

2. ENCOUNTERS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Yosel ben Todros

S. Y. Agnon on the Language of Ashkenaz

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Jews of the Ashkenazi diaspora spoke, read, and wrote in two languages: Hebrew and Yiddish. In his work S. Y. Agnon touched on the historical duality that characterized the German language in the culture of Galician Jews after they were incorporated into the Habsburg empire. The state-sponsored linguistic shift from Yiddish to German, which took place over the course of the nineteenth century in the cities and towns of Galicia, was presented by him in an extremely negative light. This was the source of his hostility to the writer Joseph Perl, whose modern school undermined the socio-linguistic base which had preserved the cultural unity of the Ashkenazi diaspora.

J EWS OF THE ASHKENAZI diaspora, which extended from the communities of Alsace and the Netherlands in the west to Lithuania and Ukraine in the east, spoke, read, and wrote in two languages: Hebrew, the holy tongue (*loshn-koydesh*), and the 'language of Ashkenaz' (*loshn-ashkenaz*).¹ The bilingualism of Ashkenazi culture, which had evolved over many centuries, was shaped by historical, geographical, and demographic factors and influenced by social determinants including class and gender. *Loshn-ashkenaz*, which was called both *yidish* (Jewish) and *teutsh* (German), not only was the everyday vernacular of men, women, and children but was also used for writing and as a vehicle for literary expression in both prose and poetry. This cultural-linguistic system existed in the context of a multigenerational contact with two linguistic systems much larger than itself—to which it was related, whose influences it absorbed, and on which it also exercised its own influence, although to a lesser degree—German and Slavonic. The interaction between Yiddish, with all its dialectal diversity, and German over the past several hundred years is an important chapter in European Jewish history and an insufficiently researched cultural-linguistic episode in the development of modern Israeli culture.²

In much of the Ashkenazi diaspora, German was the language of the non-Jewish environment and frequently also the state language. As a result, the influence of Yiddish in the west persisted for a shorter period than in the eastern areas of Ashkenazi Jewry. An exception to this was constituted by the Jewish communities in southwestern Ukraine, where German served as the state language from the end of the

eighteenth century until the end of the First World War (alongside Polish from 1866). In the province of Galicia, an administrative unit that came into being after the incorporation into the Kingdom of Austria in the summer of 1772 of extensive territories of the Kingdom of Poland, the bilingual reality was similar to that of other regions of the eastern Ashkenazi diaspora. However, one feature that distinguished it from other Jewish communities in eastern Europe from the time of the annexation was that German became the official state language. The adoption of German by Yiddish speakers in Galicia became an exceptionally fraught issue in the modern era. Because of its connection with ideology, religion, politics, and society, the transition from Yiddish, the traditional vernacular language of Ashkenazi Jews, to German, the state language, became an essential signifier of the processes of modernization.³

In this chapter, I will discuss how S. Y. Agnon (1887–1970), one of the key figures of modern Hebrew literature, dealt with a central issue in the history of Galician Jewish culture: the transformation in the status of the German language among Jews following the annexation of the region to the Austrian empire and Jewish society's attitudes to the changes this brought about. However, before approaching the question of Jewish attitudes to German in Galicia, it is necessary to examine the larger question of Agnon's attitude towards Germany, German Jews, and Jewish culture in the German language, which conditioned his understanding of the Galician reality.

'The Jewish spirit was so totally dominated by Germany'

Agnon belongs to the not insignificant group of east European Jews who were exposed to the influence of Western culture in its German incarnation. Born in the late nineteenth century in Buczacz (Buchach), a small town in Eastern Galicia, today in Ukraine, the course of his life took him away from the traditional fabric of Jewish existence. As a result he found himself forced to choose between two alternative cultural-linguistic systems, German and Polish, something that was typical of many of his contemporary compatriots.⁴ The influence of the German language on his oeuvre was certainly greater than that of Polish, although the history and culture of Poland and the Polish language spoken in the environment of his childhood and youth is also clearly evident in his writings.⁵ During his youth, he read European literary works in German translation and subsequently even experimented with writing in the language. In 1908 he emigrated to the Land of Israel, and in 1913 he travelled to Germany, where he remained until 1924. In that year Agnon returned to the Land of Israel, making his home in Jerusalem, where he associated with a group of Jewish intellectuals and scholars, émigrés from Germany who developed and sustained what might be described as 'islands' of central European language and culture. In the Land of Israel, Agnon continued to maintain the complex relationship of an Ostjude (east European Jew) to German cultural heritage in its Middle Eastern incarnation. The Nazis' rise to power and the fate of German Jewry, now summarily ejected from the soil that had nurtured it, which he observed both at first hand and from a distance, had a major impact on Agnon's literary treatment of issues

concerning the German language. In his novel *Shira*, which is set in Jerusalem under the British Mandate, readers encounter Agnon's explicit account of the complex nature of the impact of the German Jewish heritage on his own life—in Galicia, Germany, and the Land of Israel.

The hero of the novel, Manfred Herbst, a Byzantine historian, leaves Germany in the 1920s to take up a position at the newly founded Hebrew University. His decision arouses incomprehension among most of his German friends and relations. For them, Germany is the exemplary Western country and has also been an object of admiration and longing for many east European Jews from the early Haskalah until the end of the First World War. With the rise of the Nazis in 1933, this land of promise turned overnight from an idealized homeland or destination into a place from which Jews hoped to flee—even seeking refuge in an 'Eastern' country, Palestine, which was not only Middle Eastern but also east European in character. In the novel, Agnon describes the paradoxical situation of German Jews unexpectedly forced to leave their place of birth:

Many of the Herbsts' relatives had remained behind in Germany. Upon hearing that Henrietta and Manfred were going to the Land of Israel, they had sneered at them for leaving a highly cultured country for an arid wilderness. When they heard Manfred had been appointed lecturer at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, they were astonished to learn that Jerusalem had a university. When they heard lectures were given there in Hebrew, they were astonished that the language still existed. Between yesterday and tomorrow, events occurred in Germany—a country that was now transformed into an inferno—the very country about which it was said: 'Every Jew should bless God daily for living there.' Now they wandered from land to land . . . But, in the end, they were helpless among the mass of supplicants, including the Herbsts' relatives, who were left with no options other than Palestine.⁶

The contrast that most Weimar Jews before 1933 had assumed existed between Germany's high culture and the culture of the Land of Israel is presented ironically by Agnon in an 'orientalist' perspective which combines German Jewish condescension towards the customs and lifestyles of their backward co-religionists in eastern Europe with denigration of the Asiatic 'East'. An elderly Jew, 'who was born in the province of Poznań', a relative of Manfred Herbst's wife, had mocked Manfred for accepting a lectureship at the Hebrew University, which he compares to a *heder* of Polish Jews.

One day, my father took me to a poor neighborhood. We went into a crumbling building. I peered inside and saw shabbily dressed boys crowded together on narrow benches, reading in shrill voices from tattered books, their words a jumble of the holy tongue and ordinary jargon [Yiddish]. A skinny man stood over them, wielding a cane and a strap, groaning, grunting, and spitting . . .

What is the point of this tale? The Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where our good friend Manfred was appointed lecturer, is the point. I don't suppose the university in Jerusalem is exactly like the school my father threatened me with in my childhood. But most

likely it is similar; otherwise, why would the Zionists want to create a Hebrew university in Jerusalem, when they could send their children to universities in Germany? What role is there for Hebrew in our time, our forefathers having renounced it? And what do we, the Jews of Germany, need with Jerusalem?⁷

This stereotypical description of a drab east European *heder* and its bad-tempered *melamed* pokes fun at the traditional Ashkenazi style of learning which was bilingual: *loshn-koydesh* and Yiddish. From the late eighteenth century critics of traditional Jewish education had sought to replace the corrupted Yiddish used by *melamedim* in the *heder* with *Hochdeutsch*, a language that could be acquired in the schools of the state. It is no coincidence that Agnon placed this critique in the mouth of an elderly Jewish man from Poznań, an area that had been part of Poland–Lithuania until the end of the eighteenth century. After the incorporation of the area into Prussia, its Jewish residents had been subject to a rapid process of Germanization and came, through migration, to constitute a large part of Berlin Jewry. Their acquisition of German culture during the long nineteenth century entailed a rejection of their affiliation with their east European cultural heritage. Leaving Germany, the land of high culture, before 1933 to move to an obscure and remote Jerusalem thus appeared to many German Jews a retrograde return to this scorned cultural heritage. Agnon was well aware of the project of German-language state schools to Germanize the local Jews that was instituted in Prussian Poland. It clearly had echoes of the Austrian regime's policy of Germanizing the Jewish population of Galicia from the end of the eighteenth century (I discuss Agnon's description of this policy below). To him, these attempts at Germanization were deeply imprinted in the collective memory of east European Jews.

The trauma that German Jews experienced with the horrific discovery that the culture they admired in the language they adored had—in the blink of an eye—become the culture of a hostile polity was an issue that much preoccupied Agnon. It was, of course, a trauma to which hundreds of thousands of other Jews throughout Europe were also subjected. German émigrés in Jerusalem brought with them magnificent libraries, transplanting the riches of European culture—and German culture in particular—into the sweltering city. In *Shira*, Agnon described at length the libraries of Jerusalemite scholars, most of them professors at the recently founded Hebrew University,⁸ to which he added the reflections of Manfred Herbst on the nature of German literature. Herbst, who 'was reared on German poetry',⁹ goes back to reading it in Jerusalem, only to discover its antisemitic essence which had escaped his notice during earlier readings:

Herbst was aware that Germany was afflicted with a big dose of antisemitism, so that, of all the Hebrew words fixed in the tongues of German Jews, the word *rishus*, meaning 'viciousness' was most widespread. But he never considered the change in its meaning, for now one says *rishus* to warn Jews to behave in this or that manner so as not to provoke Germans to be vicious, that is, to behave badly toward Jews . . .

When Herbst went back to those books, he realized that even the finest of Germany's

lyricists did not eschew such viciousness, that they celebrated and transformed it into a virtue, giving their approval to all manner of cruelty toward Jews. In the course of this, they distorted words, twisted the straight, perverted justice. But truth is so great that it is evident even in a lie. They meant to portray the Jew as a paradigm of evil . . . It is worth mentioning here that many slanderous and vicious books were given to Herbst by Jews for his barmitzvah. The Jewish spirit was so totally dominated by Germany that Jews didn't realize how much hatred permeated these books. But what the Jews did not recognize was recognized by the Germans, who learned what they learned.¹⁰

As this passage reveals, Agnon had a very harsh view of what he saw as the illusion of Jewish–German symbiosis. This had resulted in a crisis, the roots of which were to be found in what he regarded as the blindness produced by the (apparently) successful acculturation of German Jewry. Exchanging the traditional culture of *loshn-ashkenaz* for non-Jewish culture enslaved many Jews in Germany to an anti-semitic discourse, without them even being aware of the internal transformation they had undergone. Manfred Herbst, wholly saturated in Western culture, had to come to terms with the implosion of the world of the Western Enlightenment, a world to which Ashkenazi Jews had been in thrall since the beginning of the *Haskalah*. The spirit of the Enlightenment and the quasi-messianic optimism it inspired in its followers became the mainstay of their thinking, beliefs, feelings, and modes of conduct. They gained access to this spirit through the mediation of German. A few generations later they experienced the rough rejection of the heritage of the Enlightenment in their own homeland, a rejection which was also unequivocally expressed in German.

Paradoxically, while Manfred Herbst ponders the harmful influences of German literature, one of his daughters, Tamara, discovers the beauty and profundity of German culture on her father's bookshelves:

Even Tamara, who can barely read German, began taking books off these shelves. When she had finished her courses and received a teachers' certificate, she had discarded all the books about yeshiva students, old men with earlocks, beggars, and eccentrics of all kinds—all those types celebrated by Hebrew literature—and turned to books in other languages that told about real people, the kind whose thoughts and actions a civilized person is interested in. After reading everything that has been translated into Hebrew, she began reading English and even German. It is an odd thing: visitors who come from Germany say that, since the Nazi rise to power, they have begun to value a single line of Hebrew more than all of Goethe and Kant; yet this girl, conceived, born, and educated in the Land of Israel, whose friends were all born there, who speaks Hebrew fluently—she replaces Hebrew books with Gentile books and, what is more, she calls the Hebrew books 'drivel'.¹¹

Agnon thus calls into question the new Hebrew literature that was meant to serve as the foundation for the flourishing of a modern Hebrew culture in the Land of Israel. He points out the dangerous attractiveness of European literature generally and of German literature in particular, as against Hebrew literature whose east European themes had been imported into the country together with the *Ostjuden*. The

German cultural ideal seeped out of the libraries transported by the Ashkenazi immigrants into the minds and hearts of the Jews who were born in the Land of Israel and engendered in the ancestral land a kind of renewed assimilation—a replaying under different circumstances, but with similar results, of the same harmful process that their forefathers had undergone in Germany. Paradoxically, according to Agnon, those who remained immune to this new form of cultural assimilation, exemplified in Herbst's admiration for Greek philosophy, were precisely the Jews of his native Galicia. This was the result of the traditional Jewish education they had received, which rendered them immune to the attractions of the European cultural tradition with its origins in Greece:

Others, who came from the study houses of Galicia, knew hardly anything about Greek cities beyond what appears in the Gemara and in Josephus. Macedonia, for example they related to [the talmudic] Alexander of Macedon; Athens, to the sages of the Athenian school and to Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah; Corfu, to [Jewish] newspaper items about its citrons on Sukkot . . . They were astonished to hear [Manfred Herbst in a lecture] refer to worldly scholars as *tsadikim*. Though they themselves had changed since childhood, their faith in these righteous *tsadikim* was intact. And who were the *tsadikim*? They were rabbis whose greatness was on the lips of everyone, the teachers of the hasidim. When these young people moved away from the Torah and began reading secular books, they found support for much of what they had heard.¹²

State Language and Dialect

And so Dan was in that remote place, an army regular. His fellow soldiers were all tall and husky and spoke a German [*loshn-ashkenaz*] that could not be understood by anyone not born there, certainly not by this young Jewish boy who was born and raised in Buczacz, where everyone spoke *loshn-yehudish*. If there was in Buczacz some enlightened person [maskil] who knew German, it was the flowery German of Schiller . . . The miracle was that this Jewish boy from Galicia who had no German, much less the literate German that even those who spoke it did not fully understand, was able to comprehend what his commanding officer wanted, and so he did not incur his wrath.¹³

Dan of Buczacz, the protagonist of the story 'Disappeared', is a Jew who has been conscripted into the Austrian army, who is subjected in the course of his military service to the linguistic melting pot that the state had established in Eastern Galicia. Military service and public education were the two main instruments employed by the centralizing European states from the eighteenth century onwards to disseminate the state language amongst its ethnically diverse subjects.¹⁴ Standard High German was to replace the local dialects in use in the German linguistic sphere. In this passage, Agnon is concerned with the cultural-linguistic system that a Yiddish-speaking east European Jew would have experienced in the kaiser's army. On the one hand, the Galician Jew was obliged to grapple with learning the state language used by his commanders. On the other, his knowledge of Yiddish needed to be sufficient

to understand something of the various German dialects spoken by the other conscripts.

In this encounter, Yiddish fulfilled a role similar to that of the German dialects from the empire's other provinces: a non-prestigious vernacular of inferior status that had been sidelined by the dominant language spoken by those who wielded power. Dan, a tailor from a poor family, would have probably acquired in his home town some knowledge of *Hochdeutsch*. But, like his co-conscripts, he did not belong to the social stratum that had acquired knowledge of literary German. Yiddish, presented here as a branch of the German language system, was an inferior dialect spoken by the lower classes (and women), but at the same time it was not unrelated to the state language and enabled its speakers gradually to shift from one language to the other through a process of Germanization.

Agnon here, in a consciously 'naive' manner, adopts the understanding of Yiddish held by many of the pioneers of the Haskalah. The maskilim were of the opinion that Yiddish was a bastardized form of German, whose original form had been corrupted over time by the Jews' forced relocations. According to their view, the best way to bring east European Jews back to the pure source of their spoken language was by replacing the Hebrew and Slavonic elements which play such a large role in the Yiddish language with their *Hochdeutsch* equivalents. Certainly, under the circumstances in which the empire sought to replace the Jewish population's language with the state language, the affinity between Yiddish and German played a significant role in the Jews' process of acculturation, because it could be perceived as one of many dialects of the state language.

'The entire book of Psalms as translated by R. Moyshe'

In his story 'Two Scholars Who Were in Our Town,' Agnon juxtaposed the normative status that the German language enjoyed among the Jews in the Ashkenazi cultural sphere preceding the Age of Enlightenment with its hostile image as a language that threatened the foundations of that same culture in the early years of Austrian rule in Galicia. As opposed to the passage cited earlier, which deals with the linguistic education of a young lower-class east European Jew, Agnon now addressed the place of German among the elites of that same society:

The emperor's troops arrived in the town's environs for training exercises, with the archduke in command. It occurred to the community elders that should the archduke come to town he would surely visit the great synagogue to bestow honour on the Jews. However, there was no one who knew how to deliver a sermon, especially in the state language. For in those days our town languished without a rabbi, with an aged *moreh hora'ah* serving in place of a rabbi. This *moreh hora'ah* was not accustomed to delivering sermons, even on Shabat Shuva or Shabat Hagadol, and, it goes without saying, certainly not in the languages of the nations. They considered bringing a preacher from Tarnopol [Ternopil] from among the students of Yosel ben Todros, known as Joseph Perl.

However, Reb Shlomo offered to take up the task: 'I will deliver the sermon and I am

confident that the merit of my sacred ancestors, whose righteousness endures, will sustain me.' All were delighted that there would be no need to engage a preacher devoid of Torah and *mitsvot*, and they were astonished that Reb Shlomo was willing to deliver a sermon in a language to which he was not accustomed, because, if he erred or stumbled, it could only be for the worse not for the better. The entire town prayed that he would not trip over his own tongue and that his words would be pleasing to the archduke. The prayers did their share, and Reb Shlomo's talent took care of the rest, so that when Reb Shlomo stood by the Holy Ark it was truly a holy moment . . . And yet, it wasn't a miracle at all, inasmuch as Reb Shlomo knew by heart the entire book of Psalms as translated by R. Moyshe [Moses Mendelssohn] and also most of the *piyutim* [liturgical poems] that Reb Wolf Heidenheim had translated. He had also learned something from his wife who was fluent in German [*loshn-ashkenaz*]. This sermon brought him fame throughout the land. Reb Shlomo, however, tried to downplay it, so that it shouldn't be said he gained acclaim by means of the German language [*loshn-ashkenaz*] and so as not to create an opening for the 'new maskilim' to try and curry favour with him.¹⁵

In this story, Reb Shlomo represents a generation of Torah scholars that carried the general Ashkenazi tradition of the early modern period into the first half of the nineteenth century. The rabbis and scholars in question were part of a cultural network extending from western Europe to the eastern part of the continent, whose members were not divided by the anachronistic boundary between Westjuden and Ostjuden. Members of the pan-Ashkenazi Torah elite married each other, obtained rabbinical appointments in communities that were distant from their native communities, and took part in debates and controversies that spread throughout Europe. The uniformity of Ashkenazi culture on the cusp of the modern period finds its most outstanding expression in the fact that the language of Yiddish literature in print was western Yiddish and in the existence of a close relationship between writing and publishing in western Yiddish and the employment of *Hochdeutsch* (written in the Hebrew alphabet) in the eighteenth century by Jewish scholars, some of whom were among the pioneers of the Haskalah. A number of them who belonged to the milieu of Moses Mendelssohn and participated in his projects of translating the Bible into German and preparing a German-language Bible commentary circulated between Jewish cultural centres in eastern Europe and the communities of western Europe. One such case was Rabbi Shlomo of Dubno (1738–1813), who collaborated on Mendelssohn's *Bi'ur* (Bible commentary) and whose career is described by Zuzanna Krzemień.¹⁶ He may have studied in Galicia under Rabbi Solomon ben Moses of Chelm, a rabbinical scholar best known for his multi-volume *Mirkevet hamishneh*, and was subsequently active in Berlin, Vilna, and Amsterdam.

The protagonist of Agnon's story, Reb Shlomo, exhibits a mastery of German. He draws on Mendelssohn's German translation of the Psalms, which he knows entirely by heart, and the translation of *piyutim* by Wolf Heidenheim. Both these texts were written in *Hochdeutsch*, which became the language of culture and literature in some of the German states during the latter half of the eighteenth century. The central point here is that within Agnon's oeuvre, Reb Shlomo represents a historical-

linguistic phase of Jewish culture in which pre-modern Ashkenazi bilingualism was an integral part of the traditional way of life.

‘The Vicissitudes of Time’

In his story ‘The Vicissitudes of Time,’ Agnon observed:

One more law decreed by the Kingdom of Austria, dictated that a man must give his family a name in the German tongue. Not like Isaac son of Abraham, or Jacob son of Isaac, or Joseph son of Jacob, or Moses son of Amram, or David son of Jesse, but a name contrived by the Gentiles. Thenceforth, the name of every Jew was divided: to the Torah he was called by his name in the Holy Tongue, while outside he was called by a name in the foreign tongue. The holy name of the families of Israel was uprooted, and they were called by a new name previously unknown to them or their fathers. And even the name of a Jew given to him the day he entered the covenant was changed to the foreign tongue. And if the official appointed by the emperor to hand out names to the Jews was a cruel Gentile or a jester, he would give every Jew who came before him a humorous or a disparaging name.¹⁷

With the partition of Poland–Lithuania in the late eighteenth century, Jews of the former commonwealth were exposed to an energetic bureaucratic assault of censuses, registration of residents, and issuing of passports and birth and death certificates. All of these actions were essential for increasing the efficiency of surveillance over subjects of the centralized states into which the commonwealth had been partitioned, and they were not innovations specifically motivated by antisemitism.¹⁸ However, the bureaucratic transformations that were taking place in Prussia, Austria, and the tsarist empire did pose a threat to the traditional identity of the Jewish communities and were harbingers of a cultural shift. They linked the aims of the enlightened absolute rulers for the acculturation of native east Europeans—transformations of language, dress, and commercial activities—with the state’s official documentation. Thus, the changing of Jewish names and the imposition of surnames became a fraught ideological issue, which was associated in Jewish collective memory with the Exodus from Egypt and the Hellenizing Jews of the Second Temple Period, two definitive events of ancient Jewish history that had been immortalized for generations in hallowed texts and religious ceremonies. However, the existence of dual names that Agnon alludes to—a foreign (German) name for the needs of the state and a Jewish name for all sacral purpose—was not an innovation in Ashkenazi culture which first appeared in the times of Kaiser Joseph II (or in the other regions of partitioned Poland in the days of Frederick the Great or Tsar Alexander I). For centuries prior to the emergence of centralized state bureaucracies, both boys and girls had been given names in *loshn-ashkenaz*, which served them in their daily life, alongside their names in *loshn-koydesh*. In the Ashkenazi diaspora, a special ceremony was customarily held in which a Yiddish name was given to a newborn. *Hollekreisch* was the name of the secular naming ritual of a boy, a few days after his circumcision. A similar ritual was customary for the secular

naming of a girl.¹⁹ In the case of dual names, too, Agnon appears to distinguish between the age-old use of secular names in *loshn-ashkenaz*, which was, in his view, entirely legitimate, and the modern use, which he utterly rejected as contrary to the spirit of Jewish tradition because of his resistance to any adoption of non-Jewish customs. The pre-modern unity of the ritual name (in Hebrew or Aramaic) and the secular name (in Yiddish) had been violated, Agnon believed, because of the new meaning and the non-traditional context in which secular names were given in Galicia under Austrian rule.

'It fixed them up with schools'

The Kingdom of Austria had its say over the big things as well as the little things. It fixed them up with schools and put teachers in charge of teaching them the German language and writing and the sciences of the nations. What is wrong with that? Certainly, if one is to write and speak, a man must know the language and writing of the country, and as for the sciences of the nations, the first sages, who were great and righteous, praised highly the seven liberal arts. However, the righteous meant their study should be undertaken for the sake of the Torah, for the wiser one is, the closer one is to the Torah. Those teachers, on the contrary, meant to distance their pupils from the Torah and bring them closer to the laws of the Gentiles. And their end proves its beginning, since 'they spoiled their dish'. And they would give evil counsel about Israel, and the kingdom would hear it and add decree after decree.²⁰

Here Agnon reveals his view of the network of German-language schools established by the Austrian authorities in Galicia during the reforms of Joseph II (1780–90).²¹ The maskil Naphtali Hertz Homberg (1749–1841), whose name was execrated in the collective memory of pious Jews in Galicia, was appointed in 1787 as supervisor of this network. During the years in which he worked for the Austrian government, Homberg had supported the candle tax imposed by the government on the Jews in 1797, which bore particularly harshly on the Jewish poor. He was also involved in other activities that were perceived as attacks on Jewish tradition. Agnon's statement about the teachers who "spoiled their dish". And . . . would give evil counsel about Israel, and the kingdom would hear it and add decree after decree' seems to be a thinly veiled attack on Homberg, drawing on the way he was seen in traditional Jewish society of his time. There is little basis for this view. As Rachel Manekin has demonstrated:

Homberg was not an agent of the Berlin Haskala. He went back to Austria because he supported Josephine Enlightenment and fit in within the system that was implementing it. That system, religious at its core, pursued a policy of relative tolerance, made education mandatory for all, advocated state rule over the Church, and worked to create some uniformity in the multinational and religious Empire by emphasizing the ideas of state and patriotism.²²

According to Manekin, Homberg was not a radical maskil. She has demonstrated most convincingly that the maligned figure, regarded so negatively by traditional

Jewish society and familiar today from later academic research and popular literature, is to a large degree the figment of the Viennese Jewish historian Gershom Wolf, who distorted the information in his sources about Homberg's activities and ideas to create a new figure of the immoral maskil, a collaborator with the secular state, whose opinions were radical and whose dealings corrupt.²³ On the question of the schools founded by the empire for the Jews of Galicia, Agnon gives a similarly distorted view of contemporary Jewish attitudes. Ostensibly, 'The Vicissitudes of Time' describes a point of view widely held in the towns of the region at the time that these government schools were under Homberg's supervision: adamant religious opposition to secular studies in the state language and a campaign against the heretical and corrupt maskilim who collaborated with hostile authorities. This was widely held to be the actual Jewish position on this question, the *vox populi*, as it were, that clearly represented the spirit of the people. In truth, this is one of numerous cases in which Agnon makes anachronistic use of the academic and popular research of his own time. This literature had established—exhibiting at the same time an extraordinary consensus between the die-hard Orthodox, ardent nationalists, and avid socialists—the dichotomy familiar today in the Jewish and Israeli cultural-political discourse between secular studies in the state language and religious studies in the traditional language. According to this clear and simple polarization, those who support only the first undermine the foundations of the nation's existence, whereas those who support only the latter are protecting the boundaries of the Jewish people.²⁴ In this way, Agnon perpetuated the notion—which fails to take into account the complexity of the actual cultural processes that took place—that the Galician maskilim, including also Joseph Perl, were radical thinkers and extremists in their rejection of traditional values, far more than is warranted from what is evident in the sources. Here again is the dichotomy previously encountered in Agnon's writing between the legitimacy accorded to early eighteenth-century maskilim to study the state language and undertake secular studies, and the lack of legitimacy with which the Orthodox gatekeepers of the nineteenth century regarded the acquisition of the German language and the investigation of 'the wisdom of the nations' (such as mathematics, history, and geography).

Conclusion: The Janus Face of *loshn-ashkenaz*

S. Y. Agnon touched on the historical duality that characterized the German language in the culture of Galician Jews at the time of their transition from a pre-modern autonomous community to subjects of an empire. He gave literary expression to the socio-linguistic transformation that took place in the parts of Poland that were incorporated into the Austrian empire, describing in his writings the resulting changes. He sought to provide literary 'testimony' to the complexity of the process of acculturation taking place in Galicia. In his view, German (or more accurately Judaeo-German) continued to be considered *loshn-ashkenaz* within Jewish society until the nineteenth century, a pan-European Jewish language that had united

Jewish communities in the early modern period, and still did. At the time the boundaries between German and Yiddish were for the most part blurred. Conversely, during the period of Austrian rule in Galicia, the concept of German as the language of non-Jews—a language that had become more menacing at this time because of the significant role it played in undermining the world of tradition—gained strength. During the early modern era, before the emergence of modern national movements, an ‘imperial language’ (more precisely, one or other of its dialects) could also simultaneously be used as the vernacular tongue of Ashkenazi society. In this situation, a scholar of the older generation could deliver a sermon in what passed for German while drawing knowledge from the works of Moses Mendelssohn and the *piyut* translations of Wolf Heidenheim, and relying on his wife’s expertise in the language for assistance. This scholar, and others like him, were, as Agnon put it, ‘the early maskilim’, who knew how to make proper use of *teutsh*.

However, in the generations that followed the partitions of Poland (1772–95), the ‘new maskilim’ used the state language in a harmful manner. They viewed the shift from Yiddish to German as a crucial ingredient of the social and cultural change they sought to initiate among Jews. Certainly they knew how to deliver sermons in eloquent German but, unlike their predecessors, they were ‘devoid of Torah and *mitsvot*’. This historical shift, which took place in the course of the nineteenth century in the cities and towns of Galicia, was presented by Agnon in an extremely negative light. This was the source of his hostility to Joseph Perl, whom he mockingly referred to (and in Yiddish at that!) as Yosel ben Todros. This major maskilic author, who had himself founded a modern school in his city of Tarnopol, was, according to Agnon, the agent of secularization and assimilation into an alien culture—a culture whose language (German) threatened the values of traditional Jewish society and undermined its socio-linguistic base (the diglossia of *loshn-koydesh* and *loshn-ashkenaz*) which had enabled its undisturbed existence for generations.

Translated from the Hebrew by Ilana Goldberg

Notes

- 1 On bilingualism in Ashkenazi society, see U. Weinrich, *Geshikhte fun der yidisher shprakh: bagrifn, fakten, metoden*, 2 vols. (New York, 1973), i. 320–51; I. Bartal, ‘Midu leshoniyut masortit lehad leshoniyut le’umit’, *Shevut*, 15 (1991/2), 183–94; Eng. trans.: ‘From Traditional Bilingualism to National Monolingualism’, in L. Glinert (ed.), *Hebrew in Ashkenaz: A Language in Exile* (New York, 1993), 141–50.
- 2 For an exhaustive summary of the historical vicissitudes in the relations between Hebrew, Yiddish, and German, see I. Bartal, ‘Loshn-ashkenaz be’erets hakodesh: germanit, yidish, ve’ivrit yisra’elit’, in E. Etkes, D. Asaf, and J. Kaplan (eds.), *Avnei derekh: masot umehkarim behistoryah shel am yisra’el, shai litsevi (kuti) yekuti’el* (Jerusalem, 2015), 277–83.
- 3 On the acquisition of German among Galician Jewry, its political and social circumstances, and demographic dimensions, see J. Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia* (Cambridge, 2012), 16–30; R. Manekin, “Daytshen”, polanim o ostrim? dilemat hazehut shel yehudei galitsyah (1848–1851); *Zion*, 68 (2003), 223–62.

- 4 The complexity of the linguistic environment into which the author was born is revealed in how Dov Sadan (1902–89), himself a native of Eastern Galicia, so aptly described it: ‘Their language of speech at home and in the streets among themselves was not Polish but Yiddish, and their language of culture was not Polish but Hebrew, and their language of learning was not Polish but German, and the language of most of the populace was not Polish but Ruthenian’ (D. Sadan, ‘Rosh verishon – rosh mishum shehu rishon? hadugmah: tsemitat manhigut batsiyonut begalitsyah’, *Kevutsot ilut ushekhavot manhigut betoledot yisra’el uvetoledot ha’amin* (Jerusalem, 1967), 131–9: 135; see H. Hever, ‘Hasatirah hale’umit vekorbanah: politikah shel rov umi’ut le’umi bebine’areinu uvizekeneinu’, *me’et s. y. agnon*, *Iyunim bitekumat yisra’el*, 5 (1995), 455–72).
- 5 On the image of the Pole in the works of Agnon, see S. Verses, ‘Bein metsi’ut historit lete’ur sipuri: bein yehudim lepolanim bekhitvei s. y. agnon’, *Gal-Ed*, 11 (1989), 101–60; expanded Eng. trans.: *Relations between Jews and Poles in the Light of S. Y. Agnon’s Works*, trans. O. Wiskind (Jerusalem, 1994).
- 6 S. Y. Agnon, *Shirah* (Jerusalem, 1971), 352; Eng. trans.: *Shira*, trans. Z. Shapiro (Syracuse, NY, 1989), 356.
- 7 Agnon, *Shirah* (Heb.), 352–3; id. *Shira* (Eng.), 357.
- 8 Agnon, *Shirah* (Heb.), 286–92; id. *Shira* (Eng.), 288–94.
- 9 Agnon, *Shirah* (Heb.), 292; id. *Shira* (Eng.), 294.
- 10 Agnon, *Shirah* (Heb.), 292–3; id. *Shira* (Eng.), 294–5.
- 11 Agnon, *Shirah* (Heb.), 172–3; id. *Shira* (Eng.), 170–1.
- 12 Agnon, *Shirah* (Heb.), 336; id. *Shira* (Eng.), 339.
- 13 S. Y. Agnon, ‘Hane’elam’, in *Ir umelo’ah* (Jerusalem, 1973), 448–86: 456.
- 14 On the 1788 conscription of Jews into the Austrian army, see M. K. Silber, ‘From Tolerated Aliens to Citizen-Soldiers: Jewish Military Service in the Era of Joseph II’, in P. M. Judson and M. L. Rozenblit (eds.), *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe* (New York, 2005), 19–36.
- 15 S. Y. Agnon, ‘Shenei talmidei hakhamim shehayu be’irenu’, in *Samukh venireh* (Jerusalem, 1954/5), 5–53: 14–15.
- 16 Z. Krzemień, ‘Solomon Dubno: An East European Maskil and the German Haskalah’, this volume.
- 17 S. Y. Agnon, ‘Tahapukhot hazeman’, in *Ir umelo’ah*, 446–7, 492–3: 492.
- 18 On the exposure of Jewish subjects to the imperial census in eastern Europe, see E. M. Avrutin, *Jews and the Imperial State: Identification Politics in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, NY, 2010).
- 19 Probably from the French ‘haut la crèche’ (raise the crib). During the ceremony, Torah verses were read, the words ‘Hollekreisch/Wie soll das Kind heiss?’ (‘Raise the crib/What will the child be called?’) were recited, and the mother would announce the secular name of the boy or girl (Y. T. Lewinsky, *Entsiklopedyah shel havai umasoret bayahadut* (Tel Aviv, 1970), 141).
- 20 Agnon, ‘Tahapukhot hazeman’, 492.
- 21 A number of important recent studies based on primary sources shed new light on the Josephinian education system in Galicia (see D. Sadowski, *Haskala und Lebenswelt: Herz Homberg und die jüdischen deutschen Schulen in Galizien 1782–1806* (Göttingen, 2010); id., ‘The Jewish German Schools in Galicia (1782–1806): School Reality and Corporate Resistance’, *Jewish Culture and History*, 13 (2012), 153–72; R. (T.) van Luit, ‘Homberg, Herz’, in G. D. Hundert (ed.), *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (New Haven,

Conn., 2008); T. van Luit, 'Paths of Modernity in Tradition's Strongholds: The German Jewish Schools as Arena for the Encounter between the Habsburg Absolutist Welfare State and the Galician Kahal', Ph.D. thesis (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2011); ead., *Paths of Modernity in Tradition's Strongholds: The German Jewish Schools as Arena for the Encounter between the Habsburg Absolutist Welfare State and the Galician Kahal* (forthcoming)).

- 22 R. Manekin, 'Herz homberg: hadmut vehadimui', *Zion*, 71 (2006), 153–202: 202.
- 23 See G. Wolf, *Studien zur Jubelfeier der Wiener Universität im Jahre 1865* (Vienna, 1865), 110–21; see also B. Wachstein, 'Bibliographie der Schriften Gerson Wolfs', *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in der Tschechoslowakei*, 1 (1930), 17–36.
- 24 A typical example within Jewish historiography of the 'nationalization' of the cultural-religious struggle in Galicia and its dichotomous representation based on Marxist theories can be found in the research of the Zionist Marxist historian Raphael Mahler:

In every area and every detail the Haskalah was the diametrical opposite of hasidism, an inversion that reflected the opposite interest and the contradictory world-view of two classes within the Jewish people, divided by a deep social chasm . . . The hasidim, fearful for Jewish tradition and adhering to the Yiddish language, were zealously hostile towards the slightest foreign cultural influence; the maskilim viewed as their primary vocation a cleaving to the dominant nation by means of language, dress, and external manners. For the hasidim, Galicia was an alien land. The Kingdom of Austria, a horrific subjugation to monarchy; whereas the maskilim competed with one another over their loyalty to the Austrian 'homeland', to the gracious king, and his kingdom of loving-kindness. (R. Mahler, *Haḥasidut vehahaskalah* (Merchavia, 1961), 75)

It seems that a writer identified with Orthodox Jewry would have barely altered a word of the characterization of the state of affairs in nineteenth-century Galicia.