In Mr. Lublin's Store

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Foreword

Agnon's Believer Who Does Not Know What to Believe In

In Mr. Lublin's Store, set in Leipzig during the First World War, is S.Y. Agnon's last novel, never published as a whole during his lifetime. The first chapter was printed in the literary supplement of the Hebrew newspaper *Ha'aretz* in 1964 and further chapters appeared in other newspapers and literary journals in 1964 and 1966, but it was not until 1975, five years after his death, that it was published in its entirety. It is therefore a composite work, constructed of the published sections and others that remained in draft or manuscript form. Agnon clearly intended the parts to constitute a completed work of fiction but it was left to his daughter, Emuna Yaron, to construct the novel as a whole from the material she found in his archive, as drafts and notes, which she combined with the already published material.

Shmuel Yosef Czaczkes, Agnon's original name, was born in Buczacz, Galicia (in today's western Ukraine), in 1888. He immigrated to Jaffa in 1908, but spent 1912 to 1924 in Germany, living first in Berlin

and then moving to Leipzig in 1917 where he spent much of that year. "I have already been living in Leipzig for four months. I have ration cards and everything else is going well. Living in Leipzig is pleasant. It doesn't impose much on its citizens and even a person like me finds his way around." So writes Agnon's narrator in *In Mr. Lublin's Store*, echoing Agnon's own comment in a letter to Salman Schocken in 1917: "I like Leipzig very much."[1] In 1924 he returned to Jerusalem, where he remained until his death in 1970.

Despite the difficulties Agnon endured in attempting to find lodgings and work after his arrival in Berlin in 1912 and throughout the war years, he did not neglect his literary activities, writing, revising and publishing his work. However, none of the works written between 1914 and 1918 dealt either with the war or with his life in Germany, his attitude to German Jewry and Germans in general or, indeed, with the Land of Israel. His literary preoccupation during the war years, as it had been for some years previously, was the life and culture of Eastern European Jewry, the life he had permanently left behind.

It was only much later, from the 1950s, that he turned his attention to Germany, to write this valediction to pre-war German Jewish life. Two major novels, *To This Day* and *In Mr. Lublin's Store*, and a handful of short stories resulted from his stay in wartime Germany. *In Mr. Lublin's Store*, the most European of his novels, deals not only with the German Jewish communities but also with Germany, its history, its people and, of course, the war.

The novel is composed of narrative, anecdotes, extraordinarily detailed personal histories, encounters and long conversations. The framing story is very simple: the narrator, whose name is referred to once in the novel as "Agnon," has moved from Jerusalem to Berlin and from there to Leipzig. On his way one Sabbath eve to buy what he requires for his Sabbath meals he runs into his friend Mr. Lublin, who is the wealthy proprietor of a mail-order company. Mr. Lublin has an urgent appointment and has no one to mind his office. On a realistic level this in itself is doubtful because Mr. Lublin, a successful entrepreneur, is unlikely to run his enterprise on his own, or even with his two rather simple assistants, but in this way the often fantastic, expressionist, even magic realist, nature of the story is set from the beginning. The narrator agrees to sit in the store until Mr. Lublin returns.

While in the store the narrator has nothing to do. There are no books or magazines, the telephone has been disconnected, and Mr. Lublin has taken the newspapers with him. The narrator is confined to sitting within four walls, so all he can do is allow his imagination to range far beyond them, without boundaries of time and space. He reflects on his life and the people he has encountered in the past, in Germany and in Galicia, his birthplace. The American novelist Herman Wouk wrote that Agnon once admonished him, "We are storytellers. Pictures, pictures! No thoughts!"[2] Agnon has obeyed his own injunction in this novel: the narrator's memories are presented in a series of vivid scenes and pictures of places and people. In fact, throughout the novel Agnon emphasizes synonyms for seeing, watching, looking and observing. Through these pictorial memories we receive a very rich account of the narrator's life in Germany during the First World War, of the German Jewish communities before and during the war, Leipzig, where the narrator lives, his friends and acquaintances and, in particular, all the pressures of wartime. He also devotes much of his reflection to his Galician hometown which he does not name, although it is clearly assumed to be Buczacz.

Because of the fragmentary nature of the text there is no continuous, coherent narrative, although certain consistent themes help to presume Agnon's intentions, and the book's separate sections are bound together by an inner logic, however disparate they may seem to be. Like a musical rondo, the narrative regularly returns to the theme of Mr. Lublin's store, which is a central and consistent unifying element. In any case, even as a whole the novel would have retained its episodic nature, as indicated by each of its component parts.

The narrator recreates a world in memory: from the distant past to the present, through authentic historical events in a modern European metropolis, to fantastical happenings, dreams and strange meetings, coincidences and adventures. For example, a beautiful woman is swept away by a cavalryman on horseback, a husband advises his wife from the grave, an ancient rabbi suddenly appears to a grief-stricken mother, and three medieval horsemen magically transport the narrator to France to meet a medieval king. Through the interweaving of autobiographical and historical fact into these less realistic elements, we can assume that to a certain extent it is Agnon himself, or some type of autobiographical

projection of the author, who is sitting in Mr. Lublin's store. His mind is the store and his memories are like the catalog he finds there but rather more willy-nilly, disorganized, as memories are. All this is interlaced with biblical and rabbinic references, Jewish legend and folklore, all evidence of Agnon's enormous erudition.

To begin with, the narrator reflects on his present environment, Mr. Lublin's compound on Böttcher Street in an historic area of Leipzig, the Brühl, known for its shops and markets. This area houses four old craftsmen's workshops belonging to a quartet of non-Jewish artisans all of them incredibly ancient and representative of the local culture of the past. This section of the story is the consolidation of the narrator's observations about the German world, reflected mainly through these four characters. Mr. Lublin's warehouse, set in the same compound, stocks varieties of household goods. His own store and the others are unchanged from the time they were built centuries previously. The narrator commends Mr. Lublin for preserving the shops' ancient character while throughout the city buildings are being knocked down and rebuilt to modern tastes.

The workshops belong to Götz Weigel, a knife sharpener, Jakob Weinwurzel, a beltmaker, Adam Isba, a puppeteer, and Joachim Hermann Witzelrode, an antique dealer who rarely bothers to open his shop. The narrator recounts the lives of all those artisan-shopkeepers, almost as old as their workshops, their lives filled with color and adventure, suffering and struggle. He tells not only their stories but those of all their families, including their ancestors, wives, lovers and children. They represent Agnon's rather nostalgic portrayal of the world of unadaptability to modern life. As the scholar Dan Miron writes, they are the remnants of the German Middle Ages, the guild culture, trained by generations of artisans, in the tradition of Richard Wagner's *Der Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.[3] Their stories form the core of the book, and reflect Agnon's intention to use these storekeepers as emblems of a Germany that has long since disappeared, where once craftsmen created objects of great beauty before the factories came along and, like the builders of modern Leipzig, wiped out the traces of the past.

None of these craftsmen are Jews. Jews had lived in Leipzig since the 14th century but following outbreaks of anti-Semitism they were

persecuted and expelled. In the 17th century the first Jew was given the right of residence in the city, but Jews had been allowed to attend the annual trade fairs for some years previously. Later, the most significant immigration to Leipzig from Eastern Europe was from the cities of Brody and Breslau, which Agnon mentions in the novel. According to the narrator, Leipzig's Jews originated in Galicia, Hungary, Romania and Bohemia. The encounter between the Orthodox *Ostjuden* (Eastern European Jews) and the established German Jews, many of whom were assimilated and ideologically attuned to German culture, was not always free of tension. In the Jewish sector of the city the narrator meets ḥasidic Jews who have retained their ancient customs, worship and garb. Their antithesis, tall, blond, blue-eyed Mr. Arno (né Aaron) Lublin, considered by some scholars to carry a hint of Agnon's patron, the businessman and publisher Salman Schocken, represents the assimilated, acculturated Jews, also the economic prosperity and social integration that many German Jews enjoyed before the war. Lublin is "self-made," his wife is German-born and they have given their children German names, Heinz, Thomas and Gerda. Lublin is a philanthropist, admired by the city leaders. In keeping with her status Mrs. Nora Lublin works for the war effort, she organizes events for army officers, soup kitchens and soldiers' clubs and she supports the arts and theater.

Agnon presents Lublin as a perfect representative of the historical cooperation between Jews and Germans. Lublin is impeccably honest, well-liked and respected. Through his official contacts he has paved the way for the narrator to live in Leipzig during wartime, when rights of residence for foreigners were severely restricted. Above all, Lublin seems to have completely rejected his Galician origin. The harrowing story of his childhood is told in detail, the classic, almost Dickensian tale of a starving urchin making good. Yet Mr. Lublin still has some rough edges: he is not particularly well-educated or interested in intellectual pursuits. He tells the narrator that he is not a theatergoer and that he reads nothing but newspapers, and if he reads a book he does so to please his wife. He is a self-contained man who is not easily fooled. He is unfailingly considerate to his workers and to the deeply Orthodox narrator who struggles with his admiration of him, an ex-Galician secular, assimilated Jew. He says,

> I had meant to defend Mr. Lublin for not bothering to visit our town, for not having been there since he had left, for we knew that he had run away at age eleven because of his father and he never again showed his face in our town. In the end I told the stories of all the others who had done the same thing…

At the opposite pole stand two figures, both the antitheses of Mr. Lublin: the learned and rigidly prescriptive but sincere Rabbi Jonathan whom the narrator has followed from Berlin to Leipzig in the hope of studying Talmud with him, and Mr. Jacob Stern, an old mentor from their native Galician town. Rabbi Jonathan, thought to be a reference to Rabbi David Feldmann, who was appointed as a rabbi in Leipzig in 1910, is caught between the letter and spirit of the law, and has no choice but to render difficult decisions with potentially tragic consequences. Somehow the narrator does not manage to ever "run through the Gemara" with the rabbi, and one wonders whether his obsessive desire to do so stems rather more from form than substance. Yet it is the rabbi, rather than the narrator, who provides the impediment to their study for a variety of reasons mainly to do with his communal responsibilities, especially those imposed in wartime.

The narrator is kinder to Rabbi Jonathan than to other representatives of Orthodoxy, particularly ḥasidic groups: he pits the various scholarly and pious Jews against each other as they vie for greater devoutness, each described with an edge of irony. Some of them condemn Berish Salzmann, a naively pious Jew, a ḥasid, who, through need of a living, keeps his café open on the Sabbath, having "sold" it for the day to a gentile. With quite scorching irony the narrator describes Berish's ḥasidic rebbe who boasts that he offers up so many prayers that the angels are unable to carry them all to God. He claims to have prayed with all his heart for the safe homecoming of Berish's son from the war, but dozes off while consoling Berish and in any case he is unable to remember the boy's correct name.

Mr. Stern does not represent Jewish observance, but the essence of cohesive Jewish life in the rather idealized, almost mythical, framework of the Galician Jewish town. He suddenly appears in Mr. Lublin's store shortly after the narrator, still sitting alone, had been imagining that he was walking through the streets of his hometown, discussing

the events of the day. (The town is never named, but is clearly modeled on Buczacz.) Mr. Stern appears almost as a personification of the town. He and the narrator had been friends in their town which happens to be Mr. Lublin's as well. Mr. Stern, whose family had lived there for generations, was devoted to the town and its inhabitants, customs and history. He had been the narrator's mentor, a man of many parts, great knowledge and intellect and also wealthy and prominent. Lublin, on the other hand, clearly hates the old world and could not wait to shake the dust of his town off his feet, a phrase that occurs frequently in the final chapter, in contrast to Stern, whose feet resist the very attempt to cross the city limits.

Lublin is new, youthful and modern. Stern, on the other hand is wordless, tired stooped, with skin the color of clay, looking as if he had undergone a long journey. The one is alive, the other, dead, perhaps dead long before his visit to the narrator. With Lublin the narrator has a dialogue—with Stern there is only the narrator's monologue.

The narrator is suspended between these two poles of Jewishness in Leipzig, a man who tries to uphold his observance and scholarship, attempting to study with the rabbi but is thwarted, or thwarts himself at every turn. Instead of pursuing Torah and Talmud, he has to earn a living working as a bibliographer in a large bookstore. His own ambivalence is signaled by the fact that he enters Mr. Lublin's store on the eve of the Sabbath. Instead of eating the prescribed Sabbath meal, he goes hungry. This is not only a matter of his discomfort but also sinful, for Jewish law demands that every Jew eat three meals during the Sabbath. Also, that Friday is the anniversary of the death of the narrator's much admired rabbinic and intellectual master, Maimonides. Normally on such a day he would peruse Maimonides' books, but on this day he has nothing at all to read. He is divested of his codes of Jewishness by his own choice. In a brief statement that seems to tilt the balance away from Rabbi Jonathan and Talmud study, the narrator wonders, significantly, why he has become "closer to [Mr. Lublin] than to anyone else in Leipzig."

The real identity of Mr. Stern is difficult to determine. Scholars have suggested that he is the narrator's alter ego, or that he is a symbol of the narrator's guilt for having left both the Land of Israel and

the town he loved, that he and Mr. Stern are both dead and sitting in a tomb, that Mr. Stern is his judge, and in a way, his nemesis. Perhaps Mr. Stern is more like a psychiatrist listening to a patient's long confession. He seems to wither and wane as he sits silently opposite the narrator. It may be that Stern is the narrator's conscience for his waning love of his town as time passes and other places claim his affection. Stern does not speak, his silence becoming increasingly oppressive to the narrator who desperately tries to arouse his interest and draw out some words. But there is no dialogue with Mr. Stern. It is as if the narrator is making a frantic effort to hold on to the memory of his town by summoning its stories, characters and events while Stern and the town fade away.

One of the central themes of the book is, therefore, the town itself, "one of the few towns that still existed in the world of the Holy One blessed be He." The narrator, like Agnon himself, left the town to live in the Land of Israel, but then moved from Jerusalem to Germany. Because of the war he was trapped in Germany but in fact, Agnon remained in Germany six years after the war had ended. The narrator is filled not only with guilt but with longing—not for the Land of Israel, as would be expected, but for his town. In fact, the entire story seems to be the narrator's confession not to Mr. Stern or Mr. Lublin (on the contrary, the latter confesses to him) but to the town itself. "Our town" is the repository of all that was positive in the narrator's early life, the cohesion and devotedness of Jewish life, himself as a Torah student, scholarship, even the physical diversion in Buczacz's Strypa River. According to the narrator, the war has ended "our town," and brought about the end of the culture of the *alte heim*, perhaps symbolized by the death of Mr. Stern. In fact, the disintegration had begun some three decades earlier but the war provided the *coup de grâce* for the established cohesiveness of the Eastern European Jewish communities.

However, in hindsight, it seems that Agnon's view of "our town" is somewhat over-idealistic. This idyllic picture of Jewish devotion to scholarship and custom on the one hand, and swimming in the Strypa and taking long walks in the country, on the other, may be a little too glorified by memory. Agnon was not unaware of the hardship of old world life for the majority of the Jews, their extreme poverty, actual persecution and the constant fear of it. Modern Leipzig is portrayed with

more geographic accuracy than the old town, which appears as a hazy, dreamlike entity. Nevertheless the last chapter of the novel is a valediction to this lost Jewish *heimat* in Eastern Europe.

Across all these factors, all the characters in the present and the past, their faith and lack of it, their industriousness, creativity, goodness and venality, wealth and poverty, cuts the Great War. It is another of the central characters in the novel, influencing every aspect of the peoples' lives, their livelihood, their families, even their religious observance. Agnon had already written a novel set in wartime Germany *To This Day* (*Ad Henah*, 1952). It took place in Berlin and like in *In Mr. Lublin's Store* the war provided a graphic background to the narrator's life and encounters. Both these novels provide an abundant picture of Germany in the terrible second decade of the 20th century. Indeed, the two novels are in dialogue with each other, and it is clear that they share the same narrator.

In both novels the people are affected by lack of food, by fear, by the constant anxiety about sons and husbands in battle, rather than by suffering a military onslaught, bombing or invasion. The narrator constantly refers to the fate of the Eastern European Jewish communities who were displaced in their millions from their villages and towns. The war can therefore be read in a number of different ways: as both the actual historical event and also, in some instances, as the metaphorical axis around which Agnon's musings about German-Jewish history, and himself as an exile, revolve.

The time of the war represents the end of one of the most significant periods in German Jewish history after which Germany became a tablet upon which anything could—and would—be written. It may be that by focusing on the first war Agnon is foreseeing the second. While the narrator is sitting in Mr. Lublin's store events of the 20th century pass before his eyes and he sees the historical processes that, to our post-Holocaust sensibilities, could account, at least in part, for the Holocaust. Furthermore, the war symbolizes the final mutuality of the two cultures, the German and the German-Jewish.

The war permeates every section of the novel. Young men are killed, maimed and disabled in mind and body. Ostensibly the war has prevented the narrator from studying the Talmud, it interferes with his

study of Judaism and it is therefore a negative force in his quest for spiritual self-realization. It undermines the foundations of faith and of God's law. It distorts society, filling it with the bereaved and with women who have abandoned domesticity for the workplace. The narrator repeatedly tells the terrible, heartbreaking story of the Salzmanns' dead son. Mrs. Salzmann, the café-owner's wife, represents all the parents whose sons have been killed on the battlefield. Her dignified agony is among the most moving parts of the book and she is one of Agnon's most rounded characters. Even Mr. Lublin does not escape the effects of the war: his son is a prisoner-of-war who manages to contact his parents through the Red Cross. While the narrator has little compassion for anyone, except perhaps the Salzmanns who have lost their son, his compassion for the soldiers is unmistakable. He is scathing about anyone who supports the war, including the Jews, about patriotism, even his friend the composer Gerti Hinning's uplifting war songs, he derides the young women's admiration of men in uniform, and he reserves equal scorn for a civilian playwright who appears onstage in military dress. He disapproves of women who see their men go to war and then take their jobs.

Agnon puts his often expressed detestation of the war into the mouths of his characters, the knife sharpener, for example.

> The sharpener held out the knife and Rabbi Jonathan examined it. He paid him and said, "It is sharp and smooth." The sharpener replied, "The war's teeth are sharper. I would be surprised if its teeth did not grow larger through overeating."

The narrator is angry that it takes a gentile to express these sentiments while the Jews throw themselves wholeheartedly into the war. "They all utter a single phrase and one word, to volunteer for the war in body and pocket for the sake of truth and justice."

Agnon describes, with historical precision, the effects of the war on the society and particularly on the individual. It is foregrounded in all its horror and chaos, a thread in the fabric of the narrator's life. Based on Agnon's own experience, the narrator describes aspects of civilian life, such his having to present himself regularly at the police station, as a foreign national, hunger and the harshness of rationing, the inedible food,

the army wives' pay, the widows who are forbidden to wear mourning for reasons of general morale. Many of the Jews have arrived in Leipzig due to the barbarity of the Czar's anti-Jewish measures that have destroyed their homes and communities. Even Mr. Stern is displaced because of the war, leading to the catastrophe of his death in a foreign land.

Yet not everything in the book is grim. Agnon laces his narrative with irony, humor and even some comedy, such as the tragicomic story of a goose. He tells the stories of various rabbis, marriage brokers, agents, tradespeople, theater folk, parents and children who populated the Eastern European Jewish world and a good deal of Yiddish literature. The narrator shows no mercy for very sanctimonious Jews, even rabbis. His humor is wry, cynical and appears frequently in plays on words in Hebrew which, unfortunately, can't be conveyed in translation.

Women are not spared. The narrator, who tells us that he is 27 years old, is somewhat passive in the company of women, and generally disparaging about them in the abstract. He mentions more than once, with a certain disapproval, that women have taken over the essential work during wartime while their men are serving and "when they take up the men's work they assume an angry expression, a mistake they make because they think that an angry face is a sign of manliness." Nonetheless, women are drawn to him and pursue him and one of them even jealously complains when he appears to favor another one over her. Yet he does not have a genuine relationship with any of them; on the contrary, he tries to avoid them. Despite the narrator's apparent denigration of womankind as a whole, the individual women in *In Mr. Lublin's Store*—Jewish and gentile—have unique talents and without exception they are strong and independent, even those without education such as a fruit-seller and the wife of a soldier who runs her own dairy business. Gerti Hinnings is a poet and intellectual who works for a living, Lisa Lotte Lemke is a sports champion, Mrs. Salzmann runs a café, Mrs. Lublin has founded an officers' club, Friederika Lemke the ex-stage star is smart enough to get the better of her director, and even stringently religious Regina Honig helps her father keep the books in his business. The narrator seems to be both repelled and fascinated by them.

The narrative of *In Mr. Lublin's Store* is interspersed with dreams, the narrator's and those of others. Agnon has intentionally placed the

dreams throughout the text, to provide a certain revelatory psychological subtext to the story. For example, the narrator's dream that his suitcase is too torn for him to pack his possessions and return home becomes reality the following day. His need to have the suitcase repaired is a reason—one among many—to delay his departure from Germany.

Three major dreams, the beltmaker's messianic vision of a kind of Eden, the narrator's about his magical visit to Charlemagne, and later, a dream about his father, provide the subtexts of one of the major preoccupations of the book, the narrator's apparent defection from religious fidelity. One of the most significant encounters in the novel is between him and Jakob Weinwurzel, one of the shopkeepers, a devout Christian, whose paradigm for living is the Bible and whose models are biblical figures, all drawn from the Hebrew Bible. A scene in which Weinwurzel describes his dream is one of the core pieces in the novel and a key to understanding its central sensibility. A man of simple and honest piety, Weinwurzel reveres the narrator for knowing Hebrew, the language of Scripture, and for being able to write it. He dreams of a messianic figure that he identifies with the narrator due to his knowledge of the Bible. This notion of the miracle of speaking and writing the Holy Tongue recurs in the narrator's dream about Charlemagne who also requires someone who is adept at Hebrew speech and writing. The narrator's mocking rejection of Weinwurzel's dream, and his own dream of Charlemagne seem to express his conscience, the Jew who is, according to Weinwurzel, "a believer who does not know what to believe in."

One would imagine that the narrator would appreciate the naïve piety of Weinwurzel, the dedicated Christian who sees Judaism as the true faith, but he derides and then abandons him. His callousness may stem from the fact that he, the sophisticate, the Torah scholar, is unable to enjoy the simple faith of a simple man, and that the simple man is actually indicating the way to faith, or perhaps (although this is never suggested in the book) this uncomplicated faith, which requires only the Bible for substantiation, is an indictment of the narrator's own conflict between absolute devotion and something less. The real problem, however, is signaled by the emphasis on *writing* in these scenes. The narrator, with rather coy humility, says "I am something of a writer," his self-reflexive evaluation. On another occasion he says that he merely recounts facets of the

human condition for which only God knows the cause. Agnon—and his narrator—indeed writes in the Holy Tongue but rather than a metaphorical scribe creating scrolls he is writing fiction, stories that have no basis in the sacred texts. He is not performing a service to God, but to art.

The condition of many of Agnon's protagonists in other works is to yearn for fidelity to traditional Jewish life with its embodied holiness, but to suffer from a kind of inertia. What they seek is conviction, not spirituality, perhaps not even faith, but a rootedness in the framework of Jewish knowledge, practice and tradition, of Jewishness rather than Judaism, to counter the destructiveness of modern urban life, a leading challenge to Jewish traditional values. In the novel's technological world the telephone interferes with a man's rest and tranquility, the theater offers its audiences licentiousness, submarines, representing all the technology of warfare, lurk under the sea, and newspapers replace the biblical text. Despite all his efforts to engage Rabbi Jonathan, to study Talmud, to recall the sages of many generations, the narrator does not find the reconciliation he is seeking between the old world and the new, Torah and literature, Leipzig and Jerusalem, Rabbi Jonathan and Mr. Lublin's store.

While generally in the novel the relationships between the Jews and Christians are comfortable and sometimes even affectionate, the narrator occasionally utters less than positive remarks about the gentiles, often couched in the language of tradition. Anti-Semitism and oppression, while never explicitly discussed in the context of the story, are rarely deep below the surface. The Galician Jews in Leipzig have endured displacement and exile, not only as war victims but specifically as Jews, the narrator mentions figures in the history of anti-Jewish persecution, such as the vicious Jew-hater Bogdan Khmielnitski, together with a collection of lesser known anti-Semitic figures. A character mentions Mendel Beilis, the victim of a blood libel, a scene in the novel depicts the spread of a slanderous anti-Jewish rumor and in another episode a poor Jewish woman is abused by a gentile neighbor who lets pigs into her garden—until she is rescued by a gentile judge.

The novel is, then, about the war, about the relationship between the German and Jewish populations, about Leipzig and its culture, including theater and music, about Jewish culture and religion, about numerous individuals both real and fictional, and it is also about the

narrator himself, the lapsed Torah scholar. He deeply admires Nora Lublin, he admits that he is fond of Mr. Lublin, he is flattered by Lublin's friendship and perhaps after all there is more of Lublin in him than he cares to acknowledge. He spends his days working in a bookstore rather than studying, visiting friends in Leipzig, welcoming young women to his room, strolling through the city and sitting in its cafés. He goes with Lublin to the theater, followed by a good meal in a restaurant. He is inordinately grateful to be allowed to remain in Leipzig and rarely mentions his years spent in the Holy Land, nor barely refers to thoughts of return. Yet his inner life, the one that predominates in Mr. Lublin's store, is perhaps, contrarily, more real that his authentic existence in modern Leipzig.

Generally the novel's characters, anecdotes and scenes collate to form an intelligible picture of a vibrant society that lingered for a while after the First World War and was annihilated by the Second. Agnon, writing after the Holocaust, looks back to a few generations of German Jews and non-Jews who lived together in comparative harmony while on the very brink of disaster. With the war came modernity and the sweeping away of all the old traditions, including the tradition of Jewish-German cooperation.

Glenda Abramson
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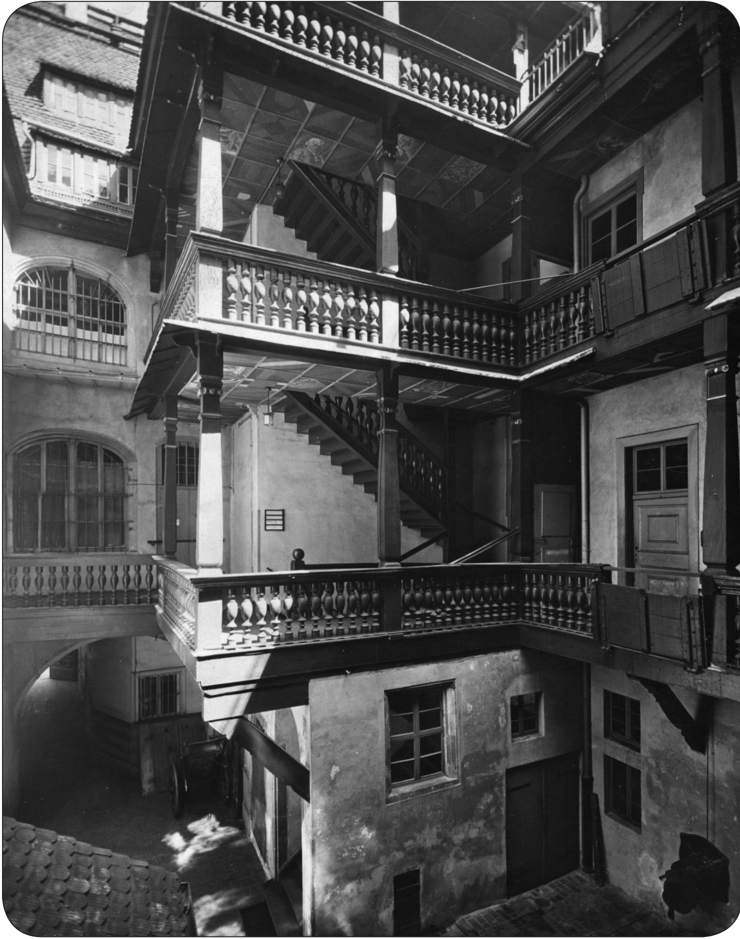
NOTES

[1] Letter of February 20, 1917 in *S.Y. Agnon – S.Z. Schocken: Ḥilufey Igrot [Letters]* (Schocken, 2003), Letter #31, p. 42.

[2] Herman Wouk, "Agnon in Jerusalem: A Reminiscence and a Teaching," *Bar Ilan University: Distinguished Rennert Lectures* (1998), p. 4; see also his *The Language God Talks* (Little, Brown & Co., 2010), epigraph and p. 119.

[3] Dan Miron, "German Jews in Agnon's Work," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 23:1 (1978), p. 275.



Old Courtyard off of Böttchergässchen (Böttcher Street), Leipzig, containing a warren of offices, warehouses, and workshops, presumably the model for the setting of Mr. Lublin's store, after 1928 (courtesy of Stadtgeschichtliches Museum, Leipzig).

The Leipzig Fregehaus (18c. Baroque-style merchant house) as seen looking down Böttchergässchen, with two print-workers standing in archway, c. 1938 (courtesy of Stadtgeschichtliches Museum, Leipzig).