CHAPTER SIX: JEWS AND POLES

Lost and enfeebled after being cut off from his hunting party, the great Count Potocki is discovered by a charcoal maker named Nahum Ze'ev, who carries the nobleman to his one-room hovel in the forest to regain his strength. Soon the count has sufficiently recovered to be taken back to his palace in Buczacz, but before they can set out Nahum Ze'ev has to say his morning prayers; for he had been on his way into town to pray with the community when he came across the exhausted magnate. The sight of the Jew praying is utterly astonishing to Count Potocki, and the narrator makes this ironic observation:

> Approximately eighteen hundred Jews lived on Count Potocki's estates. Among them were leaseholders of farm land and taverns, grain merchants, and businessmen who handled financial transactions, not to mention shopkeepers and artisans. But when it came to the customs of the Jews, he had not the least notion, and their prayers he had never heard, except for parodies of them by the banquet jesters who were a constant presence at his table. Now that fate had placed him in the home of a Jew who was preparing himself for prayer, he lay there with eyes open waiting to see what the prayer of Jew looked like. But fatigue and the brandy he had drunk overcame him and he fell asleep. (243)

This episode, from the story "Hashutafim" [The Partners], is remarkable for what it reveals both about Jewish-Polish relations in eighteenth-century Buczacz and about the imaginative intervention in those relations undertaken by Agnon's fiction.

Buczacz was one of the many "private towns" wholly owned by an aristocratic family. In 1602 it passed into the possession of the Potocki family, headed at the time the story takes place by Miklaj Potocki, who ruled over the town for much of the eighteenth century.[1] He was a man renowned both for his irascible temper and his great generosity to civic and religious institutions. Buczacz, the many villages that surrounded it and the serfs who inhabited them, as well as vast tracks of forest and rivers in the region, were but part of the family's hereditary holdings. Yet all this land and natural resources could be converted into wealth only with the help of the Jews. It was through their entrepreneurial, commercial, and managerial acumen that forests could be turned into timber, rivers harnessed to power

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flour mills, animal hides processed into leather, grain converted into highly profitable alcohol, and the agricultural bounty of the peasantry efficiently marketed in return for manufactured necessities imported from abroad; and this is not to mention the tradesmen and artisans necessary to sustain the civilized life of a city. The Jews and the great Polish landowners were far from equal, but it is no exaggeration to say they were interdependent. This was especially the case in the borderlands of Poland in western Ukraine, where Buczacz is located, because it was the Jews who mediated between the Polish Roman Catholic nobles and the Orthodox Ruthenian peasants.

Yet despite the multiple, dense layers of interconnectedness between Poles and Jews, the knowledge of each other's culture remained paltry. Although the Great Synagogue was the most visible Jewish structure in Buczacz and synagogue prayer the most visible ritual of the Jews, the only familiarity Count Potocki has with these matters comes from the derisive mimicry of his court entertainers, who likely found in the Jews' penchant for gesticulation and movement during prayer rich fodder for their ridicule. The feeling was mutual, it is fair to say. For their part, the Jews evinced little interest in the theology or practice of Catholicism in its eastern or western forms and were repelled by the images and statuary that played such a prominent role on saints' days as well as in personal piety. So despite the fact that they lived in the same city—albeit in different quarters—and did business with each other day in and day out, Jews and Poles led parallel but separate lives. Parallel but hardly symmetrical when it came to status and political vulnerability. Priests could whip up incitement against Jews; the students of the Basilian monastery school in Buczacz could vandalize Jewish property whenever it suited their high spirits; and the lord of the town, Count Potocki himself, could shoot a Jew to death with impunity after finding nothing else to shoot at during a long and frustrating day hunting.[2]

It is precisely at this point that Agnon's fiction makes its intervention. The Buczacz stories conjure up the embroiled relations between Poles and Jews with fidelity to the historical record. But instead of stopping there, the stories introduce an alternative plane of reality in which the asymmetry inherent in these relations is equalized or reversed. In the passage quoted above from "Hashutafim" [The Partners], Count Potocki is not only rescued from death's door by a poor Jew but exposed to the intimate gestures of his devotional life in a way that engenders respect rather than disdain. (Note well, however, that he falls asleep just at the moment Nahum Ze'ev begins his prayers!) Did such an event ever take place? Was there even a legend to this effect that was passed down in local lore? Was the story retrofitted as an etiological myth to explain why a Jewish family possessed an inalienable

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writ to occupy the basement of the grand town hall, as described in the remainder of the story?

Although the historical framework of the story is unassailable, the historicity of its central event, the rescue of a Polish count by a Jewish charcoal maker, is suspect and ultimately beside the point. This is not to say that simply by placing the text in the category of fiction it gets a free ride. Whether Agnon built his story around the armature of a legend that circulated in Buczacz or whether he created it out of whole cloth, the more interesting question is how his story envisions Polish-Jewish relations. At the core of the other major story that deals with this issue, "R. Moshe Aharon mokher mei devash" [R. Moshe Aharon the Mead Merchant], is a similar instance in which a high-ranking Polish nobleman is saved from death by a Jew and which results in a temporary benefit for the community as a whole. In both cases, I would argue, Agnon is doing something new. He is "adding" to the historical record by imagining what could have or *should* have transpired between Jews and Poles. The wisdom evinced by Nahum Ze'ev and R. Moshe Aharon, each in his own way, is not so much an individual distinction as an expression of the achievement of Buczaczan—read Polish--Jewish society as a whole. Agnon's contribution is to take this achievement, which is real, and create an imaginative experiment in which a great Polish lord in extremis is exposed to it and is compelled to acknowledge its truth.

Thus for Agnon to devote himself to the project of re-imagining Buczacz in its golden age means not simply to accept the limits of the historical record but to enlarge them. He exploits the imaginative freedom accorded him as a storyteller to conjure up or reveal or bring into being developments that, if the right opportunities had presented themselves, could have taken place. This is not an indulging in denial or wish fulfillment but the creation of a more useable past. For despite the innumerable and variegated interactions we know to have taken place between Poles and Jews in Buczacz by virtue of their commercial interdependence, the paucity of documentary sources allows us to experience precious few of them. Agnon's intervention exfoliates that fraught potentiality. It performs imaginative experiments and interventions while remaining true to the thick texture of the historical record.

The stories that depict the encounter between Jews and gentiles in *'Ir umelo'ah* are divided by the partitions of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century. This chapter will deal with the Jews' interaction with the sovereign Polish lords who brought them to Ukraine to serve as their agents. The next chapter will discuss the eclipse of the feudal paradigm and the effects of the subsequent Austrian rule on internal Jewish relations.

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THE GOLDEN PREROGATIVES OF THE NOBILITY

Before Poland was dismembered and divided up among Russia, Prussia and Austria, it had been unique among European states in its governance. The office of king was elective rather than hereditary. As a protection against tyranny, the Polish nobility insisted on choosing a monarch from among its ranks without the possibility of dynastic succession. This "golden liberty" was first among a number of privileges that vested enormous power in the hands of the nobility rather than the monarchy. The nobility, which was called the *szlachta*, was an estate or a caste that included 6% of the population, a proportion greater than in other European states. The *szlachta* was a vast group whose members ranged from the landless and impoverished gentry to minor gentry and then to fabulously wealthy land owners. Over 60% of the land, towns, villages and peasantry of Poland were privately owned by the nobility, and a few families, such as the Radiziwills and the Potockis, owned networks of non-contiguous holdings numbering dozens of towns and hundreds of villages. These so-called magnates (members of the *magnateria*) exercised absolute authority within their estates (called *latifundia*), and their judgments on civil and criminal matters could not be appealed to any royal or centralized judiciary.[3]

It was the goal of the magnate to extract from his *latifundium* as much profit as possible to sustain a style of life based on expensive imported goods. The magnate could rely on the brute labor owed to him by his serfs to plant or harvest his crops. But when it came to exploiting the natural resources of his property—extracting minerals, felling and marketing timber, milling grains, fishing and fish farming—he called upon the services of leaseholder called *arrendars*, who received a concession to operate in a specific economic sector in return for a fee or a share of the profits. The most abundant resource was agriculture, and the magnate faced a special challenge in realizing profit from surplus grain, which, even if he could export by virtue of proximity to river transportation, could not be sold at a premium. The solution was to distill the grain and convert it to alcohol and sell it back to the peasants at a significant markup to be consumed locally at rural taverns that were permitted to dispense only the landowner's liquor.

It is as leaseholders, agents and bankers that the Jews enter the picture. It was beneath the status of the magnate to engage in business, although he might employ lesser members of the *szlachta* in the administration of the estate. Jews provided the commercial and

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managerial acumen and discipline necessary to maximize the yield of the *latifundium*. When it came to the retailing of alcohol, their sobriety was particularly advantageous. Whereas the peasants lived in villages, Jews made up the largest group inhabiting the market towns, where they provided goods and services for the hinterland. Although there were existing guilds of Polish artisans, Jews were often the most prominent tailors, haberdashers, butchers, furriers, and tanners. They maintained shops that stocked textiles and other goods not produced locally. Living in close proximity to the synagogue and the beit midrash, the Jews constituted a separate corporate entity, and the lord of the city would relate to them as such. He would deal directly with representatives of the kahal, the community's lay leadership, when it came to exacting taxes and granting privileges.

This pattern, which repeated itself throughout the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was intensified in the western Ukraine, where Buczacz was located. The Polish landowners had entered this region in more recent centuries as colonizers and had subjected the Ruthenian peasantry to their rule. The Eastern Orthodox Christianity of the local populace, along with its language, was treated with contempt, and their churches and religious orders received few of the resources lavished upon the Roman Catholics churches and institutions. (This was the case even after the creation of the Uniate or Greek-Catholic Church, which combined Eastern Orthodox ritual with obedience to the authority of Rome.) Ukraine was the scene of the only serious peasant uprising in the history of the Commonwealth. This was the rebellion led by Bohdan Khmelnytski in 1648-49, which was responsible for the destruction of hundreds of Jewish communities and tens of thousands of Jewish souls, as well as a smaller number of their Polish patrons.[4] The uprising became possible only because of the location of Ukraine on the southern flank of the Commonwealth, which enabled the leadership of the Cossacks and the participation of the Tartars. The Buczacz fortress withstood the Cossack siege during the uprising, but the town was sacked several times in the ensuing decades by Tartars bands and by the Ottoman army, which had reached the gates of Vienna only to be turned back by the Polish King Sobieski.[5] Subsequent border changes and the ceding of East Ukraine to Moscovy eventually removed Buczacz from its exposed position on the frontier. Yet the general region of western Ukraine known as Galicia remained one of the wildest and least developed in the Commonwealth. Its vast forests and marshlands provided refuge for outlaws and brigands as well as for Cossack adventurers who would cross the Dnieper to stir up trouble.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the external threats to the region had receded, and with them the prospects for mass violence against Jews. Buczacz was rebuilt

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under the patronage of the Potockis, and a charter was granted to the Jews reconfirming their right to take up residence in the town and do business there. They were as necessary to the project of reconstruction and civic prosperity now as they had been almost two centuries earlier when the Polish nobles had sought to develop the town's fortunes. But the usefulness of the Jews did not ameliorate their general situation. They were loathed by the peasants as the visible agents of the Polish oppressors. They were resented by the Christian townspeople for what was perceived to be their unfair commercial advantage and their domination of certain trades. And they were despised by the *shlachta* for not being Christians, for not being Poles, for not being *shlachta* and for living in town.

In *'Ir umelo'ah* this misery is faithfully represented, but it is not left alone. Agnon writes two major stories in which the ratio of power is reversed: "R. Mosheh Aharon mokher mei devash" [R. Moshe Aharon the Mead Merchant, pp. 128-43] and "Hashutafim" [The Partners, pp. 239-255]. Although the stories are very different in their conception and atmosphere, at the center of each is a Polish nobleman of immense stature who is rescued from death by a Jew. How and why Agnon constructs this alternative reality, which constitutes the imaginative supplement he adds to the record of Jewish-Polish relations, is the question that will preoccupy this chapter.

Before exploring these two stories, it is important briefly to survey the more general canvas in order to appreciate the exceptionality of these stories. Many of the stories referred to below have been discussed in the previous chapters and will be familiar to the reader. I do so under five headings.[6]

First is the Cossack Uprising of 1648-49 led by Bohdan Khmelnytski. Even though the perpetrators of the massacres were not Poles, the Jews bore the brunt of the violence because of their service to their Polish lords, who generally saved themselves when possible rather than protect "their" Jews. In the collective Jewish memory, the particular identity of the enemy was absorbed into the figure of the *goy*, the gentile persecutor. The impact of this trauma is given its fullest representation in the story "The Parable and its Lesson" (pp. 394-440), which depicts Buczacz in the generation after the massacres as a community in which each and every member struggles with the murder of most of their family members. The collective experience of loss is marked by the fast day of the 20th of Sivan, whose solemn liturgy is lavishly and extensively described in the story.

Second is the incitements by Catholic priests and religious persecution. In order to deflect attention from her own misdeeds, the wife of a church beadle accuses a Jewish bystander, the community's hazzan, of witchcraft and desecrating the Host in "The Linen

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Man" (pp. 84-113). The civil rulers yield to the appeals of the church authorities and the saintly Gavriel is convicted and condemned to death by being drawn and quartered. In "The Parable and its Lesson," Aharon, the senior disciple of R. Moshe, who is afflicted by doubts about divine justice in the wake of 1648 massacres, is lured into conversion and eventual death by the wiles of a local priest. Under this religious category should be added the periodic waves of vandalism committed by the students of the Basilian monastery students in Buczacz. Monastery hooligans?

Third is murder authorized by aristocratic indulgence or by personal whim. There is the famous story of Count Potocki, who, frustrated by a long day of hunting with nothing to show for his efforts, forces a Jewish woman to climb a tree so that he can shoot her dead with his bow and arrow ("The Little City Hall," 256-7). The count, the narrator observes, was not an anti-Semite but a nobleman who was law unto himself and whose impulses and caprices had no regulation. Boredom on a Friday afternoon accounted for another incident in which the great count importuned a Jew on his way to Sabbath prayers and, using his whip, forced him to dance before him (75). Sometimes it was a great lord who strove to protect his Jews from the depredations of the lesser nobility. It was a failure to do so that resulted in the murder of Naphtali, the wine merchant, the father of Zlahte in "The Parable and its Lesson" (409). While Naphtali sleeps by his wagon one night on a trip through the lord's lands, the petty retainers open the wine casks and get drunk. When they come to their senses, they realize they have violated the lord's prohibition and hasten to murder Naphtali and bury his body to erase traces of their crime. A similar occurrence is recounted in "In Search of a Rabbi," in which the murder of a Jew from Stanislaw by a lesser nobleman evokes the anger of the ruling magnate. The murderer then kidnaps a wagonload of Jewish artisans from Buczacz and delivers them to the magnate as a replacement for the Jew he murdered (311).

Fourth is sexual victimization. "The Story of the Betrothed Maiden" (272-4) tells the story of a young woman from Buczacz who is renowned for her fancy desserts and is hired to bake for the wedding reception of the local lord's son. While she is busy in the castle's kitchens, the bridegroom becomes so smitten with her that he lures her to an isolated place and rapes her, and she dies. In a parallel tale ("Sons Who Were Born to Them" [154]), the erotic obsession is homosexual. A Polish lord becomes entranced by the stunning beauty of a young Torah scholar, the only son of older parents, who is already engaged to be married. He too is lured to an isolated place and raped. But rather than dying on the spot, he becomes mentally deranged by feelings of pollution, and after his parents' repeated failures to cure him he throws himself off a mountain and falls to his death.

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The fifth is economic persecution and intervention in internal Jewish communal affairs. An important source of income for Polish nobles was the manufacture and sale of alcohol made from excess grain production. The retailing of this commodity was largely placed in the hands of Jewish tavern operators, who leased the rights to sell alcohol to the peasantry on the lord's estate. When the lord's expectations of profit were not met, he could turn a family out of its home even if it had operated the tavern for generations—this is the case with Nahum Ze'ev in "Hashutafim" [The Partners], 240]—or he could throw the family in the stockade. It was from this latter fate that Yisrael Natan rescued Sarah Rivkah and made her his wife in "In Search of a Rabbi or ~~According to~~ the Whim of the Ruler" (332-33). It is this epic cycle of stories, as we have seen, that makes its central theme the constraints imposed by Polish nobles on the most proprietary of Jewish communal choices: the appointment of a rabbi. In their audience with the Rabbi of Zavno, the representatives from Buczacz discuss the systemic bribery necessary to regulate relations with Polish rulers (311). But sometimes bribery is of no avail. When a Jewish law court decides a case in a way displeasing to a great nobleman, the latter simply sets aside the verdict and dispatches his men to put the presiding rabbi in prison. The rabbi flees for his life and, in hiding, conveys to his disciple, who is destined to become a formidable scholar, the utter importance of avoiding the office of rabbi.

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A JEWISH STATESMAN

The Polish nobles own towns, lands and forests and rule with a high hand. But to the significant degree that the Jews are allowed corporate autonomy, how do they rule themselves? Throughout *'Ir umelo'ah* Agnon makes a strong argument for considering the large Jewish towns in Poland as self-governing city-states that manage their own affairs and negotiate as communities with the powers that rule them. The narrator takes pride in the Council of Four Lands and in its role in representing the interests of the Jews to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and he expresses resentment at the abrogation of the Council shortly before the breakup of the Commonwealth, the latter event taken as punishment for the former.[7]

Who governs these proud Jewish polities? Because Agnon chooses, ~~with deliberate consideration~~, to make learning and worship the normative pillars of his imaginative reconstruction, it is natural to present rabbis ~~and scholars~~ and hazanim ~~to a lesser extent~~

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as the rightful rulers. At the same time, he well knows that the notion of the rabbi as ruler is not the historical truth but a construct driven by desire, a longing for the way it *should* have been. And the stories themselves endlessly document the political constraints that weigh on the rabbinate and lead to the eventual diminution of its authority. So the question remains: if Jewish communal autonomy is real, who is it that rules? Now, we do not need Agnon's literary fictions to know that the kahal of each community was controlled by a group of well-to-do householders who took turns administering the institutions of the community and representing it before the gentile authorities. The position is variously called the *parnas* or the *gabbai.* Yet in the several instances in which the stories of *'Ir umelo'ah* turn their attention to the workings of temporal rather than spiritual authority, they do something more than reconfirm the facts we know from the historical record. Agnon exploits the freedom he has arrogated to himself in order to conjure up the mental world of Jews who rule other Jews and to explore how their temperament is fitted to the task. He opens up an imagined and imaginative three-dimensional space behind and beyond the historical record and populates it with flesh-and-blood figures whose experience is more real than their historical cyphers.

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Such is R. Moshe Aharon, the eponymous hero of "R. Moshe Aharon the Mead Merchant". The story is one of three about gabbaim, and it joins the larger taxonomy in Book One of *kelei qodesh*: occupations, lay and professional, that serve the religious needs of the community. First come the hazanim and the shamashim, and then the gabbaim and later the lomdim (men who devote all their time to study in the beit midrash), and, finally, in Book Two, the rabbis. Passing from one gabbai to another, the narrator is conspicuously operating in his role as chronicler, fixing details of succession and recording unusual events that took place during the term of each gabbai. But, as happens so often in the flow of *'Ir umelo'ah,* the chronicle mode is suddenly disrupted and overtaken by a great narrative profusion, which soon reveals itself to be not a digression but the story itself. Rather than contenting himself with a quick sketch and some piquant anecdotes, as he has in the case of the others, the narrator undertakes an ample portrait of R. Moshe Aharon, detailing his lineage, his education and intellectual formation, his costume, and the autocratic manner in which he governs Buczacz. There is a ~~further~~ surprise. When the portrait is on the brink of being completed, the narrator turns on a dime and from out of nowhere introduces a long and lurid narrative about a great Polish prince whose desperate search for atonement for a terrible crime he committed leads him on a pilgrim's journey to Egypt and back. The ostensible justification for the tale comes at its very end: Providence brings the desperate prince to doorstep of R. Moshe Aharon, who cures him and leverages the prince's gratitude on behalf

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of the welfare of the Jews of Buczacz. The connection to the main story, long deferred and often apologized for by the narrative, is finally made; but the nexus is flimsy, and the reader remains disorientated by the presence of a tale about a gentile nobleman that is so sensational that it threatens to take over the story proper.

Agnon's purpose in this strangely constructed story, I would argue, is to imagine what a successful Jewish prince might look like. The story-within-a-story of the penitent Polish prince has a function far more important than explaining why one Jewish mead merchant has garnered the favor of an illustrious magnate. Its real function is to establish a comparison—and by implication, a moral equivalence--between two unlikely parties: the lay head of a moderately-sized Jewish community and a great peer of the realm. The prince, whose name is never given and who is not identifiable as a historical figure, is referred to by that title—*rozen* in Hebrew—not only because he owns a fifth of Poland and is therefore no ordinary member of the nobility but also because the title "prince" carries the generic connotation of "ruler."[8] In European culture the term automatically evokes Machiavelli's *The Prince*, and this is an association that Agnon might welcome[9]. He wants his nameless Polish prince to function as a type for the gentile ruler, whose governance and behavior can be compared to the conduct of a Jewish ruler in his own sphere. As the ruler of a Jewish city-state, R. Moshe Aharon is every inch a prince, despite the constraints under which Jewish sovereignty operates. In analyzing how he governs, Agnon means his story to partake in the genre of "mirrors for princes" in which Machiavelli wrote. His portrait of R. Moshe Aharon is not a historical recollection of a unique individual but an exploration of what a Jewish ruler might be.

The Buczacz of Agnon's construction, to begin with, is a world that privileges learning and worship, and it is far from self-evident that civil leadership can be seen as anything more than a duty that falls to lot of successful businessmen. "R. Moshe Aharon the Mead Merchant" makes the case that such leadership can—again, potentially—be a high calling. The narrator implies that nowadays Torah scholarship and communal leadership cannot be combined in the same person and the choice to follow one path or the other constitutes a kind of "either/or." It was not always so. R. Moshe Aharon's grandfather, R. Shaul was not only recognized as a great talmid hakham but he took up arms to defend Buczacz at the time of the Turkish incursions, and was wounded in battle.[10] The position of gabbai fell to R. Moshe Aharon through a kind of dynastic default. The office was held by his father R. Nehemia, whose success in the mead trade had made communal leadership an expected duty. But the older he got the more his heart was not in his duties as gabbai, and he

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spent his time studying Torah in the beit midrash. Although the father bore the title, it was really the son who oversaw the affairs of the community. With his father's death, R. Moshe Aharon acceded to the title proper as he did to his father's business and the valuable contents of his cellar. In another story in *'Ir umelo'ah*, the father's preference for Torah study might have been held up as evidence for the sterling attributes of the denizens of the city; but in this context it comes across as dereliction. Governance is a calling unto itself with its own discipline and skills.

"R. Moshe Aharon was not considered one of the scholars (*lomdim*), but he was well educated (*hayah ben torah*)" (129). The narrator makes a nice distinction, and an important one. As a boy he was given the kind of elite training that would have qualified him to devote himself to Torah studies, and his family certainly did not lack the resources to underwrite the pursuit of such a venerated vocation. But he chose another path, and the choice was made on the basis of an implicit recognition in himself of the kind of strengths and qualities necessary to protect the community and govern it. The stamp of his character was given important confirmation by the Rabbi of Yaslovitz, his kinsman and teacher, in the form of two gifts.[11] One is a jet black sheepskin hat given to express gratitude to Moshe Aharon for saving the rabbi's life when he was attacked by a bandit. He jumped the bandit from behind, threw him to the ground, trounced him and drove the rabbi away to safety. This was a formative lesson in the vulnerability of the Jews among the Nations and in the will necessary to resist victimization, and it is by no means insignificant that it was to a convocation of the Council of Four Lands, the parliament-like Jewish deliberative body, that the rabbi and his young companion were traveling. That the rabbi's gift is an expensive headdress, a kind of symbol of office, and not a tome of Talmud commentaries—Moshe Aharon buys that for himself—is also telling. The rabbi is aware of what his pupil is just learning: his gifts lie in statesmanship and not learning.

The rabbi's second gift, given on the occasion of Moshe Aharon's wedding, is two works by R. David Gans (1541-1613): *Tsemah David*, which chronicles Jewish and world history from the creation of Adam to the discovery of America, and *Sefer nehmad vena'im*, which relates the discoveries of astronomy, "the shape of the four basic elements, the nine celestial bodies, the height of the sun and every star beyond the horizon and many other wondrous phenomena" (129). The Rabbi of Yaslovitz was placing in the hands of his student the sum total of what could be known at the time by a Polish Jew reading in Hebrew about the human and natural history of the world. Close study of these works has a transformative impact on the young man's worldview. The world of Buczacz and the communities of

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Galicia are revealed to be a miniscule locus within the vastness of the cosmos. His study of world history leads to the formation of a determined political consciousness as well as a sense of personal destiny. "As much as he learned about kings and emperors, he felt saddened that the glory of the Jews had been taken from them and give to the nations of the world. How could this have happened? All of the nations of the world have emperors and kings, princes, officials and rulers, whereas we, the holy people Israel, are mired in Exile without a king or a ruler or a sovereign" (129). Unlike similar questions asked in the wake of the 1648 massacres by another Aharon, the tortured denizen of Gehinnom in "The Parable and its Lesson," Moshe Aharon does not draw a damning conclusion about God's justice but rather takes Israel's fallen state as a personal charge to forge the kind of leadership that has not been given by grace.

These discoveries, especially pertaining to developments far away, would seem to open up a shared space of worldliness between Jews and Poles, of refinement and learning. In his enthusiasm, R. Moshe Aharon tells the noble who is the owner of Buczacz about the discovery of America only to be told in return that "this was just another of the fabrications the Jews fill their books with." Undeterred, he loans the noble his copy of *Sefer nehmad vena'im*, which contains a Latin précis as an appendix, in order to document the news. But the acknowledgement never comes, and the volume, the precious gift from his teacher, is never returned. From this painful early experience, R. Moshe Aharon draws two lessons: "A Jew should never engage a gentile in conversation about matters the gentile is not familiar with, and a Jew should not bring a book written in the language of the gentiles into his home." R. Moshe Aharon's conduct in this episode suggests something about the man himself beyond these practical wisdoms. He converses with the lord of Buczacz as if he were his equal, as he indeed regards himself, no matter how contemptuously he is regarded by the Polish magnate. And he converses with him in Polish, a language he speaks with fluency and authority, as we are told at the end of the story (141). Finally, we see him as a leader who learns by acting in the world and by turning rebuffs into sagacity about future statecraft.

R. Moshe Aharon has a further distinction. Of all the men and women who parade through the pages of Agnon's Buczacz stories he is the only one to merit what amounts to a catalogue raisonne of his wardrobe.

> He wore an old felt coat lined with cotton and a grey turban, wide at the bottom and narrowed in a circle to the top. Although it appeared to be woven, it was actually not, because he never wore anything woven after once

Comment [JS8]: It hadn't occurred to me before, but it's an interesting mirror image of HaMashal vehaNimshal re the consequences of loaning/borrowing book form a non-Jew.

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> discovering that the threads in a garment he had purchased were woven in the shape of the cross.
>
> Wearing these garments he would go about his business and welcome the princes and lords who come to his home to taste his mead.[. . .] Whenever he recited the blessings after meals—and, there is no need to add, when he walked to the synagogue or went to circumcise an infant—he wore a coat over his garments with a lambskin turban in place of his regular one. On Sabbaths and holidays he wore a satin coat and a silk turban. On winter Sabbaths he wore a marten coat and a goatskin turban of such deep and shiny blackness that it seemed to give off sparks of blue light.[12] (130)

Comment [JS9]: I'm not sure how best to translate mitznefet, but I think turban will mislead the reader, who will likely be thinking of some medieval Persian headdress.
In the army (contemporary Hebrew for sure) it means a kind of cap.
Mitznefet Shena = sleeping cap, e.g.

What prompts the narrator toward this upsurge in sartorial specificity is a desire to suggest--through the indirection of metonymy—the different aspects in which R. Moshe Aharon presents himself to the world. We learn, for example, of his studied indifference to Christian mores. Although he would take great pains to alter his costume and put on finery for Sabbath and ritual functions, he makes a point of not doing so when he is receiving high-born visitors shopping for spirits. The avoidance of any woven garment because of cross-like stitching is surely a hyper-stringency, and it would seem to reflect a need to reinforce the conviction of an inner boundary on the part of a Jew who has frequent contacts with Christians. Most striking in R. Moshe Aharon's wardrobe is the variety of his headdress. There are four altogether: one for business, one for the observance of weekday ritual acts, one for summer Sabbaths and one for winter Sabbaths. (This last one is the gift from his teacher for saving him from the hands of bandits.) The Hebrew term for this head gear *mitsnefet* is not the usual word for hat. It comes from the biblical name for the head covering of the High Priest in the Jerusalem temple, although it was also used later to connote a turban, i. e., fabric wrapped around the head.[13] Whatever its precise meaning, the term projects an archaic, hieratic, and vaguely oriental tone and suggests, in addition to his exquisite awareness of his self-presentation, that R. Moshe Aharon sees himself as the re-embodiment of an ancient Jewish ruler, the very prince absent from annals of the post-biblical of Israel.

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The aggressive and autocratic manner in which R. Moshe Aharon discharges his duties as gabbai, the narrator informs us, has never before been witnessed in Buczacz. When a man with connections to the rulers seeks to avoid paying a tax levied on the community, the gabbai tells him coolly that he may be exempted, but when he dies he will not be buried until

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his heirs pay several times the sum to the community. When another complains that he has not been treated with the respect he deserves by a representative of the community, he is told by R. Moshe Aharon, "Wait until Yom Kippur, when he will want your forgiveness, and if it is difficult to wait, forgive him now" (133). When still another criticizes the gabbai's brusque style by comparing it to his father's agreeable courtliness, he receives this riposte: "Why do you compare me with my father? My father dealt with men of understanding like your father, but I have to deal with troublemakers and malcontents like you." He makes enactments that are necessary for the community's welfare and only after the fact convenes the council of elders to inform them. If his measures fail to elicit approbation, "he would close his eyes as if he were asleep and no one could know whether or not he had heard."

R. Moshe Aharon's behavior is a subject of astonishment rather than judgment. Speaking in his role as the representative of communal opinion, the narrator reports, "Many people struggled with the question of where Moshe Aharon found the strength to act in this way" (132). The elderly denizens of the beit midrash do not remember as well behaved a boy as he, and his contemporaries say that he was an agreeable youth who showed no signs of aggressiveness, except, that is, for the time when he grabbed a switch out of the hands of a melamed who was about to thrash him. The narrator can come up with no explanation, and he is forced to admit that this remains a question with no answer.

There *is* an answer, of course, but the narrator is looking for it in the wrong place. He assumes that Moshe Aharon's behavior as an adult must necessarily be an outgrowth of a core personality that was shaped in boyhood and youth; and he is confounded when he can adduce no early signs of the later man. We have in fact already been informed of the source: after reading about the kings and princes of the nations and the abjection of Israel, the young man decides, within the terms available to him, to become a ruler and statesman. That it could be will rather than temperament that is what is driving the gabbai's conduct is a notion beyond the narrator's mental repertoire, which has provision for neither the concept of a Jewish ruler or prince nor for the act of self-fashioning Moshe Aharon has undertaken. So even though it is the narrator himself who describes Moshe Aharon's revelatory experience reading history, he cannot put the two things together. Agnon invites us the readers to take that step.

"R. Moshe Aharon the Mead Merchant" is a portrait sketch of a singular communal leader until it suddenly becomes something else. The story goes about its business laying out the gabbai's lineage, education and conduct in a manner that, despite an admixture of illustrative anecdotes, is essentially discursive. But then, with the flimsy excuse of

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explaining how Moshe Aharon achieved prominence in the mead trade, the story launches into a lengthy and lurid narrative about a Polish prince who traverses most of the known world in search for atonement for a terrible crime. The narrator is well aware of the fact that he is taking the reader on a wild ride far away from Buczacz and deep into world of Polish Catholicism, and the longer the story goes on the more frequent the apologies, the requests that the reader stay with him, and the promises to be brief and cut to the chase. The narrator eventually makes good on his promise to bring his tale back home and demonstrate its relevance to R. Moshe Aharon and his milieu. Yet the ostensible connection between the two remains slight and unpersuasive, located somewhere between the vagaries of divine providence and the coincidences of melodrama. Again, Agnon as implied author urges us to discover a deeper nexus, one that lies beyond the ken of his narrator.

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THE HAUNTED PRINCE

The hero of this tale-within-a-story is no ordinary Polish noble, and the transgression for which he seeks remission is no ordinary sin. The noble is an unnamed prince who owns a fifth of Poland and whose vast wealth is beyond imagining. (He is not, it is important to point out, a scion of the Potocki family, and his estates do not include Buczacz.) His sin is hiring an assassin to murder his sister and her husband, whose independence after their marriage aroused a jealousy he could not abide. Although his exalted status places him above the law of the land, the prince cannot be defended from the afflictions of his conscience and from accusatory apparitions of the murdered couple. Feasting and drinking provide only fleeting relief, and when he tries to lose himself in hunting, the animal he is about to dispatch opens its mouth and says, "Are you going to kill me too the way you did your sister and her husband?" (132). He seeks refuge in a rural church, but the huge sums he contributes have an opposite to what he seeks. In the smoke of the candles his donations have purchased the shades of his murdered victims appear and lay hold of him, haunting him without respite. Next he consults with distinguished priests who are used to serving as father confessors to the nobility, and he is counseled to make pilgrimage to the grave of a saintly wonder worker.

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That errand is a failure, but the prince hears from other penitents about a cave in Egypt that assures atonement to sinners who spend the night in it. Humbled, he foreswears his finery and joins a group of pilgrims traveling by foot to the holy site. By this time he is so hobbled by the consequences of his transgression that he can barely walk; he can proceed

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only with the support of the other sinners, who endlessly rehearse the tales of their own sins. The cave is the cell of a penitent who carved out a space only large enough for him to kneel in, and there he installed himself until worms devoured his flesh. The worms were overheard promising absolution to any sinner who spends three nights in the cave; a monastery was established on the site, and pilgrims came from wide and far. The claims prove true; arriving in a state of mental collapse, the prince spends just one night in the cave and suddenly feels free of the censorious apparitions that have so long haunted him. But that same night, alas, he contracts a wasting fever and lies languishing in the paupers' ward of a hospital. Having been immersed in the torments of the soul, he is now plunged into the torments of the body.

His luck changes when his aristocratic identity is discovered by a European nobleman visiting the indigent ill. He is brought to a proper hotel, loaned money and given a carriage so that he can consult doctors and return home. He visits many doctors in many countries, taking the medicines they give him for the payment of enormous fees, but he does not improve. Finally, he comes under the care of a great court physician, who declares that the essence of his suffering derives from the toxic drugs he has been given by meretricious doctors. Under this new regimen, the princes condition improves somewhat, and when the physician becomes too busy with his obligations at court to treat him, he decides to return to his estates in Poland and to turn his attention to his subjects, whose welfare he had ignored even before his troubles began. On the road home there is a terrible flare up of the fever, and his driver pulls his carriage into the nearest town.

The town is none other than Buczacz, and the house in front of which the carriage comes to a stop is none other than R. Moshe Aharon's. The prince is taken in and put to bed. R. Moshe Aharon descends into his cellar and retrieves a cask that was already two hundred and fifty years old when his father laid it down fifty years earlier. The prince is given two beakers of this elixir to drink and falls into a deep slumber. Over the course of two days he sweats out his fever and arises restored to health and full of boundless gratitude to his host. When R. Moshe Aharon declines the purses of gold he is offered as thanks, the prince is astonished at the comparison between him and the many doctors who drained his pockets yet brought him no relief. The prince promulgates an edict placing the mead merchant under his protection; R. Moshe Aharon becomes the mead supplier of choice to the great estates, whose lords visit his home to taste the mead and converse with the worldly merchant. Prince himself sets aside a day or two each year for a visit. The two men would sit together and discuss—in Polish, of course--"the affairs of the world, the prince basing himself on what he had seen with his own eyes and R. Moshe Aharon on what he had read in the volumes

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Tsemaḥ David and *Neḥmad vena'im*" (142). The favor R. Moshe Aharon enjoys in the eyes of the Polish elite is converted to political capital in difficult times, and the fortune he accrues is left to the community upon his death.[14]

The prince's tale is finally concluded and folded back into the frame story. Yet the tale remains so sensational and exotic and lengthy that it threatens to consume the frame that is supposed to contain it. It is also a journey deep into a gentile Christian imaginary thick with mortal sins and mortifications. Why, then, is this tale here? What justifies the hefty narrative weight it displaces?

The Prince's tale, I would argue, serves two purposes, one explicit and one implicit, one urged on us openly by the narrator and one implied structurally by the author. To begin with, the narrator justifies the prince's tale by virtue of its etiological value. It provides an explanation for the extraordinary fact that a Jew from Buczacz has frequent contact with the Polish nobility and counts one of its greatest magnates as his special friend. The coincidence that makes all this possible—the prince's carriage "happening" to come to a stop beside R. Moshe Aharon's mead shop—is presented as a clear instance of providential orchestration. The narrator goes so far as to claim that the reason the prince does not lose a grip on his sanity, which would have been his likely fate in view of his extreme suffering, is because God wanted the prince to hold himself together just long enough to collapse on R. Moshe Aharon's doorstep and thus provide the mead merchant with the chance to cure him and put him in his debt (135). Yet despite its expository necessity, this chronicle of obsessive sin and the quest for absolution drags the reader over a terrain of gentile Christianity that, though fascinating in a voyeuristic sense, is alien and polluting. The narrator feels called upon several times to address the reader directly, offering reassurance that we, as Jews, know that these beliefs and practices are nonsense. Regarding the belief that a night spent in the cave of the Egyptian penitent delivers absolution, for example, the narrator says, "To you, my friend, it is not necessary to say that their sins were not remitted; would that at least thenceforth they desisted from sinning." The directness and intimacy of the narrator's address to the reader as "my friend" (*yedidi*) are unusual in Agnon's Buczacz stories. The phenomenon may signal a desire to reinforce the bond between narrator and reader and underscore the boundary between them and the Christian behaviors in the great gentile world being described. The need for differentiation may be all the more urgent in light of the fact that the prince refers to R. Moshe Aharon as "yedidi" when he has been purged of his fever and awoken in the mead merchant's bed (140).

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Agnon is up to something more ambitious. By placing the prince's tale alongside the portrait of the gabbai R. Moshe Aharon, he is inviting us to compare the two men in their aspect as rulers. On the surface of things, such a comparison would appear ludicrous. The gabbai of Buczacz is the volunteer head of a downtrodden confessional community that is not only subservient to the Polish magnates but owned by them outright. How is it possible to speak of him in the same breath as a prince of vast wealth, the owner of a fifth of Poland? It *is* possible, the author argues, because communities like (Jewish) Buczacz were invested with a real if conditional sovereignty, and they were, at times, ruled by men of great authority and power. Not only is the comparison possible but the results turn things upside down; for it is the Jewish mead merchant who comes off as the ruler of true wisdom and aristocratic bearing. The prince serves as a foil. Despite his control of vast estates, his life has been devoted to the pursuit of pleasure, and it is not until he has been chastened by spiritual and physical pain that he accepts responsibility for the governance of his lands. Both in its commission and in its exemption from punishment, the act of murder committed by the prince is the result of an indulgence unchecked by law. His self-centeredness persists despite his afflictions. In his search for atonement, it is striking that he never repents of his deeds and attempts to reform himself; the goal of his quest remains aimed solely at palliating his suffering and banishing his demons. R. Moshe Aharon's worthiness shines by contrast. Armed with neither great wealth nor the coercive power of the state nor the trappings of noble office, the gabbai of Buczacz governs with wisdom, dignity, self-assurance and justice, qualities that should be the envy of princes and dukes.

R. Moshe Aharon's achievement, however, remains singular, and it is not presented without qualification and irony. The vocation of governance is realized at the expense of devotion to the study of Torah. R. Moshe Aharon and his wife, moreover, are childless, and that fate would seem to be a tragic payment for a consuming devotion to communal leadership. His brusque and autocratic manner does not make him much loved, at least during his lifetime, by his fellow townspeople and by the village Jews, whom he has forced to travel into the city for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It is only after his death that the latter acknowledge his wisdom in this ruling and bring their heartfelt rustic tributes during the mourning period. Most striking is the fact that the boundary that separates him from the princes turns out to be more permeable than it appears. The man who will not wear woven garments because of the taint of cruciform stitching is the same man who discovers the will to rule not from the chronicles of ancient Israel but from the histories of the kings and princes of the nations of the world.

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It is telling that the spectacle of world history is discovered by reading a book in Hebrew. The prince has traveled the known world, but R. Moshe Aharon may never have traveled farther from Buczacz than Yaslovitz, the neighboring town, yet he gets all he needs from reading the Hebrew books of David Ganz. The worldliness the gabbai attains by reading in Hebrew draws attention to the prevalence of the theme of languages in the story. The gabbai reads texts in Hebrew, talks with his fellow Jews in Yiddish, and converses in Polish with the Polish lords, who, in turn, can read texts in Latin and converse in French, the international language of European aristocracy. These attainments are, perhaps, only to be expected among members of the ruling elite. But the narrator adduces two instances, one more bizarre than the other, in which the knowledge of a "foreign" language becomes a marker of secret and effectual wisdom. One concerns the cave of the Egyptian ascetic. After his death, the worms who formerly feasted on his flesh are overheard conversing by the monks, who, not knowing languages, cannot make out their meaning. It is only when the sagacious abbot translates for them that the good news about the cave's powers can be recognized and broadcast (134).

The other incident occurs earlier when the prince is searching for diversions that would blot out the afflictions of his conscience.

> He went out hunting. He sighted an animal and was about to take aim, when suddenly the animal spoke up! "Do you intend to kill me as you killed your sister and her husband?!" That the prince understood what the animal was saying should not surprise you, because wild animals and birds are able to speak Hebrew, as we know from the incident of Balaam's talking ass. Now the prince did not know Hebrew. However, animals, beasts, and birds do not waste a word, and they were not party to sin of the generation of the Tower of Babel and remained unaffected by its punishment. They therefore retained their unitary language from the time when the entire world had one tongue. So when the animal opened its mouth to speak, the prince understood what it was saying. He threw away all his weapons and began to run. (132)

In his desire both to promote the primacy of Hebrew and to favor us with a reproachful talking bird, the narrator gets lost in the thicket of a casuistical argument. We know from Bilaam's ass that animals speak Hebrew; we know that the unitary language spoken before Babel was Hebrew; and we know that animals were not implicated in the sin of Babel. Ergo, the bird

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spoke Hebrew. But Hebrew is a language the Prince does not understand; so how he understands its accusatory message remains tangled in the overly-knowing syllogism.

Despite this confusion, a kind of principle emerge that is embodied in the careful balance of R. Moshe Aharon's conduct. So long as Israel lives in exile among the nations of the world with their many different tongues, Israel's leaders must of necessity be worldly men who can converse with their rulers and understand their intentions. But this worldliness is only a functional necessity, an appurtenance of statecraft. When it comes to true wisdom about the world as opposed to mere worldliness, Hebrew remains the font of truth, whether it is the Hebrew of Scripture and the ancient sages or the Hebrew of an astronomer, cosmographer and historian like David Ganz, who lived only in the previous century.

A final thought about R. Moshe Aharon. Although he is elevated above his brethren by virtue of his demeanor and authority, he shares a great deal with them when it comes to his occupation, because, like them, he is an alcohol retailer. The wide prevalence of rural taverns run by Jews, as was discussed at the beginning of this chapter, was the result of an economic logic. The surplus grain produced on the magnate's estates would lose much of its value if it had to be transported to distant markets. But distilled into alcohol locally, it could be sold under monopolistic terms to the Ukrainian-Ruthenian peasants, and who better than the Jews, with their reputation for sobriety, to do the selling? The coarse intoxicants dispensed in the taverns were not of much interest to the nobility, who preferred wines imported from Hungary or mead, a beverage that is made from fermenting honey and is capable of aging and great refinement. R. Moshe Aharon inherits a cellar of old casks from his father, and, thanks to its role in healing the prince, his mead becomes a sensation. Being blessed with a superior product and a superior clientele gives him the wealth and connections necessary to lead and protect his community. But the tony and upscale nature of his business should not obscure the fact that R. Moshe Aharon is plying a trade that is not essentially different from the rural Jewish tavern keepers. The point is made ironically in the particular way in which the excellence of his cellar is praised by his highborn clients. At their banquets, "[t]he priests would sing that all the Jews' houses should burn like stubble except for the cellar of the Jew who makes mead" (131). The Jew who makes mead knows that his exemption is highly contingent and that his fate is shared with that of his people. With sober purpose and statesmanlike resolve he leverages his advantage on behalf of his community.

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Rarely does a title deliver so much meaning with so much concision. "Hashutafim," which means "The Partners" or "The Sharers," describes the circumstances under which the descendants of a humble Jewish charcoal maker named Nahum Ze'ev came to acquire permanent tenancy of the basement of the grand City hall of Buczacz, thus becoming "partners" with the descendants of Count Potocki, who erected the building.[15] *Shutaf* (the singular) is a rabbinic, post-biblical term that connotes a variety of commercial and legal arrangements in which two or more persons share responsibility.[i] Persons become partners when they join in a business or in the ownership of a property; persons can also become partners even in the absence of a commercial relationship, when, for example, their houses abut a common courtyard. The verb stem *sh.t.f* means to join or associate, as with the many midrashim in which, as an act of grace, God associates his name with Israel.[ii] The verb also has a connotation of empathic sharing, as in participating in the joy or sorrow of another.

With this lexical instrument in hand, Agnon probes the ironies of the Jewish-Polish relationship. What seems, especially viewed from the hauteur of the Polish nobility, as a relationship based on ownership or domination, or at the very least, feudal obeisance, turns out, viewed from other angles, to be less stratified and differentiated. There are nodes of entanglement between Jews and Poles in business, in the conduct of everyday life and in the management of the great estates. Although they would be loath to acknowledge it, the Poles were dependent upon the Jews for their success in colonizing the Ukraine; and the Jews, no more eager to admit as much, were grateful to the Poles for conditions of commercial stability and communal autonomy that did not exist elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Although this was a relationship hardly based on equality, it was, for all intents and purposes, a functional partnership.

Like most partnerships of necessity, there was little intimacy. The Jews did not know, and were not interesting in knowing, much about the domestic and religious life of the Poles; and the Poles were interested in the inner sphere of Jewish life only as fodder for drinking songs and the doggerel of court jesters. The relationship can be summed up as one of pragmatic enmeshment together with mutual disgust and willed ignorance. For this very reason, the intimate encounter Agnon stages between a Jewish charcoal maker and a Polish magnate in "The Partners" is truly remarkable. As described in the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter, the count observes the Jew in the homely act of praying from his position prostrate on his rescuer's rustic pallet. Later the same day, Nahum Ze'ev penetrates the palace precincts, traverses the great dining hall, and installs the count on a couch.

Comment [JS10]: שיתוף
In medieval Jewish thought shituf also has a meaning of worshipping Hashem in "ASSOCIATION" with another god (e.g., Jesus) constituting Avoda Zara. See e.g. first mention in Tosfot to Sanhedrin 63b.
Not sure that's what's at play here, but maybe?

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Throughout much of the day, the count's enfeebled body has been carried in the arms of the charcoal maker or supported by him, the physical distance between these unlikely partners closed entirely.

The tale of the charcoal maker and the count, so fraught with coincidence and drama, is told by the narrator for an ulterior motive. It explains the origins of a singular and surprising situation whereby a Jewish family enjoys the inalienable right to live in the basement of Buczacz's magnificent city hall. The tale discharges an etiological function similar to that of the tale of mead merchant and the prince in the account of the gabbai R. Moshe Aharon, whose wealth and worldliness are anomalous and require explanation. Both stories have a similar envelope structure. An anomalous feature of Jewish-Polish relations is described in a discursive opening section; in the middle comes the sensational tale that accounts for the phenomenon; and, finally, a report on its fate given in the narrator's longitudinal, chronicle mode.

In "The Partners," Agnon fashions a spatial metonymy with extraordinary resonance. The permanent and irrevocable installation of a Jewish family in the basement of the grandest edifice in Buczacz stands for the place of Jews in Polish society in the Ukraine. True, the Jews are in the basement, but their right to be there has been secured, and there they persist and thrive, maximizing the real but constrained opportunity given them for religious expression and mutual assistance. They are permanently wired into the subconscious of the host culture. The power of this spatial metonymy depends on the special importance of the city hall, whose magnificent but dark history is recounted in the story that immediately precedes "The Sharers."[16] That story describes Mikolaj Potocki's desire to build in Buczacz the grandest civil structure in Poland and his recruiting an Italian architect and sculptor named Theodore to design the project and oversee its realization. The project is a success. The magnificent, many-storied city hall, festooned with lifelike sculptures, towers over Buczacz and gives this modest town bragging rights throughout the country. The dark dimension of its history concerns Theodore's fate. A Jewish child by birth, he was seized by priests, forcefully baptized and apprenticed to a master sculptor. It is not until his sojourn in Buczacz that he comes in contact again with Jews, and the encounter stimulates memories of his early trauma. (He sculpts some of the biblical figures that adorn the city hall in the likenesses of Buczacz Jews.) The success of the building turns out to be Theodore's undoing. Unwilling to allow him to duplicate or better his achievement elsewhere, Count Potocki locks the artist in a chamber in a high tower in the building he himself had built and leaves him there to die of starvation. Realizing his fate, Theodore fashions a set of wings from the odd

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building materials scattered around and succeeds in taking flight from his prison. But in this Jewish version of the Icarus tale his strength lasts him long enough only to reach the other side of the River Strypa, where he crashes to his death. The Ukrainian peasants working in the fields observe his fall and, pronouncing his name in their dialect, call the place Fedore Hill. The name endures, and it is on this hillside, the narrator informs us, that the Nazis made 500 Buczacz Jews dig their own graves.

There is another shadow cast by the splendor of the city hall, and this is the first thing the narrator tells us at the outset of "The Sharers." Despite the building's conspicuous display of wealth and power, it is built upon a cavernous basement designed as a place of refuge in case of Tatar or Turkish attack. The basement connects to a series of underground passageways that enable the Polish rulers to flee the city rather than being picked off for deportation and ransom. This was not, needless to say, an emergency evacuation scheme that included the Jews, who would be left together with non-noble Poles to defend the city with their lives. But as the bloody seventeenth century receded into the past, and with it the terrors of Ottoman incursions, the basement of the city hall fell into disuse and became a cobwebbed place remarkable only for the cries of demons heard form it on occasion by local ears. When Nahum Ze'ev is given the basement as a reward for his rescue of the count, he fills this vacuum with purposeful life. He cleans it, sanctifies it as a Jewish dwelling place by affixing mezuzot to its doorways, and, because he needs only a fraction of the space for his living quarters and his business, he makes the basement available at no charge to the poor stall operators in the adjacent market square. These as poorest sellers who cannot afford shops of their own and who can now store their merchandise overnight rather than carting it back and forth each day to the distant quarters where they live.

Thus, without the need for explicit statement, Agnon allows his spatial metonymy to suggest, in the largest possible terms, the place of the Jews in the edifice of Polish society. The Jews took the inferior and disused sectors of society allotted to them and made them productive, and they leveraged the good fortune of the few on behalf of the many. Now, this global, affirmative reading of Polish Jewry is not, to be sure, the only account rendered in *'Ir umelo'ah*; as we will see in the next chapter, in the stories set after the Partition and under the Austrian regime, Agnon adopts a far more acerbic stance toward the behavior of Jews toward each other under conditions of oppression. But in this earlier period, when Jewish communal and rabbinic authority have not yet been significantly undermined, his eye remains more benevolent and seeks out instances of piety, ingenuity, and steadfastness. This is why at the beginning of the story Agnon has his narrator single out the figure of Nahum Ber standing at

Comment [JS12]: This is of course a Judaized (or Agnonized?) version of the Icarus myth.

Comment [JS13]: I think Moors were only western European and African Muslims – not Ottomans or those from the east.

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the doorway to the basement of the city hall. As we will come to understand by the end of the story, Nahum Ber, who lived at the end of the nineteenth century and was a friend of the narrator's parents, is a direct descendant of Nahum Ze'ev, who was granted the tenancy of the basement sometime in the middle of the eighteenth. All these years the family has held fast to its subterranean home and rejected the escalating offers from the Potockis to buy it back. Although it would be in his financial interest to sell, Nahum Ber responds to the latest offer thus: "If I have merited to have been made a partner of the majestic counts from the House of Potocki in the city hall that is the glorious splendor of the city and an object of envy throughout Poland, could I possibly dissolve the partnership? I would not dissolve it for all the money in the world" (239). Nahum Ber's response, ~~which~~ tweaks the noses of his "partners" with its inflated, sycophantic diction, and makes the point that, come what may, the Jews will not relinquish their rightfully-acquired ownership of their portion of the Polish polity. And this is a time, it must be remembered, when the sway of magnates like Potocki has been diminished by Austrian rule and the magnificent edifice of their authority has already been heavily mortgaged.

As the ~~narrator~~ now proceeds to tell the tale of the charcoal maker and the Count, which explains how all this came to be, the issue of Polish oppression does not disappear. Before he became a charcoal maker, Nahum Ze'ev was the ~~leaseholder of a rural~~ tavern that had been operated by his family for generations. When tavern's profits disappoint the Polish lord who owns it, he turns out Nahum Ze'ev and his family and installs another Jew who promises a better return. Dispossessed and wandering in the countryside in search of work, Nahum Ze'ev comes across an elderly Ruthenian peasant who remembers kindnesses shown to him by the Jewish tavern keeper in former times. He is a charcoal maker by occupation, and he offers to teach the trade to Nahum Ze'ev, who gratefully accepts his offer. The old man has no heirs to take over the business—one son joined the army, one hired himself into domestic service, and one was arrested for brigandage—and when he dies, Nahum Ze'ev, who is already not young himself, takes over the hard work involved in producing charcoal: cutting down trees, chopping them up, burning them down under controlled conditions, and transporting the finished product, ~~which is sought after as fuel,~~ to town for sale.[17]

Once the problem of livelihood has been resolved, there remains a large hole in his heart.

> He got up early that day, as was his wont, and set off. What was in his heart at that moment? Although one cannot know what is in the heart of another, one

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> can conjecture that he desired what most village Jews desire: to live in town with other Jews, to pray daily with the community, especially the morning prayer. For at dawn one senses palpably the Lord's work as he returns our souls to our lifeless bodies, and one wants to praise God in a house of prayer where there is an ark, religious books and Jews. (240-41)

Nahum Ze'ev's typicality is at odds with R. Moshe Aharon's edicts regarding village Jews. The gabbai views their Judaic literacy as woefully substandard and fears the erasure of their Jewishness altogether if they are not compelled to spend Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur with their brethren in town. Nahum Ze'ev is a strong witness for the defense. In our story, the maintenance of his piety in isolated circumstances is presented as characteristic of his class of Jews rather than as exceptional. He is not a zealot or a holy man but a representative figure, and on that basis the narrator justifies the license he takes to imagine his unspoken thoughts as he makes the long predawn journey on foot from his home in the forest to pray with the community in town.[18] This is a trek he undertakes twice a week, on the days when the Torah is read in the morning service, as well as on Sabbaths and holidays. Even long after he has accommodated himself to the rigors of his occupation as a charcoal maker—the story is vague on time but informs us that his children are now grown up—the feeling of being deprived of daily communal prayer has not grown less acute.

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Comment [JS14]: You might want to explain: because in the small villages here was no minyan, krait ha-Torah, possibly no tekiat shofar, etc.

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Note well the nature of Nahum Ze'ev's religiosity. The spring of his desire to pray with the community is not rooted in issues of moral duty or halakhic requirements or communal solidarity. The narrator presents it as the instinctual response of a religious person to the created world. This is the instinct to praise God for the wonders of life, which are experienced with special urgency upon arising from the demi-death of sleep and encountering the mystery of creation. Note also the importance to Nahum Ze'ev of the presence of the ark; it takes the close proximity of the ark, together with other Jews and the tomes of sacred writings and commentaries, to fulfill the potential force of communal prayer. The term for the ark used here is *aron*, but, recalling the discussion of the stories about hazzanim in Chapter Four, the alternate term is teivah. In those tales, which concern religious professionals whose very business it is to draw close to the teivah, proximity verges on danger. The oft-personified teivah does not suffer all who approach it, and dwelling in its presence, for those with the requisite superior spiritual resources to do so, requires either self-sacrifice or self-disqualification. The problem is the opposite for the hero of "The Partners." Nahum Ze'ev is too far away from the source of holiness. As an unlearned layman he will

(emphasis)

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never draw too close for safety, but as a Jew of steady faith he needs something more than the strength of his own devotion. He seeks to be warmed by proximate distance to the holy, and this can be achieved only by joining the congregation in the synagogue.

The thematic significance of this desire cannot be stressed enough. Nahum Ze'ev's longing to take part in daily communal prayer is not presented as an endearing idiosyncrasy or the product of a special spiritual endowment. Rather, it is an instantiation of what is most essential about Buczacz in Agnon's re-imagining of the town. As was argued at the beginning of this volume, Agnon decided to anchor his reconstruction of Buczacz to two normative pillars: Torah study and communal worship. The path of study, even with its many compartments and levels, is open to those who have had the good fortune to have been educated in their youth. The path of worship is open to all, and the case can be made that there is no better embodiment of this than the figure of a charcoal maker whose circumstances have hitherto kept him at a distance and who, now that a fortuitous opportunity has, literally, crossed his path, is determined at all costs to seize this prize, which is taken for granted by town dwellers but has eluded him all his life.

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STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

To be sure, coming across Count Potocki prostrate on the forest floor eventually turns out to be Nahum Ze'ev's great chance. But it is crucial to keep in mind that initially, and for a long narrative duration, the encounter with the stricken magnate is fraught with danger rather than opportunity. It is still nighttime when the charcoal maker comes across the body of a man propped up against a tree. He identifies the great man by his clothing and is relieved to discover that his lifelessness is sleep rather than death. But he sees that the count has lain out all night exposed to the cold air, and he reasons that there is a serious danger of what we would today call hyperthermia. Lest you think the course of action is self-evident—take the count to safety indoors—it is well to remember that this is the same Count Potocki who was well known for having shot dead two Jews in the marketplace simply because a frustrating day hunting had produced nothing else to shoot at.[19] Moving the unwell magnate and then having him get worse or even die as a result of the intervention would have deterred many from touching his body. Yet Nahum Ze'ev does not hesitate. Because the count is too weak to walk, he puts him over his shoulder and carries him, in addition to the bundle of charcoal he was taking into town for sale and the satchel of his tallit and tefilin, to his home.

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The picture of Nahum Ze'ev that emerges from the set of deliberate actions he takes is startling. He is a Jew who is at home in the physical world. No longer a young man, he displays enormous strength in hoisting up the count on his shoulders and carrying him through the woods. It is in those woods that he displays a preternatural intimacy with nature. On his predawn trek to the synagogue in town he strides from wood to wood, from thicket to thicket, along a path that only a veteran woodsman can discern. "And if summer rains or winter snows have erased the path, the smells of the trees show him the way. Passing through trees, each with its own smell, he suddenly gets whiff of a human being. Following the smell takes him to a broad oak tree and a man propped up underneath it" (241). From his days in the forest Nahum Ze'ev has developed the indigenous wisdom of a Ruthenian peasant, but, in his case, it is a knowledge deployed for purpose of navigating his way to the divine service in the synagogue.

There can be no greater contrast than that between Nahum Ze'ev's dexterity, sturdiness and decisiveness and the count's enfeeblement. True, he has been suffering from exposure and dehydration, but he exhibits a near total collapse of faculties far beyond his physical situation. His disorientation stems from his sudden isolation and from his removal from the network of helpers and servants that customarily surround him and answer to his every whim. As one of the great magnates, he resides at the pinnacle of *shlachta* culture; beneath him are serried ranks of lesser nobles who eat at his table, serve in his army, and administer his estates. That he is allowed to go missing from this legion of minions, retainers and servants may or may not be a plausible plot development; nevertheless, this is where he finds himself, depleted and debilitated and alone and in the hands of an uncouth and decidedly non-noble stranger.

Intimacy, both physical, domestic and spiritual, is the keynote of the time the two men spend together, which, although it is only one day, is spread over many pages. First, there is the contact of their bodies. Nahum Ze'ev places the count over his shoulder and carries him to his home in the village, and after the count has sufficiently recovered to travel, he has to hold on to him with his arms and support him as they proceed on foot through the forest because the way is impassable to wagons and the count is unsteady on horseback. Although he was only semi-conscious when he was carried to the village, he is fully aware that it is a Jew who is holding him up as they trek through the forest to the palace. The count is then installed in the Jewish couple's one-room cottage and placed on the pallet of stones and straw that is Nahum Ze'ev's bed. It is there that Nahum Ze'ev takes his life in his hands by disobeying the count's peremptory order to return him to the palace immediately. He had not

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yet said his morning prayers because he had discovered the count on his way to the synagogue in town and was subsequently occupied taking care of him. Now that it is clear that the count's life is not in danger, he takes leave—respectfully but unilaterally—to pray before they depart. It is precisely at this point, as Nahum Ze'ev puts on his tallit and tefilin and begins the swaying motions of Jewish prayer, that the narrator makes the observation, cited at the opening of this chapter, that although thousands of Jews live on his estates the count had never seen Jews at prayer. He looks on as this Jew prays and is not reviled.

The whole long day is one of boundaries crossed and identities inverted. The social distance collapsed between the two men is so enormous that it is unthinkable, or thinkable only in the imaginative space of the story. The mighty have been humbled and the meek have been raised up. This is a reversal that has taken place without any violent reckoning. The puissant aristocrat's collapse stems from an internal insufficiency; cut off from his retinue, his executive self shrivels. The Jewish charcoal maker, on the other hand, is elevated only by virtue of the accidental situation he has stumbled upon; for he remains unchanged and continues to apply to this radically unanticipated event the same God-fearing values he applies to all aspects of his life.

This awkward, intimate connection between the two men can exist only so long as they remain in the liminal, interstitial zone of the forest. Their troubles begin at sunset when they emerge from the woods in sight of Buczacz. Angered and confused by the sight of the city lit up as on a festival, the count instructs Nahum Ze'ev to ask a drunken and rowdy tough what is going on. In reply he gets only vulgarity and curses hurled at him, and he is told "Shut your mouth, Jew, and don't get in the way of superior lords" (245). This odd couple soldiers on and arrives within sight of the palace. When one of the torch bearers sees a Jew in these precincts—and apparently missing the shrunken figure next to him—he lands a blow on Nahum Ze'ev's legs that brings him to the ground together with his noble charge. There they lay, one exhausted and in pain and the other dazed and disoriented. Eventually they get back on their legs and hobble into the palace, which at that moment is completely illuminated and completed deserted. It is at that point that the count utters the most risible line in the story. The poor charcoal maker, who has never before been anywhere near the magnate's residence, is given the command, "Set me down on my bed!" (246). Earlier in the day, the count had lain on Nahum Ze'ev's rough-hewn pallet, but now any notion of a mutual or reversible intimacy is absurd. Just then a couch is found in the corner of the dining hall upon which to deposit the count, and the room begins to fill up with hungry and impatient retainers returning from combing the countryside for the missing magnate. Nahum Ze'ev is filled with

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dread by the prospect of being caught in this company, and he slips away just before the count's presence is discovered and the jubilation over his return begins.

To the count's credit, he does not forget what happened to him in the woods once he regains his strength and is again surrounded by those who do his bidding. His gratitude to the poor Jewish charcoal maker is genuine, but his efforts to fasten on a reward that would be acceptable to his rescuer prove challenging. Money in itself is of no interest. The one thing Nahum Ze'ev wants is the same thing the narrator assumed was on his mind when he happened upon the count's body in the woods. He wants to live in town so he can pray with the community. And fulfilling this desire turns out to be the one of the few things the great magnate cannot do with the mere issuance of an order to his minions. In a series of exchanges with his well-informed major domo, the count learns that, because of a recent fire, housing in the Jewish quarters of Buczacz is not just at a premium but impossible to obtain. But the count perseveres and comes up with the idea of granting him the right of tenancy in the basement of the city hall. A solution is also found to the problem of how the charcoal maker will find livelihood in the city. He will be assigned the town's yeast-selling concession, a trade traditionally given to a rabbi's wife in order to supplement the limited salary paid her husband by the community. Because of illness, the wife of the current rabbi of Buczacz cannot avail herself of this opportunity. The count purchases the concession from the community and assigns it to Nahum Ze'ev and his descendants in perpetuity, that is, on the same basis on which they are given the basement.[20]

In the final sections of "The Partners," the typicality accorded Nahum Ze'ev at the beginning of the story is rubbed away to reveal a man of singular faith. Living among the gentiles in the villages and forests, as we know from the reasoning behind R. Moshe Aharon's edicts, is a test of Jewishness that many cannot withstand. But the charcoal maker's convictions, embodied in the unremitting desire for public prayer, remain unsusceptible to environmental conditions. The narrator begins to refer to him as *hatamim*, "the innocent one" or "the perfect one," and he is presented as an ideal type of unlettered piety. This is not a piety to which any mystical appurtenances attach; rather it is a distinctly urban piety that can be fulfilled within the worldly and mercantile space of the city. The narrator hastens to inform us that Nahum Ze'ev did not treat the yeast commission as a sinecure or just as a source of income. In possession of a monopoly, he could have sold an indifferent product; but he made it his business to produce yeast of a quality rarely found in other cities. As a result, the weekday breads and Sabbath loaves of the housewives of Buczacz rose gloriously, making a modest but real contribution to the gross domestic

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happiness of the community (251). Nahum Ze'ev's boldest gesture, as described above, is to alleviate the daily travails of the poorest of the city's commercial class: the market sellers who have no shop and only their merchandise and a stall.

With the account of Nahum Ze'ev's generosity, the narrator announces that he is bringing to a close the amazing tale of how a poor Jewish family came to share the grand city hall with the noble Potockis. By way of a coda to the story, he jumps ahead by over a century to the 1890s to focus on the figure of Nahum Ber, the last descendent of his family to occupy the city hall basement and the author of the proud rebuff to the Potockis quoted earlier. This latter-day Nahum is an avatar of his namesake: a busy man who works for a living but never fails to join his brethren in the synagogue for daily prayer. Although he is not learned, he is, literally, warmed by the light of Torah, as evidenced by his habit of popping into the well-heated beit midrash on a cold winter afternoon and enjoying the sound of Torah being studied aloud. There is something noticeably different in the way the brief account of Nahum Ber is rendered. Jumping to the end of the nineteenth century places events within the lifetime of the narrator and enables him to use childhood memories as an epistemological source. (This is one of those sporadic moments in *'Ir umelo'ah*, discussed in Chapter Three, when the chronicler-narrator fashioned by Agnon bleeds into the voice of the autobiographical implied author.[i]) There is a family connection as well. The narrator's mother served as a kind of adoptive parent for Nahum Ber's younger daughter Neche after the death of her mother. The reasons given for the death of Nahum Ber's wife are fraught with historical moment: "It was because nature and the temper of the generations had changed that her mother died. They said it was because of the air in the basement that she died" (254). The widower abandoned the basement and took an apartment in a location that would make it easy for his daughter to make frequent visits to the narrator's mother. Even if he had persevered in the basement of the city hall, the narrator informs us, the special arrangement that had guaranteed his family's tenancy—and together with all it represented about Jewish-Polish relations--was shortly to be dismantled and cast aside by the cataclysm of World War One.

Surprisingly, here at the ~~end of the~~ story, as he deals with vast historical changes in necessarily telegraphic gestures, the narrator seems to have plenty of time to tell us about Nahum Ber's two daughters. We might account for this late-in-the-game digression as a familiar expression of the narrator's fondness for telling us more than we need to know about the families of his beloved city, especially when there is a link to his own family history. But Agnon is doing something much more astute. He is using the fates of the two girls to represent the forces responsible for the collapse of the two phenomena dramatized in the

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story: the embroiled "partnership" between Jews and Poles and the steadfast though unlettered piety expressed in the desire to pray with the community.

The older girl, whose name the narrator cannot recall, was married to a hard man who ran through her dowry and divorced her but not before teaching her bad habits. Now back home in Buczacz, she has not only rejected religious observance but she flaunts her apostasy by installing herself on a bench on the Sabbath where she can be seen knitting by the worshipers exiting the synagogue (253). The narrator and the good people of the town profess to be stupefied by her provocations in light of her estimable family background. Yet the reader can infer that her "bad luck" can be put down to acculturation, pauperization, modernization, urbanization and a host of other forces that transformed East European Jewish life at that time.

The younger orphan, Neche, is nurtured by the maternal mentoring of the narrator's mother and married to Feivush Ringelblum, an upright grain merchant who is a kinsman of the narrator's family. Their son, born in Buczacz in 1900, was none other than Emanuel Ringelblum, the historian and social scientist whose name will live forever because of the extraordinary archive he assembled in the Warsaw Ghetto, near which he was murdered on March 7, 1944. Ringelblum is the last transformation, in secular form, of the spirit of Nahum Ze'ev, which, after the decimation of the First Destruction (World War One), has now been extinguished by the "accursed and polluted minions of the defiled abomination" (255).

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Comment [JS16]: Sadly, I don't think you can assume readers know of his significance. You might need to explain how "Ringelblum is the last transformation, in secular form, of the spirit of Nahum Ze'ev"

Agnon and Ringelblum were cousins (through Agnon's mother's side).

Rather than ending the story with a reference to the final destruction wrought by the Holocaust, which is his practice in a number of the stories in *'Ir umelo'ah*, Agnon closes on a distinctly elegiac and liturgical note. He returns to Nahum Ber's midday visits to the beit midrash when he used to stand surveying the men and boys learning Torah and sing a song.

> There are many melodies I have heard and forgotten, but this melody has stayed in my heart. When I recall the days gone by when our city was full of Jews and the old beit midrash full of learners, the melody that R. Nahum Ber used to sing when he came into the beit midrash sings itself in my heart. Although the melody itself I am incapable of conveying, I can set down the words. These are the words in Aramaic:
>
> Exalted is the Lord from the first to the last,
> He wanted us and was pleased with us and gave us the Torah (254-56)

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The forgotten melody resonates strongly with the ending of "The Sign," the story that describes Agnon's consecration to the task of memorializing Buczacz, which was discussed in the introduction to this book. There, Shlomo Ibn Gabirol, the dean of medieval Hebrew poets, mystically appears to the Agnon-like narrator and composes a poem that will perpetuate the name and memory of the city. Concerning that poem, the narrator says, "[i]f I don't remember the words of the poem, for my soul left me because of its greatness, the poem sings itself in the heavens above, among the poems of the holy poets, the beloved of God."[21] To be sure, there is no comparing Ibn Gabirol's awesome elegy to the ditty sung by Nahum Ber. Yet both are melodies that sing themselves (*mitnagen*) in the narrator's heart in their respective realms, one august and one homely. Both gesture toward a music of memory beyond the reach of story.

Comment [JS17]: > lament? elegy?

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ETIOLOGICAL FICTIONS

In summary, "R. Moshe Aharon the Mead Merchant" and "The Partners" are stories that run against the grain of the general picture of the relations between Jews and Poles in the Buczacz tales as being rooted in political vulnerability and persecution. Here the ratios of power are reversed. In both stories, it is a noble of superior rank who becomes vulnerable and exposed to danger, and it the Jew who rescues him and restores him to his former potency. In both cases there is a fortuitous circumstance—the carriage of the sick prince stopping in Buczacz, the lost count lying on a forest route to the synagogue in town—that affords a Jew an opportunity to display his inner qualities. The stories dramatize a contrast between the personal attributes of the characters and, again, reverses the external perception of the Jew, especially as seen through Polish eyes. The Jewish mead merchant and the charcoal maker are consistently disciplined, steadfast, strong willed, resourceful, generous and loyal to their faith and their community. The prince and the count are variously arrogant, impatient, self-indulgent, coddled, and fragile. The act of rescue has positive consequences for both sides. The rewards received by the Jews are converted into enduring benefits for the whole community. And the Polish magnates are saved from themselves and given the chance to become better and more enlightened rulers. In the process, a barely-imaginable common space is briefly opened up, a space of shared worldliness in one case and a space of shared physical and domestic intimacy in the other. Although these commonalities are hedged in

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Comment [JS18]: There's more than a little element of "The Prince and the Pauper" and its various folkloric gilgulim at work here.

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and demarcated by many forces, they nonetheless establish a basis for softening if not undoing the polarization of Jewish-Polish identities.

Where does this softening take place? Is it in the historical world, of which the story presumes to give us a truthful account? Or does it exist only within the imagined world of storytelling? I am intentionally simplifying a complex issue in order to recall the issue raised at the beginning of this chapter concerning Agnon's "intervention" in the historical record. It is reasonable to assume that the stimulus for these stories comes from established facts about Buczacz in the eighteenth century. There were wealthy Jews in the mead trade, heads of community among them, who had contact with high members of the nobility. Presumably, there was a family of Jewish yeast dealers who occupied the basement of the city hall. Yet when it comes to the sensational tale of the penitent prince or to the intimate account of the rescued count, we feel we are in the domain of invention. Whether there were kernels of legends that Agnon had in hand in fashioning these tales is something that is difficult to know but also essentially beside the point. The tales of the prince and count can be considered etiological fictions, inventions intended to explain the origins of anomalous phenomena.

Of course, in the eyes of Agnon's traditionalist narrator it is taken for granted that these tales are not only truthful but also the handiwork of the Creator. It is evident to him that the prince's sanity is preserved for the purpose of being cured by R. Moshe Aharon, just as Count Potocki was separated from his hunting party so that he would be discovered by a poor Jew whose family would be installed in the city hall. Yet, as we have seen in many other instances, the audience the narrator addresses is not identical to the modern readers addressed by the implied author. For this audience, in which we are belated participants, providential rationales are of limited utility. We are brought back to a blunt question about the status of these fictions of rescue and reversal. When all is said and done, are they compensatory and counterfactual fantasies that deny the larger framework of Jewish-Polish relations?

They are something much more, I would argue. The stories presume to present the deeper, unseen truth about Jews and Poles as experienced from the point of view of the Jews. This can be called an aspectual difference. In the historical record, Jews in Poland were subservient to the ruling Polish nobility, very much the "lord's Jews," as Moshe Rosman has put it. But viewed from a different aspect, one that is rooted in Jewish experience, the role played by the Jews in the western Ukraine looms much larger. Despite the vast wealth and power of their rulers and owners, it was the Jews in their constancy, sobriety, initiative and good sense who were the secret spring behind the maintenance and progress of this society.

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Agnon imaginative resourcefulness takes this further, into the realm of alternative history.[22] The tales of R. Moshe Aharon's curing of the prince and Nahum Ze'ev's rescuing the count are events that *should* have taken place, and, given their power to explain features of Polish-Jewish relations, *might* well have take place if the fullness of the historical record could be laid out. For Agnon, what we call fiction and what he calls storytelling are mechanisms for correcting a skewed perception of the Jews as a community oppressed and constrained in spirit. Agnon knew the truth was deeper and richer, and his writing was committed to making that known.

Tikkun

[1] Mikolaj Potocki was one of the wealthiest of the Potocki clan. His annual income was reckoned at around 50,000 ducats. <<HOW MUCH IS THAT WORTH?>> . His primary

Gershon

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title was Starosta of Kaniow, the administrator and tenant for life of a major crown estate on the Dnieper. In addition to owning Buczacz, he had major estates in Potok, Horodenka, and Gologor. He maintained a private army of up to 3,000 men, and he was known for terrorizing large swathes of Polish Rus, especially Lewow, on drunken, debauched, and destructive binges. Out of remorse for the misdeeds of his youth, he later undertook large acts of philanthropy and gave major endowments to the Catholic Church (both Roman and Greek Catholic [i.e., Uniate]); he was also a patron of the arts as evinced by the commission to Bernardo Meretti to design the rococo town hall in Buczacz. Later in life he converted to the Greek Catholic Church and took up residence in the monastery of the Basilian Brothers in Buczacz. (My thanks to Professor George Lukowski for this information.)

[2] Note to story <<בית המועצות הקטן>>

[3] This general picture of Jews and Poles in the western Ukraine is synthesized from the following works: Gershon Hundert, *Jews in a Polish Private Town: The Case of Opatow in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992; Jerzy Lukowski, *Disorderly Liberty: The Political Culture of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Continuum, 2010); Moshe Rosman, *The Lord's Jews: Magnate-Jewish Relations in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth During the 18th Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Omer Bartov, forthcoming.

[4] These number represent estimates from latter part of 20th century. Earlier in the century, Jewish historians believed the number to much far higher, well over 100,000, and Agnon was likely basing himself on this understanding.

[5] Note on fountain from which he drank.

[6] **I am dealing here with the representation of Jewish-Polish relations *only* within *'Ir umelo'ah*. The topic in the whole of Agnon's fiction is obviously much larger, and fortunately it has been surveyed with characteristic virtuosity by Shmuel Werses in "Between Historical Reality and Fictional Description: The Relations Between Jews and Poles in the Writings of S. Y. Agnon" [Hebrew] in his *Shai Agnon kefeshuto: keri'ah bikhtavav* [Agnon Literally: Studies in his Writings] (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 200), pp. 215-63. <<THIS EXISTS AS AN EXPANDED AND TRANSLATED TO ENGLISH EDITION AS A 128-PAGE MONOGRAPH: Relations Between Jews and Poles in S.Y. Agnon's Work (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1994).>>**

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Agnon was preoccupied with the larger meaning of the Polish-Jewish experience from early in his career, as evinced by the stories in the cycle *Polin*, that were begun in 1917 and later included in the volume of his collected stories *Eilu ve'eilu*. See Nitza Bendov's insightful analysis of one of the earliest of these stories: "The Story 'Bimetsulot' As a Paradigm for the Relations Between Jews and Poles" [Hebrew] in *Ayin Gimel: ketav 'eit leheqer yetsirat 'Agnon*, No. 2, 2012, accessed at http://www.biu.ac.il/js/li/aj/images_ag_eng/second_issue_eng.html.

[7] See

[8] On the various Hebrew equivalents for Polish noble titles.

[9] If Agnon wanted to invite a direct comparison, he would have used the term *nasikh* for prince instead of *rozen*, the term in use in the story. The comparison is still illuminating.

[10] This fact helps to fix the time of the story's action as the beginning of the eighteenth century. The narrator is disinclined to provided overt historical markers in order to allow the archetypal nature of the tale to dominate.

[11] The Rabbi of Yaslowitz is probably R. Zvi Hirsch Margolies.

[12] It is not easy to be precise in identifying the cuts and fabrics the passage describes. My thanks to Avraham Holtz in helping to reach viable approximations. Marten coat?

[13] See Jewish Encyclopedia entry on headdress. Agnon uses the terms elsewhere to indicate the fabric head wrap worn by a married woman whose head has been shaven. <<Not sure this is precise: Only Hungarian women shaved their heads; Lady Galicianers would have certainly covered their hair, but unshaven underneath – see most famously the eponymous mitpachat of the story about his mother's head covering.>>

[14] R. Moshe Aharon is childless. His will leaves a third of his estate to his wife, a third to the synagogue, and a third to the community, despite the ill will of poor brothers and other relatives (141).

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[15] I have chosen "The Partners" as an English title for reasons that will become clear during the discussion of the story.

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[16][i] See Eliezer Ben-Yehudah, *Milon halashon ha'ivrit* (New York and Jerusalem: Thomas Yoseloff, 1958), vol. VIII, pp. 7503-5.

[16][ii] One that is especially apposite to the themes of the story is given in the name of Reish Laqish, Yerushalmi Ta'anit 2 /6 (check!): "[The Holy One says,] if I left Israel to their own devices, they would be swallowed up by the idolatrous nations; therefore I am associating [*meshatef*] my great name with them so they will live."

[16] "Beit hamo'atsot hagadol" [The City hall], 233-38. References to Bartov.

[17] In the corpus of Agnon's Buczacz stories, there is much less attention given to the Jews' relations with the Ruthenian peasants than their relations with the Polish rulers. Describing a peasant farmer in a later story, the narrator observes, "Being a Ruthenian, he was treated by the Poles like an animal, whereas the Jews treated him like a human being and did not humiliate him gratuitously" ("Besha'ah ahat" [In a Single Moment, 571]. The interaction between the elderly charcoal maker and the dispossessed tavern keeper in our story is even more positive. See also the story that immediately follows "The Partners" titled "Beit hamo'atsot haqatan" [The Little City hall, 255-69], which describes the murderous rampage of a headstrong young peasant who means to conduct his own courtship of a maiden in flagrant disregard for the practices of Ruthenian society. It should be noted in our story that Nahum Ze'ev and his wife seem to dwell in harmony with their gentile peasant neighbors, and they have no difficulty in borrowing a horse and wagon from them to bring the count home (244).

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[18] This passage was used for a different purpose in in Chapter Two as an example of the narrator's rationale for representing the inner thoughts of characters. See pp. XX.

[19] See XXX and above.

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[20] Roman Kazman argues that both charcoal making and yeast manufacture are charged occupations that link to other stories, such as "The Hidden Tzaddik" (220-28), in which the promotion of domestic happiness take on a holy and mystical importance. See Roman Kazman, *Nehu'ah qetanah*... ....

[21][See Chapter Three, XXX.

[21] Translation by Arthur Green, in Alan Mintz and Anne G. Hoffman (eds.), *A Book That Was Lost and Other Stories by S. Y. Agnon* (Milford CT: The Toby Press, 2008), 429. In *'Ir umelo'ah*, 716.

[22] See Chapter One for a discussion of Roman Kazman's TITLE and his comprehensive discussion of alternative history.

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