin*, 1977), JewishGen Yizkor Book Project, jewishgen.org/yizkor/oswiecim1/Oswiecim.html (accessed December 2, 2019).

100. Luba (Atkin) Bat, "Through Tears and Laughter (Personal Memoir)," Children of Pruzany and the Surrounding Area (n.d.), http://cpsa.info/pruzany/luba_bat.htm (accessed December 2, 2019).

101. I am grateful to Jeremy Dauber for this insight.

102. Agnon, "Ovadia ba'al mum," in id., *Kol sipurav shel shemu'el yosef agnon*, 2: 409.

103. Ibid.

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid., 410.

107. Shaked, "Three Kalikes," 185.

108. Agnon, "Ovadia ba'al mum," in id., *Kol sipurav shel shemu'el yosef agnon*, 2: 425.

109. Ibid., 414.

110. Ibid., 416.

111. Ibid., 417.

112. Ibid., 424.

113. Ibid., 418.

114. Ibid., 428.

115. While Gershon Shaked argues that Ovadia must overcome "the benevolence of the welfare society's hospital that tempted him to escape the hard facts of life," in fact it is precisely that benevolence that, together with Ovadia's own kind and perhaps naïve nature, induces him to stay with Sheyne Serl and the baby. Shaked, "Three Kalikes," 186.

116. Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin-de-Siècle*, 74-97; Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity*, 108-9; Gilman, "Jews and Mental Illness," 154-57.

117. Hart, *Social Science*, 105-6.

118. Presner, *Muscular Judaism*, 4.

119. See Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Emanuel Ringelblum, the*

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