

The half million Jews Austria received upon the first partition of Poland in 1772 was an equivocal gift. It doubled the number of Jews in the empire and presented Vienna with the sudden challenge of governing the populous new province of Galicia. Without the benefit of accurate or substantial demographic and economic data about the region, Maria Theresa and Joseph II did not hesitate to issue a raft of legislation aimed at bringing the Jews within the orbit of enlightened absolutism. What ensued in the following decades was a jittery dance between an incessant imperial desire to reshape Galician Jewry and a resourceful determination to resist that control. Agnon sets several of the major stories in *A City in its Fullness* within the turmoil caused by the Theresian-Josephine reforms, and these stories contain a surprise. Rather than allowing his Hebrew reader to settle comfortably into an opposition between gentile malevolence and Jewish resistance, Agnon subverts this binary and presents the new regime as merely an external pressure that reveals deep moral fissures within the Jewish community. (Yes, the news is grim, these stories imply, but the source of the evil is closer to home.)

The disorientation occasioned by the accession of Galicia was even greater for the Jews than it was for the Austrians. The Jews had lived for centuries within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a kind of fifth estate with a degree of judicial and communal authority. Some Jews lived on Crown lands, and others, like the Jews of Buczacz, lived in towns wholly owned and governed by wealthy nobles. Jews might be despised by their Polish overlords, but as a corporate entity they were often granted privileges on par with the Christian town dwellers. A willful seigneur could intervene in internal communal affairs and rabbinic appointments, as we have seen in several stories; yet commercial conflicts and acts of deviance and criminality were generally adjudicated in rabbinic courts. Persecutions occurred, of course, and Jews enjoyed few legal protections because the lord of the manor *was* the law; the lessee of a tavern or a mill who failed to produce enough income could be thrown into a stockade at the will of the master. But these eruptions of cruelty—*gezeirot* in Jewish parlance--were not the everyday norm, and they could usually be mitigated by bribes and ransoms. Compared with what was to come, moreover, these troubles had the advantage of being neither ideological nor bureaucratic. For better or worse, they represented a true picture of the irrational feelings of two groups living in close contact.

The lives of Galician Jews changed dramatically as the immediate consequence of a geopolitical development in which they had no role. (The Polish nobility and the Ruthenian peasantry were also profoundly affected.) Upon the Jews of Galicia, writes Stanislaw Gordziski,

“fell an avalanche of rules that changed their legal status, limited their autonomy, raised their taxes dramatically, imposed military service, and interfered deeply even in the sphere of private life. In contrast to the much rarer legal changes during the period of the ‘noble republic,’ a powerful administrative apparatus bolstered these legal amendments. It was difficult to evade the laws, dangerous to disobey them.”¹ Avalanche is an apt term because of the volume and suddenness with which laws and regulations were issued from the Austrian capital. Because the regime in Vienna was both enlightened *and* absolutist, it had a prolific enthusiasm for framing reforms as well as the unilateral power to legislate them. Many measures met significant opposition and evasion and went through many iterations; other measures, such as taxation and military conscription, were tightened over times. *and could not be escaped,*

This extremely complex story can be summarized for our purposes by listing seven areas in which Austria sought to impose changes on the Jews of Galicia. First, the regime sought to effect a process of Germanization by conducting all government business in German, requiring Jews to take German surnames and requiring German to be taught in schools. Although elementary Jewish schooling managed to resist the penetration of German and remain traditionalist, German names were widely adopted and the knowledge of the German language paved the path of many Galician Jews to the universities of Vienna. Second, as a strongly Catholic country, Austria tried to induce Jews to convert to Christianity; these efforts failed on a popular level, but legislation enabled forced child baptisms and made it impossible for someone once baptized to return to Judaism. Third, the Austrians resented the inordinate size of the Jewish population of Galicia and sought to reduce its numbers by requiring couples who wished to marry to be above a certain age, to obtain permission from the gubernatorial authorities and to prove their tax worthiness. The Jews generally evaded this regulation by entering into ritually sanctified unions, and the measure was eventually dropped. Fourth, the tax burden of Galician Jews was made much more onerous under the Austrians, and the Jews were made the target of a special candle tax (explained below), which was levied on no other group. Fifth, out of a desire to push Jews into agriculture, the Austrians forbade Jews from leasing taverns and mills, which represented a significant sector of the Jewish economy. This displaced a vast number of Jews and turned them into itinerant paupers, without creating any increase of Jews in the agricultural sector. Sixth, although Austria exploited the kahal (the council of elders) to enforce many of its decrees within the Jewish community, it severely limited the role of rabbinic authority and the

jurisdiction of Jewish courts, which were now largely limited to ritual matters. Last, in a move that was unprecedented in the historical experience of Polish Jewry, Jews were conscripted into the imperial army for long terms of service. In response to passionate outcries concerning kosher food and Sabbath observance, some accommodations were eventually made. But the demand for military service was never abrogated, and it was rigorously enforced.

All of these changes are referenced in *A City in its Fullness*. How could they not be in a work that seeks to convey the vicissitudes of Buczacz over the course of two hundred years? Yet, as became evident in the previous chapter, although Agnon takes history very seriously, his vocation as storyteller gives him license to make interventions in the historical record for what he regards as higher purposes. The Jews of Buczacz may in fact have been subservient to the will and whim of the lord of the city, but that circumstance does not prevent Agnon from imagining a set of events in which puissant Polish nobles are brought to acknowledge the wisdom and worthiness of their Jewish subjects. In a similar way, the Austrian accession is submitted to the Agnon imaginary. But this time the outcome takes a different direction. Instead of repairing the humiliation the Jews were forced to undergo, Agnon undertakes an unsparing critique of Jewish communal hypocrisy and indifference to suffering. The viewpoint becomes internal: The issue is not how the Jews deserve to be viewed in the eyes of the gentiles but how the Jews should view themselves. In "Disappeared," the greatest of these stories, Agnon takes the indictment beyond social criticism into the realm of the metaphysical. In a world from which the holy has been eliminated, he wonders, can the evil potential in human nature, Jew as well as gentile, be constrained? The march of history in Galicia at the turn of the nineteenth century does not offer much cause for optimism.

A City in its Fullness evinces a clear plan for apportioning fictional treatment of the major Austrian decrees. "Faivush The Enforcer" deals with the cruelties that attended the collection of the candle tax by Jewish tax farmers and their enforcers. "Yekele One" and "Yekele Two"—two versions of the same story, whose relationship will be discussed later—deal with the dictatorial conduct of the kahal and the marginalization of religious courts. "Disappeared" ^{next chapter,} deals with the social iniquity perpetrated by the community in satisfying the demand for Jewish young men to serve in the military. In each of these cases, the reader who comes across these stories in the later sections of *A City in its Fullness* is likely to experience something of a double-take. Suddenly torn down is the partition between the Jews, toiling

peaceably to make a living and serving their Creator, and the gentiles, exploiting the Jews for their gain while despising and occasionally beating them. All of a sudden, gentile malevolence is moved to the background and made into a real but remote condition of communal existence. The focus shifts to the violence visited by Jew upon fellow Jew, the powerful upon the weak, by the leaders of the community upon the marginal and voiceless.

FEIVUSH THE ENFORCER

All the peoples of Galicia were taxed heavily by the new masters, but the Jews were forced to pay additional taxes that applied only to them. Among these was the Lichtstuer??, the candle tax, which was instituted in 1797. Because Jews are ritually obligated to light a minimum of two candles on Sabbaths and holidays, ^{many were in practice --} placing a tax on candles proved an effective way to exact a stream of revenue from this group alone. Candles lit at weddings and other family celebrations were also taxable. The tax was geared to produce more income from the wealthy, who could afford more illumination in their homes. Although the tax was onerous and predatory, it did reflect some "enlightened" elements. Certain categories of Jews—unmarried women, widows, farmers, soldiers and apprentices—were exempted from the tax, and the collectors of the tax were enjoined from making their rounds of Jewish homes after noon on Friday. The collectors themselves were Jews employed by wealthy Jewish tax farmers, who subcontracted from one Sholomo Kobler in Levov, a Jew who had proposed the tax to the chancellery in Vienna and administered it on its behalf. The tax was in force until the revolution of 1848.² check

Of the burdens thrust upon Galician Jews by the new regime, the candle tax was especially loathed. The tax penetrated into Jewish domestic space and encroached upon the one time during the week when Jews turned inward and felt protected from the world. The legislation from Vienna ostensibly protected against overly aggressive collection practices. But as depicted in "Feivush the Enforcer," ^{Heb} the reality defied regulation from above. Feivush is the thug who is employed by the tax sub-contractor for Buczacz to enforce the payment of the tax. ^{on} Sabbath eves, Feivush takes two gentile helpers with him and makes the rounds of Jewish householders. He stomps into homes unbidden, and when he finds lit candles for which the tax has not been paid, he orders his helpers to extinguish not just the unpaid-for candles but all the

candles in the home. Aggrieved and affronted, the family must sit in the darkness, especially in the long winter evenings. Taken away is the pleasure of reviewing the weekly reading from the Torah; and even the eating of fish, so beloved ^{by} on Jews on the Sabbath, must be suspended for fear of choking on unseen bones. The insult is all the greater because the institution of the tax and its collection are the work of Jews.

This particular evil decree provides Agnon with the opportunity for a fictional exploration of how the community of Buczacz responds to the very existence of evil. In the eyes of Buczacz, Feivush is the embodiment of all that is base and villainous, and their victimization at his hands is viewed as another of the ordeals Jews are called upon to endure. Their accommodation to their fate is understood as an expression of the strength of their faith before God. It is this mixture of theological consensus and collective self-perception that is submitted to scrutiny and found wanting in the course of the story. Part of this deconstruction comes from what we are shown of Feivush's life. He turns out to be motivated by a banal industriousness and loyalty rather than venality, and his greatest desire is to enjoy the domestic respectability of a Jewish householder. When he and his wife are injured and crippled and then abandoned by his employer, Feivush is defanged and becomes an object of sympathy; and in contrast to the Jews of Buczacz, who have wholly domesticated the problem of theodicy, he refuses to be reconciled with the fate God has visited upon him. The other part of the deconstruction comes from the behavior of the good people of Buczacz, especially the denizens of the *beit midrash*. In their rush to vilify Feivush and arrogate moral superiority to themselves, they end up exposing the depths of their own violence, their indifference to suffering, and their denial of responsibility for their actions. In the final analysis, these deconstructions and reversals yield no Purim-like restoration of the moral balance. The story concludes with a dark vision of evil and cruelty as inscribed in the human condition rather than being an accident of historical victimization.

Here, as in all the stories in *A City in its Fullness*, the narrator takes us in hand and guides us through the moral and theological quandaries of the tale. Here, as well, this guidance is highly unreliable. As a chronicler of Buczacz, on the one hand, the narrator is obliged to lay out the facts of Feivush's life as they happened. But as a standard bearer of the values of Buczacz, on the other hand, the narrator "spins" those events in accord with his worldview, ^{and does not} as well as not restraining himself from overtly editorializing in an effort to shape the reader's attitudes. In "Feivush the Enforcer," the narrator is aligned with the moral consensus of the town, which

views Feivush as nothing more than a brute and his behavior execrable. His downfall is well deserved in this view, and it confirms the wisdom of Buczacz's stoic endurance of persecution. But in his role as implied author, Agnon works adroitly and subtlety to stoke our suspicions of the narrator's guidance and his apology for his townspeople. Agnon does this in a number of ways. He has the narrator mention competing perspectives in order to refute them, and, once they are mentioned, there is nothing to stop the reader from finding them more persuasive. His most effective tactic is allowing the narrator to ^{describe} Feivush's domestic sphere and inner ^{his} life, ^{and this} thus providing us with a more empathic grasp of the man, one the town either cannot see or is not interested in seeing. Finally, by further empowering the narrator at the end of the story to penetrate the sordid inner sanctum of the tax farmer who employed Feivush, we are afforded a glimpse of venality that wholly subverts the narrator's conformist piety.

A HOUSE ON STILTS

"Feivush the Enforcer" has a three-part structure. The first part (the prologue and chapters one) introduces us to Feivush and the secluded area of Buczacz where he has built his home and paints a general picture of the town's tribulations under the burden of the candle tax. The second part (chapters two through six) describes the events surrounding the injuries sustained by Feivush and his wife on one summer Sabbath. The third part (chapter seven, longer than all the rest) concerns Feivush's unsuccessful efforts to reinstate himself with his employer and to find theological reasons for his suffering, and it further describes the kindness extended by Buczacz to their handicapped former oppressor.

In presenting Feivush at the outset of the story, the narrator curiously has nothing to say about his ancestry or childhood and is wholly preoccupied instead with the location of his jerry-built house. The house stands in secluded little valley on an island formed by a bend in the Strypa and a canal dug to power a flour mill. Despite its proximity to the town proper, the valley is free from the stale urban air and graced by stands of willow trees and chirping birds. Yet no one except for Feivush lives there because of a series of inauspicious historical associations. It faces the ruins of a castle that the Tartar invaders forced the Polish nobles to tear down, and it is the location of a synagogue destroyed by Khmel'nitski. Most ominous of all is the fact that the

valley contains the ruins of the house in which Jacob Frank was born. Jacob Frank (1726–91) was the founder and leader of a sect that sought to perpetuate and ^{radicalise} develop the antinomian and anti-rabbinic teachings and practices of the messianic pretender Shabbatai Zevi (1626–76). (It is important to note that the historical evidence points to Frank's having been born in Karolivka, and Agnon is alone in asserting that his birthplace in Buczacz.) It is from the detritus of Frank's house that Feivush has built his own home. He has built it on stilts so he can pull up the ladder at night and feel entirely protected against intruders. In this beautiful but haunted spot, Feivush and his wife live "free as a bird with no worries about rent" (280).

On the face of things, it would seem that the narrator is merely doing due diligence in supplying us with information about the story's main character. Yet, ~~perhaps unwittingly~~, all the information supplied carries with it a floating sense of primordial unease. Unspoiled and verdant, the Valley of the Willows, as it is called, is truly an edenic site; but it is only at the expense of others that Feivush can live there freely and without rent. It is, furthermore, a limnal space in which he lives apart from the rest of Buczacz, intentionally disengaged from the bonds of mutual obligation that would make him part of the community. Most disturbing of all are the ruins and remainders of carnage and heresy that scar this idyllic site. The deep duality that attaches to this place foreshadows—and provides a spatial correlative to--the duality that will be exposed in the figure of Feivush. On the one hand, his brutishness and malice will be revealed to be merely the banal result of a desire to please his employer. But on the other, his ruthless work as an enforcer will ineluctably connect him to a genealogy of radical evil whose historical echoes still resonate in this rustic bower.

Further information about Feivush's name and his appearance raises similar questions about whether he himself is a source of malignity or whether he is principally an instrument for the malignity of others. When it comes to Feivush's name, the narrator offers a tortuous and withholding explanation.³

For reasons that I will keep to myself I will not call him by his real name but rather will call him Feivush. Why Feivush and not another name? Because he served Feivush the tax collector and gave his life for Feivush the tax collector's money and was ready to jump into Gehinnom for the sake of Feivush the tax collector. Therefore do I call him Feivush in the name of that other Feivush. (280)

We are surprised to discover that the infamous name of Feivush, which figures in the lore of Buczacz and gives the story its title, is a fraud. The narrator's coyness in withholding his true name only underscores the motives for the substitution. Because Feivush has made himself into the self-sacrificing tool of the tax contractor, ^{so} the narrator implies, he deserves to have his own name effaced. But does this act of renaming, [^] which the narrator arrogates to himself, exculpate Feivush from responsibility for the suffering he visits on others, or does it ineluctably fuse him with this source of evil?

Part of the answer is given when the narrator, in his role as ethnographer as well as chronicler, provides us with the text of a folk dirge that laments Feivush's cruelty. The fact it is in Yiddish is meant to attest to its popular origins, although the concluding couplet is in Hebrew and consists of a pastiche of biblical verses. The song depicts Feivush as a bogey monster capable of blotting out the light of the Sabbath created by God, and God in turn is admonished for tolerating Feivush's impudence. The song concludes with a curse: "Let him be burned together with his beard and his earlocks!" These signs of Jewishness are precisely the point; it is the fact that Feivush is one of us that rankles most deeply. In the end, it is the existence of the song as an artifact that connects it to the general line of Buczacz's response to persecution. Making a myth of Feivush, mildly complaining to God and cursing the evil, and wrapping these altogether into a song—all this affords Buczacz a mechanism for coping and denying at the same time. The greatness of Buczacz, the narrator will inform us more than once, lies in its capacity to accommodate itself to the sorrows placed upon it.

With Chapter Two, the story shifts to the fateful events of one summer Sabbath. It happens that year that Tisha b'Av (the ninth of the summer month of Av), the solemn fast day that commemorates the destruction of the Jerusalem temples and other calamities, falls on the Sabbath. Because fasting on the Sabbath is not allowed—except for Yom Kippur—the fast and its attendant rituals, such as reciting the Book of Lamentations, are shifted to Saturday night and Sunday.⁴ Because of this juxtaposition, the young men who sit in the beit midrash on that Sabbath afternoon turn their attention to the legends about the destruction of the temples in the talmuds and the midrash. It is not long before they make a connection between the great calamities of Jewish history and the present-day persecution of the candle tax. The idea of the tax, they point out, was originated by someone just like them, one Shlomo Kobler, a brilliant

Talmud student from a nearby Galician town. Kobler had hoped to marry the daughter of the Neta Sha'ashuim, the previous rabbi of Buczacz. When he was rebuffed, he went off to Vienna, and there, as a way of getting rich, he conceived of the idea of a candle tax and successfully proposed it ^{to} the court. Wealthy Jews bidded up the value of the contracts to enrich themselves, and this in turn [^] sharply increased the tax burden on the Jews. Thus was initiated the reign of domestic terror that snuffed out the joy of Sabbaths and weddings.

"There was no trouble that Israel suffered in which a Jew did not bear some responsibility" (284). This is the moral that sums up the discussion in the beit midrash. In one sense it is a worldly-wise position, because, rather than railing at the gentiles alone, it admits the complicity of Jews in their calamities. But in another important sense the admission is circumscribed because it clearly draws a line between rich and assimilating Jews on one side and the good folk of Buczacz and certainly the denizens of the beit midrash on the other. The latter remain safely ensconced in the conviction of their righteous victimhood. True, the category of persecutors has been enlarged to include unscrupulous Jews, but the "genealogy of morals" has not been altered fundamentally. The source of the persecution remains the implacable, millennial hatred of the nations for the Jews. As they sit in the beit midrash reading the legends of the Destruction, they perceive a direct line from Nebuchadnezzar, Titus and Vespasian to their home-grown oppressor Feivush the Enforcer.

GENEALOGIES OF EVIL

An alternative genealogy of evil is presented in the next chapter. ^[not] It is offered by an old man in ^{who sits} the beit midrash who is one of a small number of elders who stand apart from the rest of Buczacz because of the independent and critical stands they take toward the policies of the official community. ^{These clear} They are distinguished by their devotion to studying the books of the Bible, especially the Prophets, from which they derive their habit of speaking their minds on moral issues and even on occasion undertaking covert actions to right egregious wrongs. When it came to Austria's insistence on conscripting Jewish into the military, these men were particularly exercised by the community's practice of paying and detaining itinerant poor young man to substitute for the sons of the city's householders. And they took action rather than just talking.

One morning Buczacz awoke to find that "the room where the detainees were kept with its door open and the guard drunk, and all the young men who were to be sent to the army had vanished" (285). The narrator evinces an ambivalent attitude toward these elders. While he admires their cleverness and attention to Scripture, he thinks they "overdid their study of the biblical books," and he views them as a destabilizing element because they speak what is in their heart without regard for the powers that be. Yet despite this suspicion, the narrator—or rather the author behind the narrator—allows the old man to tell a story that offers a very different construal of Feivush's motive.

The story ^{he tells to younger men} concerns an impoverished and abashed young man who turns into an autocratic monster once he is given a little power. It is customarily the job of the shamash of the beit midrash to unlock a cabinet and distribute candles to students studying in the evening. When he had to be absent one day, the shamash asked the lad to perform this task in his place. Granted this moment of authority, the lad is transformed from being a "formless entity" ^{Heb?} into a frightening new creature. His body goes through physical changes, and he gazes on the rest of the learners, before whom he had formerly groveled, "the way a parnas would look at the dolts he would deliver up to the army" (286). He plays one recipient off against the other, switching "one candle with another even though they all were identical." The next time the shamash put him in charge, a message is tacitly conveyed to the lad when a burning candle is "accidentally" tipped over and burns his clothing and singes him as well.

Within the narrative syntax of the story, there is obvious relevance in the mention of candles, and the significance of a fire of suspicious origin will soon become evident. But it is the lesson the old man derives from the vignette that amply justifies the digression. He admits to his young listeners in the beit midrash that the oppression of Jews by Jews represented in the candle tax is shameful. ^{Referring to Jews for farmers} "If you want to use your money to make a living," he opines, "go and make it in a proper business and don't make money off Jewish blood." Nevertheless, he sees the case of Feivush the Enforcer as embodying a different truth.

When a hungry person hires himself out in order to put bread on the table, it is not he who determines his actions but the work that he engages in. The task he is assigned to perform, whatever it is, will undo him. The very fact that he is assigned to do something will unhinge him. Even if his heart tells him to do this and not that, his unsettled state will

disconcert him and subvert his actions. We see this in the cheerless way most of those charged with administering communal affairs walk around. Why are they cheerless? Because they are not at peace with themselves. What they do is not in line with what they believe. (285)

Human beings, in this view, are subservient to their needs and appetites, whether it is for food or ^{for} respect. And their nature is malleable. Given a job that puts food on the table and provides a legitimate license to exercise authority over others, an ordinary person, especially a person of low status or self-esteem, cannot help being undone and remade into a different creature. What ^{results} follows are acts of cruelty and evil. The evil may not be inherent in human nature, but a susceptibility to it most certainly is. Because this negative potentiality is universal, it makes little difference whether the heart in which it actualizes itself is Jewish or gentile. The source of the evil is therefore not the millennial hatred of the nations for the Jews or even the predisposition of Jews to become collaborators in their own persecution. Furthermore, because the evil is potentially resident in all hearts, ^{even in the heart of} like those of the young denizens of the beit midrash, ^{who are} who are quick to establish a *cordon sanitaire* between themselves and perpetrators of evil like Feivush. auto note

Feivush is a villain who, though he commits cruel acts, is following the orders of his employer, and at home he turns out to be a rather ordinary Jewish husband. It is difficult to assess his behavior without thinking about the issues of evil and ordinariness that were raised by the Eichmann trial a century and half after the time in which the story is set. Let there be no ambiguity about the timing: "Feivush the Enforcer" was published in *Haaretz* in 1956, five years before the Eichmann trial and the polemics around Hannah Arendt's banality thesis that followed. Nonetheless, these embroiled issues were in the air for entire post-war period, and it is hard to imagine a Hebrew reader not detecting echoes of them, whether or not Agnon intended them to be picked up.⁵ Arendt's argument about the banality of evil is complex, and the fierce debates that followed make it difficult use of the concept productively. Moreover, there is of course no commensurability between the Nazi regime and Austrian rule, nor between Nazi perpetrators and those who collaborated with them and Jewish tax collectors and their agents. Yet, with all of these caveats in place, the notion of banality helps us to shed some light on the alternative construal of Feivush that is advocated by the old man in the beit midrash and

advanced by the way the story is told, despite the opinions of the narrator. In the chapter that follows, Feivush is described in his domestic lair and shown to be just another Jewish husband seeking respectability from other Jewish townspeople and respect from his wife. The acts he commits are certainly reprehensible, and, like the boy with the candles in the beit midrash, he is transformed into a thug when he carries out his duties, and he is fully responsible for his cruelties. But it is the evil framework that has triggered the potential for evil that resides in all hearts.

AT HOME ON A SABBATH AFTERNOON WITH FEIVUSH

Our comprehension of Feivush is deepened by the ingress we are granted to his domestic space in Chapter Four.⁶ While he is being discussed in the beit midrash, Feivush is just waking up from his Sabbath afternoon nap, putting on his spectacles and getting ready to read to his wife Mamtchi from the Tsenerena, a work written in Yiddish in the early seventeenth century that includes traditional commentary and folklore on the weekly Torah readings. "Even though those Yiddish books were written expressly for women," the narrator informs us, "Mamtchi did not know how to read them" (286). Orphaned in childhood, Mamtchi hired herself out as a maid and never had the time or means to learn how to read. So Feivush reads to her and takes much pleasure in being thought of by her as a wise Jewish husband. It is his favorite time of the week. What is remarkable in this domestic scene is the fact that Feivush and his wife are no different from other Buczaczers. They may be less literate, but they view Jewish learning as an essential obligation and engage in it as their capacity allows; and the same goes for their careful observance of the laws relating to cooking and heating food on the Sabbath. In their humble way, in short, Feivush and Mimtchi aspire to be thought of as respectable Jewish householders.

The scene is affecting and surprising given what has been previously said about this man. But lest we fall for an image of the enforcer with a heart of gold, the story provides several means to correct and complicate our view. The first has to do with the subject about which Feivush reads to his wife from the Tsenerena. Because it is the Sabbath before the Ninth of Av (Shabbat Hazon), the text is full of legends about monstrous oppressors of Israel throughout the ages who were eventually themselves brought low and who met grotesque ends. The chief

example, and the one most relevant to the imminent fast day, concerns the Roman general responsible for the destruction of the Temple. A gnat "got into the evil Titus's nose and burrowed into his brain for seven years, and when he died they split open his skull and found there something like a bird weighing two *selas*, with a beak of brass and claws of iron" (287). So that if you see wicked oppressors eating and drinking and having a good time, know that God has raised them up on in "order to destroy them in the end, so that they should feel their sufferings to the fullest extent." "God does not countenance the wicked who bring distress to Israel," and to bring them down He gives them enough rope to hang themselves.

Now, there is nothing strange in Feivush taking pleasure and solace from these tales, as do other Jews who read the *Tsenerena* on Sabbath afternoons. The problem is that he has absolutely no inkling that he himself belongs to the category of oppressors of Israel who will one day be toppled from their positions of power and that, in essence, he is reading about himself. To be sure, he cannot be expected to know that his reckoning will come later that same afternoon when he house built on stilts will come crashing down. There is nevertheless a total disconnect between the reality of the cruel acts he performs and his naïf desire, at once homely and deluded, for Jewish respectability and self-regard. The ironies abound and move back and forth in different directions. To the best of his meager ability, Feivush studies Torah of a Sabbath afternoon, and Mamtchi pays particular attention to staying within the bounds of Jewish law as she keeps warm the special pre-fast meal she has lovingly prepared for her husband. "If anyone had desecrated the Sabbath," as we shall soon see, "it was the Torah students cloistered in the *beit midrash*," those selfsame students who are so self-righteously assured that Feivush is an evil doer.

The tone in which their domestic coziness is described is further disturbed by the language used to describe Mamtchi. It is because of her orphanhood and impoverishment that she is illiterate. Yet attend to the language used to describe this disability.

If Feivush did not read books to her on the Sabbath, she would be inferior to a cow. Except with a cow you can write a Torah scroll on its hide or make tefilin straps from it, whereas Mamtchi in this life was a mere mass of flesh, and in death would be dust and food for the worms. (286-87)

Who is responsible for this vulgarity? We might suppose that it is the narrator's hostility to Feivush and his wife that has unwittingly broken through and interfered with the job of telling the story. But a few minutes later when Feivush interrupts his reading for a moment, we are told:

Feivush looked at his wife to see if she had noticed his cleverness. Her excesses in food and drink had fattened her heart and shrunk her brain and she did not grasp the holy matters that he was relating to her. Feivush's expressive voice spiced up the telling but it meant nothing to her.

Here it is not clear whether the observation occurs in Feivush's mind as he looks to his wife for comprehension and finds none, or whether it is the narrator intervening to explain the reason for that failure. While the confusion may not be easy to sort out, the rhetorical effect is clear. If Feivush is fooling himself, Mamtchi is too. The astuteness she appreciates in her husband comes not from his ability to read ^{biblical} ~~to read~~ Torah legends to her but from the money he earns, the one percent of the fines on the candle tax he is allowed by his employer to keep for himself. As for the stories about the destruction of the Temple, the only meaning she discerns lies in the encouraging fact that the pent-up demand for weddings after the three-week period of mourning preceding Tisha b'Av will provide a great multitude of candles to be snuffed out and fined.

The same kind of disconnect is on display at that very moment in the *beit midrash*. (The action in Chapter Five is parallel in time to the previous chapter, Sabbath afternoon *chez* Feivush and Mamtchi.) ^{beginning} The young men have listened the old man's story about the lad and the candles, but they have absorbed nothing of his meaning, and they revert to telling tales of Feivush's brutalities before returning to their readings in the midrash on Lamentations. Of the innumerable passages from this body of literature, Agnon has them read the exegesis of the Sages on verses from Proverbs and Psalms. Although their relevance to Feivush is unmistakable to the reader, it remains totally opaque to the students in the *beit midrash*: *When a wise man contends with a fool, there is anger and laughter but no rest* (Proverbs 29:9) and *One who rebukes a buffoon will bring shame upon himself* (Proverbs 9:17).⁷ The verses are a direct rebuke to the denunciations they are indulging in and a warning about the dire consequences of contending with a fool or rebuking a buffoon. But they read on in the sing-song of Torah study, clueless to the connection.

It is precisely at that juncture that the news is delivered that Feivush's house has caught fire. The report is false, but neither the denizens of the beit midrash nor the reader yet know this to be the case. At first the news is discounted as merely the expression of an unspoken wish that "the one who fed us with suffering taste a little bit of it himself" (288). (Ironically, this presumption turns out to be true.) But with a second report of the fire, the news is deemed reliable, and a discussion ensues concerning the meaning of the event and whether it demands immediate action.⁸ The discussion becomes a festival of *Schadenfreude*. The high point is the proffering of a three-fold exegesis that justifies the sure but sometimes tortuous ways of God's justice. Feivush extinguished the flames of the candles that provided light for Torah, and now his life was being ruined by fire. He invaded the homes of others and now his own home is being consumed. He ruined the Sabbath pleasures of Buczaczers, and it is therefore on the Sabbath that his own life is being ruined.

But this earful of righteous homiletics is nothing next to the legal casuistry that follows. It is evident to a Hebrew reader with even a passing knowledge of Jewish practice that, when saving a life is at stake (*piqu'ah nefesh*), it is not only permissible but obligatory to break the Sabbath restrictions. If Feivush and his wife may perish in the fire, the law leaves no room for ambiguity. Yet rather than bestir themselves to deal with the emergency, Buczacz's finest young minds settle into submitting the issue to the kind of academic scrutiny they routinely use to deal with purely theoretical matters. Most provocatively, they consider the case *as if* the house were unoccupied. For indeed, if it is not a matter of life and death, a burning house can be left to burn down if the fire does not endanger neighboring inhabited structures. And since Feivush's house was isolated and built on marshy ground, they reason, it presents no danger. Eventually, they conclude that the question will have to await further investigation; they shelve their books and go outside to see what is happening.

Their behavior does not receive a pass from the narrator, either in his editorializing or dramatizing functions. As the denizens of the beit midrash join the throng moving toward Feivush's house, the narrator comments directly on the various commandments they are transgressing. They believe themselves "motivated by a desire to fulfill the mitzvah of witnessing the downfall of the wicked." But in fact "there was no end to the commandments they were transgressing in the name of a mitzvah they had fabricated" (289). Their hypocrisy is further documented when the crowd reaches the Courtyard Valley, where Feivush's house

stands, and it is discovered that there is no fire and hence no emergency. (The origin of the false rumor is never explained, and we are left to infer, as was hinted, that it was a product of wish fulfillment.) The captivating natural beauty of the place, which was described in the opening paragraphs of the story, overwhelms the Buczaczers, who do not regularly visit it because of the negative associations with Jacob Frank and other disasters. The time is the end of the three weeks preceding Tisha b'Av during which traditional Jews do not bathe or launder their clothes, and they are in a state of physical discomfort. The water and the fresh breezes and the lush vegetation are almost too much for them.

[T]hey quite forgot about the destruction of Jerusalem and rejoiced at having come to such a pleasant and airy place. I am quite sure that there were some among them who were quite ready to conduct the afternoon service in the valley without a Torah scroll to read from, and to wait there until dark and enter into the chanting of the Tisha b'Av dirges with a joyful heart. (290)

In addition to the prospect of such a scene being very funny to contemplate, there is a darker point. The righteous citizens of Buczacz, the victims of Feivush's cruelties, turn out to be made of the same malleable and imperfect human materials as their victimizer. During this, the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar, when Jews are called upon to identify with the victims of the great catastrophes of Jewish history, it takes very little to move them to thoughts of gamboling in the stream among the willows. This is less a sign of their religious shallowness than of their human frailty, a commonality with Feivush that they are hard pressed to acknowledge.

Chapter Six is the climax of the story not only because it depicts the dramatic Fall of House of Feivush but also because it utterly tears down the boundary between the pious souls of Buczacz and their so-called oppressor. The scene is both bathetic and deeply disturbing. When Feivush sees a throng of townspeople gathering beneath his house—a place that Buczaczers make a point of steering clear of—he is at first surprised and pleased. Based on the day's readings in the Tsenerena, he has learned that Tisha b'Av is not only the day on which the Temples were destroyed but also the day on which the Redemption will take place. He therefore considers the possibility that the crowd is a sign that the Messiah has come. (The narrator snootily observes that Feivush is apparently unaware of the fact this cannot take place in a year

when the fast falls on the Sabbath.) Feivush is the picture of geniality as he greets them, *He* welcomes them to his home, and inquires why they have come, regretting only that he does have not enough cold drinks to offer all of them. Earlier in the story we saw Feivush as he sees himself within the domestic sphere, a proper Jewish husband studying with his wife of a Sabbath afternoon. Now he warmly projects the same self-perception of respectability to the community as a whole. Totally absent from his awareness is the fact that these are the same people who view him as an evil oppressor and who have gathered below his house in the hopes of seeing it burn down.

That no flames are shooting from the house, which stands undisturbed rent-free in its verdant valley, proves to be an unspoken disappointment that cannot be abided. Individuals in the crowd turn on each other with abusive accusations about who started the false rumor of the fire. The shouting turns to shoving and jostling, and soon enough the old, termite-eaten stilts that hold up the house begin quivering. Enraged and fearing the collapse of his house, Feivush begins cursing them furiously. "There was not one profanity he did not utter about them, their homes, their belongings, even their ancestors" (291). And the good people of Buczacz "in turn cursed and blasphemed" Feivush, giving as good as they took. ^{take} It is Mamtchi who moves the conflict from cursing to action. She opens the oven in which she has been lovingly keeping warm her husband's pre-fast meal and systematically begins throwing the scalding dishes and their pots upon the heads of the assembled throng. Evoking the defense of Buczacz that took place in the Courtyard Valley more than a century earlier, "Mamtchi did with the groats exactly what they had once done with pails of boiling millet when they poured them out over the invading Tatars." Inevitably, the house crashes down and together with it the lit oven, which set fire to the whole structure. The fire that never was now finally becomes a reality.

Feivush and Mamtchi both sustain broken bones in their hands and feet in the collapse. And it is now, when they have been, literally, toppled from their perch and made into homeless cripples that the town of Buczacz mobilizes to take care of them. The moral drawn from this event is articulated in an exchange between one of the bystanders and Elisha, the town's medical expert, who has been called to the scene. It so happens that it was the daughter of this same Elisha who lost her grip on her baby one Friday night as a result of one of Feivush's home invasion. Referring to that incident, the bystander remarks, "This shows us that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not let the wicked go unpunished but pays them back in kind" (292).

Elisha's response is both impassioned and instructive: "Your punishment is worse than Feivush's. Feivush was stricken in body, while you have been stricken in soul because you watched someone writhing in pain while rehearsing to him the sins he had committed." Elisha, the narrator informs us, is a member of a small voluntary society, influenced by the writings of Mehanhem Mendel Lefin, whose members are devoted to moral self-improvement, especially regarding intemperate speech.⁹ Having rebuked the bystander for his moral sanctimony, Elisha immediately rebukes himself "for putting his mouth before his mind and not overcoming his bovine nature that allowed his tongue to gore other people the way an ox gores with its horns." Although the episode with Elisha is a very brief interruption in the rush of events, it is important for establishing a frame of reference for evaluating the behavior of the Buczac community, and for that of Feivush as well. Elisha alone possesses the will and honesty to understand the motives for his actions and to assess them critically. He is allied with the old man in the beit midrash who tells the story of the boy who distributes the candles, as well as with other "elders who were wont to search after the root causes of events" (297). As a dutiful chronicler, the narrator notes the existence of this perspective, but he also lets us know that it is not his own.

THE HEART OF DARKNESS

"Feivush the Enforcer" is a story with two climaxes. The first, the crash of Feivush's house, is related in an antic tone befitting the collapsing of moral boundaries between the townspeople and their supposed oppressor. The second, Feivush's meeting with his employer after his injuries, is far darker and pushes the story into a vertiginous moral freefall. Soon after the calamity, Feivush picks himself up off his pallet in the almshouse that serves as Buczac's rude hospital and, limping in pain from his broken bones, drags himself to house of his employer Reb Feivush. It will be recalled that, even though the narrator has referred to him throughout as Feivush and we have come to know him by that name, it is in fact not his given name, and he has become known as Feivush because of the rich tax collector whom he serves as an agent and into whose identity ^{his own has been} ~~he has submerged his own~~. It is that groveling loyalty to his employer that moves the afflicted, ailing Feivush to present himself. In the course of the scene we will discover another bond between the two: Feivush's mother was the wet nurse for the tax collector in his infancy at the

same time as Feivush was being nursed. Most of her milk went to the baby of the rich family, and when her own child cried out in hunger, she would “dip a rag in licorice water and stuff it” in his mouth.

Feivush’s meek respectfulness edges into servility. He stands in pain and hunger propped up on his crutches while Reb Feivush, sitting, finishes off a sumptuous meal and then stretches out on his bed for a nap. Wickedly entering the role of a rabbinic sophist for the moment, the narrator adopts Reb Feivush’s smug perspective and appropriates Maimonides, “the towering giant of Torah,” to justify his self-indulgence.¹⁰ Finally, Feivush’s abused and starved body “mutinies against him,” and he falls over. “Yet even in his collapse,” the narrator notes, “Feivush was polite, not crying out in pain lest he interrupt his employer’s slumber” (293). The thud of his fall, however, bestirs the members of Reb Feivush’s household to rush to the scene and gather around the prostrate enforcer, who, with no help from them, finally succeeds in getting back on his feet. While Reb Feivush continues sleeping, these anonymous voices gaze upon Feivush in his wounded, enfeebled state, “wondering whether this was the same Feivush whom the whole town feared.” Their attitudes is detached and bemused as they observe Feivush and debate with each other about the relative qualities of his injuries and deformities. Into this surreal scene now saunters the nameless muscle-bound thug who was given Feivush’s job the moment he was incapacitated. Looking at the pathetic cripple before him, the thug

crossed his arms over his chest, swayed back and forth, laughed, and said, “You jokers, you’re making fun of me,” and then he spat in Feivush’s face and said, “Too bad for you Buczacz that you had to make do with this undernourished mouse.” He then pursed his lips like a cat and let out a long “Meow!” (294)

The spirit of raillery continues when Reb Feivush finally gets up. He burps and yawns and observes jokingly, “The hour of the Resurrection of the Dead must have come if Feivush has gotten up from the beating he took.” Finally, it is made clear to Feivush that there is no more work for him, despite his thirteen years of devoted service and his loyalty in reporting for duty so soon after his injuries, and the point is reinforced by a violent kick delivered by the thug. The thick wadding of denial is pierced, and, acknowledging the finality of the betrayal and the rejection at last, Feivush withdraws and drags his aching body back to the almshouse.

This is a journey into the heart of evil. Heartlessness, cruelty, abandonment, ridicule, humiliation, sadism—the imagination strains to conceive of behavior more shameless and debased. Yet the reader surely remembers that although Reb Feivush's household may be the worst setting in Buczacz in which the Feivush the Enforcer has been maligned and treated badly, it is not the only one. The whole town has heaped imprecations on Feivush, made him into the villain of a folksong, destroyed his home and caused him grievous bodily injury. We might instinctively feel that the two are not comparable. It was not, after all, the overt intention of the townspeople to destroy Feivush's home and injure him and his wife, and, once the damage was done, Buczacz mobilized to see to their needs for food and shelter. Yet the comparison holds on many levels. The people of Buczacz longed for Feivush's downfall even if their longings were unacknowledged to themselves or over-layered with moralizations. In contrast to the townspeople, to be sure, the tax collector and his household show no remorse or pity once the downfall has been brought about. ^{Yet} But it is difficult not to admit that the two cases exist along a continuum of evil rather than being separated by an essential distinction.

Yet this is precisely the truth the narrator sets out to refute in the closing pages of the story. By virtue of his diligence as a reporter, the rancorous heart of Buczacz has been exposed, and now the narrator launches himself into a campaign to contain the effects of what he has exposed. His goal is to install a partition between the radical evil manifest in Reb Feivush's household, which he abjures, and the contingent evil manifest in the behavior of the people of his town, whom he esteems. The first step in this project is to describe how Buczacz spread a social welfare safety net under Feivush and Mamtchi to soften their fall. People contribute old clothes and shoes and dishes of food, and invite the couple for Sabbath and holiday meals. And do not think that this was easy to do, the narrator tells us, because Mamtchi sorely tried the good will of her hosts "because she continually complained and lamented the loss of her goat and her hens" (296). The narrator does not stint in giving us an ample portion of her chatter about the goat's milk that "would make even Count Potocki lick his lips" and the hens who knew how to show respect, and it takes little to imagine how truly vexing her inanity must have been to her hosts.

The extended mimicry of Mamtchi turns out to be an example of just the sort of bad faith the narrator condemns in others. Abject and abashed, Feivush is himself an easy target for moralistic reproach, and the narrator pats himself on the back for showing admirable restraint.

Here I could easily make fun of this hapless man as he sat anxiously in fear of the thug bastard who had taken over his job suddenly coming in and doing with the candles in his house what he himself in his heyday had done in others. He was particularly nervous when they brought fish to the table. Fish was his favorite food. Fish were his neighbors in the days when he lived in his house on the Strypa and he had established a relationship with them. But I do not make fun of the poor and the unfortunate. (295)

But that is exactly what he has just done in the guise of describing the opportunity he has supposedly passed up to take pleasure in saying, "I told you so," and savoring the nice ironies of the tables being turned in Feivush's present situation.

The narrator's condescension to Feivush is further extended by presenting him as a kind of Job manqué. In light of the brutal thug who succeeds him in his office, Feivush's own former acts of brutishness recede into the background. He remains stubbornly unreconciled to God's justice. (As was the case before his fall, he is of course conscious only of his unwavering and unrequited faithfulness to his former master and not of the harsh acts he committed on his behalf.) But for now he knows only that he has been crippled and made homeless while Reb Feivush prospers. The theological justifications offered to him as consolations leave him unsatisfied. He is told that his suffering in this world will offset his account in the Next World. He is told that his suffering is justified as a punishment for the sin of building his dwelling from the detritus of Jacob Frank's house. But Feivush is having none of it.

His defiance is both obtuse and heroic. The narrator persists in viewing his refusal to accept God's ways as pathetic and simple minded. Yet the reader is led to a different standpoint in reaction to the narrator's campaign to endorse and even extol Buczac's readiness to submit to God's will. "As it always did, Buczac accepted its vicissitudes and did not rise up against them. In fact, it lovingly embraced each and every calamity that befell it and repudiated none of them" (297). Long gone are those dissenting points of view once bravely voiced by the "elders who were wont to search after the root causes of events as they unfolded," those same elders, like the old man in the beit midrash, who took the admonitions of the biblical prophets seriously. Feivush's protest against God's justice may seem ridiculous coming from a man who himself did bad things, but it looks quite otherwise when put alongside Buczac's meek submission to its persecutions.

The narrator uses the last moments of the story to shore up a traditionalist/preservationist interpretation of the events related in the tale and to tamp down their subversive potential. In order to pull off a general exoneration and affirmation of the community of Buczacz, he anticipates the reader's discomfort with the town's behavior and concedes the sinfulness of the subset of citizens who participated in the disturbing events on that fateful Sabbath. "Darkened by the distress of that desecration," the narrator tells us in a rueful voice, "they walked around mournfully, not a smile on their faces. They gave much to charity and took upon themselves many fasts, some as prescribed by the Shulhan Arukh and some according to the numerical reckoning of the word *Shabbat* until their strength gave out and they died" (297). (The numerical value is 705!) Note well, however, that the sins for which they are so extravagantly atoning have little to do with Feivush and Mamtchi's injuries and much to do with the ritual laws of the Sabbath. In conveying their extreme devotion to their penances, the narrator is in essence praising them rather than taking them to task. Their misdeeds constituted a regrettable but isolated eruption, a one-time offense which was amply paid for and, moreover, proves the rule of town's rectitude. *Sub-set*

The narrator's valedictory defense of Buczacz's quiet submission to its tribulations represents a shrewd case of hedging one's bets. On the one hand, the town is piously bending itself to God's will and submitting to divine justice without complaint. On the other, the rationale for its submission is based on a calculation of self-interest, a dour realpolitik. The narrator imagines Buczacz explaining itself thus: "We accept our fate not because we are so upright but because we live in fear that the new tormentors and oppressors will be worse than the old ones." ^P The replacement of Feivush by the heartless new thug is the point at hand. But whether it is this way or that, the narrator has succeeded in inserting a buffer between the good people of Buczacz and the source of the evil, whether it comes from the gentile persecutors or from unscrupulous coreligionists. The scandal of that summer Sabbath remains an embarrassing anomaly that says nothing essential about the community and the darker recesses of the human condition.

[Considering the concluding lines of "Feivush the Enforcer," it is well to keep in mind that the story first appeared in the pages of *Haaretz* in 1956.]?

[E]vildoers grow progressively worse as the generations proceed. Each one is more fiendish than his predecessor. For evil feeds off those who do it; the wickeder they are, the more wickedness grows. I hope I am not proved wrong when I say that it will continue to grow and grow until that day comes when wickedness will vanish like smoke. When will that be? On the day when the Messiah will appear, may it happen speedily in our time, Amen. (297)

For the narrator's traditionally minded contemporary audience—contemporary, that is, to the turn of the nineteenth century—this pious peroration likely goes down very well. There is certainly support in classical sources for the idea that the Messiah will come when things cannot get worse. The expression of this hope, furthermore, conforms to the homiletical convention of ending a discourse on a redemptive note. But for the author's audience at the time it was ^{reading the story at the time} ~~it was published~~ ^{it was published}, a dozen years after the Holocaust, these sentiments would seem tasteless and perverse. This audience had lived through a time when wickedness had indeed grown and grown, but what came at the end of that downward spiral was Hitler rather than the Messiah. This duality is cannily caught in the phrase “wickedness will vanish like smoke” (*veharish 'ah ke 'ashan tikhleh*), which is a very specific allusion to the text of the Amidah prayer for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.¹¹ In its liturgical context, the prayer expresses an eschatological yearning for a time when Israel will be released from the grip of the nations. Uttered in the context of the murder of European Jewry, however, the notion of vanishing like smoke takes on quite another meaning.

There are many stories in *A City in its Fullness* that conclude abruptly with a reference to the slaughter perpetrated by Hitler's depraved minions. The reference is abrupt because it is wholly extraneous to the story and unanticipated by anything that came before. And this shock and disconnection is exactly the effect Agnon seeks to achieve. Its absence here, at the end of “Feivush the Enforcer,” is palpable, and effective in its own way. Instead of that tonic coup of reality, we are given the narrator's pious denials and his saccharine messianic uplift. And if that weren't enough, how are readers who have witnessed the Zionist revolution and the creation of a Jewish state to react when the narrator says in praise of the people of Buczacz that they “bowed their heads and did not rise up against their tormentors”? Agnon has allowed his narrator to dig his own grave, and it up to us as readers not to fall in.

NOTES

¹ “The Jewish Question in Galicia: The Reforms of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, 1772-1790” in *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry*, Vol. 12, eds. Israel Bartal and Antony Polonsky (London and Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1999), 70.

² *Continuatio edictorum et mandatorum universalium in Regnis Galiciae et Lodomeriae (1776)*: 76-121, esp. §1, 88, and Michael Stöger, *Darstellung der gesetzlichen Verfassung der galizischen Judenschaft*, 1 (Lemberg, 1833), XX-XX. My thanks to Rachel Manekin with her help with these sources.

³ The name Feivush or Feivel is thought to derive from Phoebus, the Latin name for Apollo, the god of light. It is often paired with the name of Shraga, Aramaic for fire. The connection to Feivush’s duties is obvious.

⁴ This is the kind of staged intersection found often in these stories. In “The Sign,” the news about the destruction of Buczacz by the Nazi is made to arrive in the afternoon preceding the holiday of Shavuot. In “In a Single Moment,” Menahem’s birthday falls on Tu b’Av (the fifteenth of Av), a festival of matchmaking during Second Temple times. And, most importantly, Agnon’s decision to make his own birth date the ninth of Av.

⁵ For the public discourse surrounding the kapo trials and the Kastner trial, see Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1991), 255-75. My thanks to Omer Bartov for discussions on this topic.

⁶ Like the titles of all the chapters, the title of Chapter Four has a tongue-in-cheek quality. “Menuḥah vesimḥah” (Rest and Joy) is the first half of the opening line of one of the standard table hymns sung at the midday Sabbath meal. The other half continues “*or layehudim*,” light for the Jews. The theme of light and the extinguishing of light is constantly kept in circulation.

⁷ The midrashic source is Lamentations Rabba 14 and 15.

⁸ Note that throughout these chapters, Agnon presents the denizens of the beit midrash and the other Jews who later stream to the site of the so-called fire as one undifferentiated body without

names or individual characters. It is only Feivush and Mamtchi who are discernable and deeply realized characters.

⁹ Menahem Mendel Lefin of Satanov (1749-1826) was an early East European maskil and the author of several works of Musar (ethical) literature. See Nancy Sinkoff, *Tradition and transition Mendel Lefin of Satanow and the beginnings of Jewish Enlightenment in Eastern Europe, 1749-1826* (Columbia University Dissertation, 1996).

¹⁰ As James Diamond and Jeffrey Saks point out in their note on this passage, although Maimonides recommends remaining at rest immediately after eating (Hilkhhot De'ot 4:3), he does not explicitly advise sleep.

¹¹ Note to Birenbaum Mahzor.