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Sholem Aleichem and the Comic Tradition
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Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow: Time and Temporality in "Baranovich Station" and "The Miracle of Hoshana Rabbah"

Thomas Mann writes in *The Magic Mountain,* "Time is the medium of narration, as it is the medium of life." If this is true, then the study of a particular text cannot preclude an analysis of the role of time within its narration, no matter how straightforward the temporality of the narration may appear to be. Indeed, the works of Sholem Aleichem, for all of their prolific creativity (Halkin xxxi) seem simplistic, at best, in their narrative style. For this reason, analyses of his stories, particularly those contained within the *Railroad Stories*, rarely go beyond indicating that the stories are set on a moving train car. And even when this is noted, discussion of the implications of the spatial properties of the train, the fact that the train functions as a metaphor for the breakdown of society, that it is an industrial vehicle moving away from the old world towards modernity, seem to far outweigh any discussion of time and temporality. However, the effects of Sholem Aleichem's storytelling are much more nuanced than this, and a mere reading of the chronological sequencing of events does not do Sholem Aleichem's powers as a writer justice.

The narrative quality of Sholem Aleichem's works, the ways in which he seamlessly weaves between temporalities so that one barely notices these shifts at all, add to the feeling of realism that is so pervasive in his texts, and it is this realism which makes Sholem Aleichem's stories anything but plain and predictable. They attempt to follow the path of time in life. Additionally, when one reads Scholem Aleichem's stories with an eye for time, when one becomes acutely aware of the synthesis between time and place, Sholem Aleichem's writings

move from the world of mere stories to something that is able to become subsumed within the collective memory. Indeed, there is something within these stories that allows the oft cited political, historical, and cultural elements to manifest themselves wherever and whenever they are read.

Up until this point, academic discourse on the *Railroad Stories* has, for the most part, looked at the events happening on the train as events unfolding in a linear fashion, events which are placed in direct contrast to the cyclical nature of "Jewish" time. Taken at face value, nothing more need be said about this temporality. Again, however, this would be to miss an essential aspect of Sholem Aleichem's writing. Mikhail Bakhtin writes in "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,"

> Encounters in a novel usually take place 'on the road'…On the road, the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people…intersect at one spatial and temporal point. People who are normally kept separate by social and spatial distance can accidentally meet; any contrast may crop up, the most various fates may collide and interweave with one another. On the road the spatial and temporal series defining human fates and lives combine with one another in distinctive ways, even as they become more complex and more concrete by the collapse of social distances (17).

Indeed, in all of the *Railroad Stories,* people from different worlds collide, if only for a moment, at a particular time and place. It is this melding of different worlds, **the intersection of past characters, present listeners, and future readers**, that makes these stories interesting. In fact, it is this collision that allows these stories to happen at all.

The travelling salesman seems to enter the conversations on the train by chance. And because the reader is privy to only that which the travelling salesman hears, we ourselves read a narration taking place in the train compartment mid-conversation, *in medias re,* to borrow a term used often to describe the beginnings of Greek epic narratives. But the time at which the text of

the narration begins is not haphazardly chosen. Rather, **the openings of these stories are very contrived**. The effect of this mid-sentence opening immediately draws the reader into the world of the text. At the same time, this temporal choice reminds the reader that he is the "other," giving the distinct impression that "the reader and Sholem Aleichem 'himself' do not belong inside the railway coach; like distant relatives or curious onlookers, they are relegated to the other side of the window, peering in" (Ezrahi 115).We are but **eavesdroppers on a discourse** that has been going on for mere minutes or for the length of days. Part of the ingenuity of these stories is that we as readers have no real way of knowing. Our curiosity is peaked. We ask the question, "Why is this moment, in this train car, more important than another moment in another train car at another time?" **Like the travelling salesman, we have no choice but to sit back and watch the events of the story unfold**. More detail on this point will follow, but for now it is enough to say that we are at once spectators and players in these stories, for although they are already written, each time they are read, our own position in time affects the story's meaning.

"Baranovitch Station" is one such story that begins mid-narration, with the travelling salesman in what will be termed "**real time**," setting the scene for the framework story, which takes place in what I call "**train time**." The story begins aboard the train where "no more than a dozen…Jews" sit, stand, lean, and crouch haphazardly "in the third class car in comparative comfort" (152). The conversation amongst the Jews on the train is disjointed, perhaps Sholem Aleichem's quip on the disunity of thought within modern society. Talk flits from one topic to the next. The subject of discussion changes "every minute," and, as the travelling salesman notes, "no one [is] able to hold the stage for long" (152). The travelling salesman continues,

> No sooner did it light on the recent harvest—that is, the wheat and oat crop—than it shifted, don't ask me why, to the war with Japan, while after barely five minutes of fighting the Japanese we moved on to the Revolution of 1905. From the

> Revolution we passed to the Constitution, and from the Constitution it was but a short step to the pogroms, the massacres of the Jews, the new anti-Semitic legislation, the expulsion from the villages, the mass flight to America, and all the other trials and tribulations that you hear about these fine days: bankruptcies, expropriations, military emergencies, executions, starvation, cholera, Purishkevich, Azef…(152).

In a matter of lines, the narration is able to move across historical time periods, condensing while at the same time encompassing the whole of Jewish suffering in the Pale of Settlement. Although Leah Garret posits that "the train marked the path away from the Jewish community and toward the anonymous, meaningless, and arbitrarily oppressive rhythms of modern life" (96), the conversation taking place on the train would indicate that these symbols of loss and alienation have seeped onto the train. Even with an eye for the future, the passengers on the train, and even Sholem Aleichem himself, are deeply rooted in the past. The reader is given a panoramic view of these events, and the heated discourse that surrounds them in "train time" indicates that the present does not take place in a vacuum. Rather, everything that happens in the present "train temporality," everything that is spoken about, is directly and distinctly related to past events.

The fast paced narration is further indicative of the frenzied conversation on the train, and marks train time as hectic time. The train creates an environment where everything happens all at once, where waking, eating, sleeping, praying, and gabbing happen quickly and simultaneously. Additionally, the ellipsis at the end of the above cited passage points to the fact that although the travelling salesman has ceased narrating the conversation taking place on the train, that although the reader is not privy to what was said by the passengers after the name *Azef* was uttered, conversation does indeed continue. These quick shifts in temporalities, here and at many other instances throughout the story, where the passage of time is marked by temporal

indicators such as “it didn’t take long” (153) and “before we knew it” (163), like the narration in the Bible in which whole days and years elapse within a matter of verses, each act as a catalyst to move the story along. The details provided are not necessarily relevant to the text. Rather, they are written so that temporalities can collide.

When conversation alights on the topic of Azef, the car is “thrown into a turmoil” (152). The only force that is able to quiet the chatter is the story teller from Kaminka, perhaps Sholem Aleichem’s nod to story-tellers in general, who begin and end narration at their pleasure. The storyteller from Kaminka disrupts the flow of narration, jolts the passengers out of their conversation of events that have taken place, to the present moment. Additionally, by having the conversation move and stop on Azef, Sholem Aleichem opens the way for the storyteller from Kaminka to narrate a tale “about a stool pigeon, and a hometown boy from Kaminka at that, who makes Ashev look pale by comparison” (153). In so doing, Sholem Aleichem weaves a thread through temporalities, from the present to the recent past to the distant past. Azef and the “stool pigeon” are connected; the hardships of the community of Jews will take the place of the hardships of the Jews on the train for the duration of the train ride. And by telling his story, the storyteller from Kaminka himself is able to transport the passengers on the train to another time and another place. His story brings an otherwise disjointed group of people together as a community of listeners. Going further, Sholem Aleichem’s story does the same thing for its readers, and readers and listeners become one, become a unified group that transcends the bounds of history.

The storyteller from Kaminka is quick to tell the Jews on the train that the story he is about to tell them “is not some opera or fairytale.” Rather, “It’s a true story, mind you, that took place right in Kaminka” (153). It is important for him to tell the Jews on the train that the story

is one he heard from his "own father" and that his father "heard it more than once from his father" (153). In doing so, the storyteller from Kaminka grounds his tale in the past, raises it to heights so important that even though the "whole thing was written down in an old chronicle that was burned long ago" (153), the story has been able to survive. It is just as important for him to tell his audience that the story takes place "in the reign of Nikolai the First, back in the days of the gauntlet" (154). Again, in this way, the story becomes grounded in an historical past in which the listeners certainly were never a part. The storyteller from Kaminka becomes the man who is able to travel between temporalities, who is able to bring the past to the present. And again, this is Sholem Aleichem's way of asserting the importance of storytellers in general, for the storyteller from Kaminka's act of telling this story, and the travelling salesman's act of writing this story down, assures that it will survive well into the future.

It must also be noted that although the storyteller from Kaminka likens Kivke to Ashef, the story itself is actually the antithesis of what is being spoken about on the train. The storyteller from Kaminka tells a story about internal strife, about the crimes of a Jew against other Jews. It is a story that can be controlled, whose sequence is determined by the actions of the Jews in the story, rather than their gentile counterparts. It is not a story about the threat of the outside world, is not anything akin to all of the "trials and tribulations that you hear about these fine days" (152). The internal story, then, becomes something to transport the passengers on the train to a time and place that is not their own. The story becomes one not about a particular moment in time, but rather, about the power of words to transcend the temporal divide.

As the storyteller from Kaminka begins the actual narration of events, the listeners learn that Kivke happened to be arguing with some Russian soldiers in a tavern "until one thing led to another and the village elder and the constable were brought in and charges of blasphemy drawn

up" (154). This story exists only because these particular people meet on this particular day at this particular tavern and say very particular words to one another, words which spur an altercation which causes Kivke to be thrown "into the cooler until an honor guard could give him twenty-five good whacks of the mace" (154). It is this event which sparks the community to action, which causes Reb Nissl Shapiro to conjure up a plan in which "he persuaded the authorities that the sentenced man, Kivke, should take time out to die while still in prison" (155). It is this plan which leaves Kivke himself in a state of temporal limbo, at once dead and alive, here and not, part of the community but removed from it. And Kivke's status as a living dead precipitates his letters asking for money, which eventually lead to threats against Reb Nissl Shapiro, which make this tale interesting enough to cross time periods, to be passed from generation to generation, from father to son to grandson to listeners on the train to the readers.

The irony of discussing the element of time within the storyteller from Kaminka's tale, is that time, at least in a linear sense, doesn't really matter. Time markers such as "before the cock crowed" (156), "one Sunday" (154), and "another half a year passed, or maybe it was a whole," to name a few, are heavily sprinkled throughout the text so as to create a text that mimics reality, intones the passage of time, even though "these hours and days leave no trace, and therefore, one may have as many of them as one likes" (Bakhtin 94). Even with the prevalence of time markers, however, the events of the story themselves do not seem to add up. We are not told how long Kivke remains in prison, or how much time passes between taking Kivke's dead body out of jail and resurrecting him. We know that days, weeks, months, years pass, but we, as readers, do not feel the passage of time. **We know that the storyteller from Kaminka begins his tale "early in the day" (152), and abruptly concludes "in the darkness" (162), but the written story itself takes only pages to be told.**

Time, in this story, although presented linearly, seems out of joint. As mentioned above, time markers are important so that the action of the story is pushed ahead. They allow for transitions between temporalities to occur that mark important interactions that can happen at only that moment. It is not necessary to make note of all of the markers of temporality, nor is it important to note every instance where a specific encounter moves the action forward. It is important to remember, however, that the entire story rests on the idea that a minute more or less, and the entire course of the story, the entire course of history, could be changed.

Another important temporal factor in "Baranovich Station" are the periodic pauses in narration when the Jew from Kaminka takes "out a large tobacco pouch from his pocket, and slowly roll[s] himself a cigarette" (155) or when he asks the Jews on the train to "kindly wait a few minutes" so that he can "ask the station master here how much time we have left to Baranovich" (157). His pauses are taken at the peak of narration, at a time when the Jews are waiting, literally with bated breath, to hear what will happen next. **A pause in narration, a change in temporality, builds suspense within the community of listeners as well as within the community of readers.** Both parties wait for the Jew from Kaminka to return to continue his tale. Just as the Jews on the train, as soon as the Jew from Kaminka returns, "quieted down, crowded together to form a human wall, and gave him [their] undivided attention" (157), so too do Sholem Aleichem's readers. Sholem Aleichem inserts these pauses into the story to transcend temporalities, to further connect his readers with the Jew from Kaminka's listeners, and in this way, the story at once becomes part of an ongoing historical narrative.

We must now speak of **Kivke's letters**, which, more than any other element in the story, seem to both create action and to give the tale its momentum. These letters seem to always arrive in the town after prolonged periods of complete idleness. The members of the community,

who, after each letter, manage to "forget that there was such as person as a Jew named Kivke" (158), are always surprised by the arrival of these letters. Bakhtin says of time in provincial towns, "Time here has no advancing historical movement; it moves rather in narrow circles; the circle of the day, of the week, of the month, of a person's entire life…Time here is without event and therefore almost seems to stand still…It is a viscous and sticky time that drags itself slowly through space" (20). And indeed, it would seem as if nothing changes within the town **throughout the five to eight year period** (a rough estimate) that encompasses the whole of the Jew from Kaminka's story. Reb Nissl Shapiro remains "the richest, most important, most cultured, most highly though-of Jew in town, and a very brainy man with high connections" (155), and **the letters stir such strife in the community that it is as if nothing else ever worries its members. The letters break the stagnant temporality of the town and move the story forward**. Unlike the Jews of Kaminka, however, who seem not to change between the sending of one letter and the next, Kivke is presented as having a very full and momentous life. He is saved, married, made a business partner, and duped out of money, twice. And through all of this, the Jews of Kaminka remain the same.

The listeners/readers find out what has happened to Kivke between the writing of one letter and the next only through the text of the letter itself. Six months or a year are condensed into a letter whose content exceeds no more than a paragraph. In this way, the letters are like the story in which they are contained and play such a vital role. The town must rely on the letters, just like the Jews on the train must rely on the storyteller from Kaminka, and the reader on the writing of Sholem Aleichem, to glean information about what has taken place in the town. And although the Jews of Kaminka appear to do very little between letters, the letters themselves, at

least for the moment in which they are received, force the Jews of Kaminka to think about the future.

Kivke's letters, which all contain the threat of Kivke's return, are very much temporally based. They arrive at standard intervals (which also help to give temporal structure to the story), and each letter contains within it a plea for money which must be met within a certain time period, which ask the townspeople to "be quick and don't dawdle" (160). When Kivke's initial pleas for money are not met, which they never are, he is sure to send a follow-up letter only several weeks later**. For Kivke, time is important because time means money**. And Kivke's letters force time to become important to people who otherwise have no care nor need of it. The action of "Baronivich Station," then, is propelled by a not-yet-realized-future, by what *might* happen because of a man who no longer lives within the town itself. For the Jews of Kaminka, the present only becomes important because of a letter, which, at the moment it is written, already exists only in the past, but which, at the same time, warns them of what will happen in the future.

But the Jews on the train, and, by extension, the readers, will never find out what has happened to Reb Nissl Shapiro and the Jews of Kaminka after Reb Nissl's last letter is sent. For in this story, as in many of the other *Railroad Stories,* the narrative must exist within the bounds of train time. The starting and stopping of the train, where passengers enter and exit, where chance encounters take place, dictate the extent to which the story can go on. As abruptly as his story began, the storyteller's tale ends. "Hearing the name Baranovich, the Kaminka Jew jumped from his seat, reached for his belongings…and…headed for the door" (162). And when "several passengers…[run] after him and [seize] him by the coattails" (163) and cry, ""Hey there! You can't do this to us! We won't let you go. You have to tell us the end of the story!"

the Jew from Kaminka responds, “What end? It’s barely begun” (163). Stopping mid sentence, reminding the Jews that they have heard only a fraction of the tale, the Jew from Kaminka leaps off the train, leaving **the listeners and the readers suspended between temporalities, between story time and train time**. Both parties feel cheated, both share the sentiments of the travelling salesman, whose words, “I wouldn’t mind if Baranovich Station burned to the ground!” bring the temporality of the story full circle, returning again to “real” time.

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In order to more fully explain Sholem Aleichem’s use of different temporalities within his stories, let us turn to a discussion of “The Miracle of Hoshana Rabbah.” Like “Baranovich Station,” this story also begins mid-conversation, in this case, mid-sentence, immediately drawing the reader into the events of the story. The narrator of the story explains that the “great train accident” which is called “The Miracle of Hoshana Rabbah” “took place toward the end of Sukkos” (186). In doing so, he provides a temporal framework for the story. This phrase is repeated throughout the story, but one soon realizes that had the story been set on, a Tuesday, let’s say, its outcome would be no different. Other than these initial temporal markers, “The Miracle of Hoshana Rabbah” is seemingly devoid of anything that grounds it in the time of reality. The story is a fantastic one, and so, it is fitting that time in “The Miracle of Hoshana Rabbah” seems fantastic as well.

From the start of the story, the reader is privy to information which makes one aware of the fact that time on the Slowpoke Express doesn’t seem to matter at all. The narrator of the story is seen “sprawled out as comfortably as if he were in his own living room and gave his narrative talents free rein, turning each polished phrase carefully and grinning with pleasure at his own story while stroking his ample belly” (187). The style and pace of narration, just like

that in “Baranovich Station,” mimics the movement of the train. In this story, however, train time is not fast-paced and hectic. Rather, it is slow and ambling; it is as lazy and comfortable as the passengers on the train. The travelling salesman, because of the nature of the train, has been riding the rails for at least two weeks’ time. Indeed, the narrator says,

> I suppose you must have noticed, then, that it has a temperament of its own and that once it pulls into a station, it sometimes forgets to pull out. According to the schedule, of course, it mustn’t stay a minute longer than it’s supposed to…Bless it’s sweet little soul, though, if it doesn’t stop for over two hours in each, and sometimes for over three! (187).

The Slowpoke Express adheres to its own schedule. It is a setting in which time moves so slowly that one seems to stop noticing the passage of time at all, and unlike many of the other *Railroad Stories*, certainly unlike “Baranovich Station,” this story begins and ends without any spatial interruptions. (It is important to note, for the sake of clarity, that the “story” to which I am referring here is the framework story, that which takes place in “train time.”) “The train’s emptiness,” posits Leah Garrett, “makes it an ideal setting for slow storytelling versus the frantic, often prematurely ended stories of the regular train where new characters constantly intrude with new narratives” (109). Although time certainly passes, it is as if the train has not moved an inch during the whole of the narration of the internal story. No passengers enter the train and no passengers exit. The narration does not even give any temporal indicator of what time of day this story is even being told.

Even the activities in which the passengers engage to utilize their idle time while the trains “tanks up” (187) is indicative of the differences between the Slowpoke Express and the other, faster moving train. Instead of talking feverishly about the most current news, the passengers on the Slowpoke Express “just sit there and yawn, some curl up in a corner and grab

forty winks, and some walk up and down the platform with their hands behind their backs, humming a little tune" (187). Like the Jews of Kaminka who seem not to change at all throughout the course of the narration, it is as if even the Jews who live in the towns through which the Slowpoke Express passes have an unlimited amount of idle time to waste. Granted, this story does take place on Hoshana Rabbah, but it seems that had this story been set on another day, the citizens of the town would be engaged in so little that they would still spend their time watching the train pull into and out of the station. After all, "meeting the train…is a local institution" (187). Day in and day out their activities are the same, are mundane, are cyclical and repetitive.

This is not to say, however, that the internal story being told is boring. If anything, it is so exciting that the story of the "runaway engine" has been told "at least a thousand times from A to Z, each time with more miraculous details" (194). The narrator begins his story with the words, "Well, it just happened to happen…" (187). With this temporal marker, the narrator of the story explains why this particular day is different than all of the other days when the Slowpoke Express stops at the station to refuel. On this particular day, by chance, "a Jew was standing by the unhooked locomotive with his hands behind his back" (187), and it just so happened that on the same day, "among the passengers…was a Russian priest" (188). Just like the Jew, the Russian priest, "having nothing to do either, was walking up and down the same platform with his hands behind his back until he reached the train" (188). The Jew and the priest meet and exchange words about the mechanical workings of the train, and it is this meeting that propels the action of the story.

At this point, the narrator's style takes on a faster pace, much more akin to that of the narrative style of "Baranovich Station." He says,

> In short, one word led to another, don't you know, and they both climbed aboard the locomotive, where the Jew from Sobolivke began to give the priest driving lessons. He gave one throttle a little twist this way and another throttle a little twist that way, and before they knew it, they were astonished to see that the locomotive was moving and they were off to the races…(189).

The increase of pace in this portion of the narrator's story mimics the events that are taking place. Sholem Aleichem presents a scene where words and actions are heaped onto one another and build to a point where there is no turning back for either the Jew or the priest. Both make a snap and almost irrational decision to board the train and test the gears. Their actions are so quick that dangerous events unfold before either party realizes what has happened. Additionally, their decision to take a ride on the Slowpoke Express throws the rest of the passengers waiting for the train into a "pandemonium" (189), jolts them from their state of utter inertia into one of action, albeit misdirected. The narrative style, too, as well as the events of the story, are given new life, and it is this moment that jumpstarts the internal story.

Sholem Alechem then, has created two distinctive temporalities which are at play within "The Miracle of Hoshana Rabbah." **There is that of "train time," which is a slow crawl, and that of "story time," which is much faster-paced, mimicking the speed of the runaway train.** And like the narrator of "Baranovich Station," this narrator makes it a point to switch between temporalities. Unlike the narrator of "Baranovich Station," however, who deliberately builds suspense with a complete lapse in narration, the narrator of "The Miracle of Hoshana Rabbah" builds suspense by digressing from the actual events of the internal narrative and overloading the listener with details not entirely necessary for the movement of the plot of the story. The reader finds out more than they need to know about Berl and his vinegar. These plot details present a shift in temporality, presenting past details and events, much like the moments

of digression in the Homeric epics. They do not move the plot along. Instead, they slow the progression of events. In this way, they are reminiscent of the Slowpoke Express itself. Whereas the narration in "Baranovich Station" is fast paced and condensed, this narrative style, although it contains moments which are fast paced, is actually quite cyclical and slow. In switching between the exciting events of the internal story and the slow narration of the storyteller's digressions, the story itself takes on the quality of a dream, alternating between waking and sleeping, between fantasy and reality.

Like "Baranovich Station," which uses letters to move the narrative events forward, "The Miracle of Hoshana Rabbah" makes use of telegrams, which serve to involve the community in the events of the story. Unlike "letter time," which most certainly presents something that has already happened in the past and which imparts upon the community the threat of the future, "**telegram time**" is presented as being something which is almost instantaneous, although certainly misunderstood. Once a telegram is sent and received, news of events on the train spreads like wild fire throughout the community, until the details are so engorged that they barely resemble the actual events that have taken place on the train. And even as this news spreads, it becomes almost instantly obsolete. Between the time that telegrams are sent and received, the train has speed its way to another location. And between the sending of one telegram and the next, the Jews' imaginations are given time to run rampant.

From the time, "*Runaway locomotive stop take all necessary precautions stop confirm at once,"* is sent, to the time, "*Locomotive just passed through Zatkevitz at top speed with two passengers stop one looks a Jew the other a priest stop both waved stop destination unknown stop locomotive headed for Heysen,"* the passengers and onlookers create for themselves a picture of the future that is certainly gruesome, replete with details "as vivid as if it had already

happened: the overturned cars, the twisted wheels, the mangled bodies, the mutilated limbs, the blood-spattered remains of suitcases…" (191). Like the Jews of Kaminka, who are forced to think about the future because of Kivke's letters, talk in "The Miracle of Hoshana Rabbah" centers around the future as well. However, it is concentrated not so much around what *should* be done as what *can't ever* be done. Although the community wants to stop the movement of the train, they are at a loss to determine what "precautions can be taken" (190). In the end, they come to the conclusion that the only thing to be done is to send "out more telegrams" (190). And so, the present action of sending out more telegrams actually interrupts their musings of the future. And just like this counterproductive solution to the problem of the runaway train, "telegram time" is a paradox in and of itself. Even the telegram's present, which, in this case, is only written, sent, and received after the train has already passed, is actually the story's past. The telegram does nothing but spread panic and frenzy.

Unlike the narrative of "Baranovich Station," where the reader must rely on exactly what is written in the letters in order to gain an understanding of the events that have taken place in Kivke's life, the reader is given the unique perspective in "The Miracle of Hoshana Rabbah" of (1) reading the telegrams, (2) seeing the community reaction to these telegrams, and (3) witnessing the actual events as they are happening on the train. **The reader is privy to three temporalities at once, which present three competing and contradictory viewpoints of the happenings between Berl and the priest on the train.** It is up to the reader to sift through these details, to transcend these temporalities, in order to create a complete and coherent picture of the events that have actually transpired. Like the community debate over who is on the train and how they got there, which grows "by such leaps and bounds with each new arrival from there, everyone adding some new touch of his own," so too does the actual story, "The Miracle

of Hoshana Rabbah," grow in detail each time the story is read, with each passing moment of narration. The reader himself, from a moment much removed from the time of the story, also adds to the story's events. **Unlike the telegram, which becomes instantly obsolete, this story, and stories in general, have a quality that allows them to always be relevant.**

Even with this interplay of different temporalities, in the end, the time that seems to prevail is **God's time**. Bakhtin writes,

> Moments of adventuristic time occur at those points when the normal course of events, the normal, intended or purposeful sequence of life's events is interrupted. These points provide an opening for the intrusion of nonhuman forces—fate, gods, villains—and it is precisely these forces, and not the heroes, who in adventure-time take all the initiative. Of course the heroes themselves act in adventure-time—they escape, defend themselves, engage in battle, save themselves—but they act, as it were, as merely physical persons, and the initiative does not belong to them" (95).

In "The Miracle of Hoshana Rabbah," Berl, during his adventure on the train, acknowledges that he has no control over the events of his life, or the time of his death. He believes that his fate is relegated to the realm of God. This is his reasoning for refusing to jump off of the moving train. Take the following exchange, for example.

> "Then Berko," said the priest. "Tell me, Berko, what do you say to the two of us making a jump for it?
>
> "What for?" asked Berl. "So that the two of us can be killed?"
>
> "We'll be killed anyway," said the priest.
>
> "What makes you so sure?" Berl challenged him. "There's no guarantee of that. If God has something else in mind for us—ai,ai,ai, you'd be surprised at the things He can do."
>
> "Such as what?" asked the priest.
>
> "I'll tell you such as what, Father," said Berl. "We Jews have a day today called Hoshana Rabbah. That's the day on which the fate of every one of us is sealed in the Book of Life for the year—and not only who lives and who dues, but who dies what sort of death. Think of it this way, then: if it's God's will that I die, there's nothing I can do about it—what difference does it make to me if it's in a locomotive, or jumping out of it, or getting hit by a thunderbolt?...(193).

In matters of life and death, Berl believes he has no control. He knows that his fate is God's will, that the end of his days has already been predestined by God. He knows that one day, one minute will announce, "One second left on earth!" and that this moment will come only at God's command. And indeed, as the Slowpoke Express begins "going so slow that it decided to stop altogether," Berl, with all of the enthusiasm of a man who has been proven correct, exclaims, "Well, Father, what did I tell you? If God hadn't written me down for another year of life, who knows how much steam this locomotive might still have and where we might be right now?" (194).

And **in the world of fiction, it is really the author who plays God with the lives of the characters**. It is the author who decides when the train will start and stop, which passengers will get on and off, what connections will be made, what questions will be asked, and what answers provided. It is the author's words that allow temporalities to collide, that provide one temporality access to another. In the case of Sholem Aleichem's stories, their purpose is not only to preserve a world that no longer exists, but also to create a space in which the reader can be transported back in time. Both stories are meant to render the past present, to make real now that which was real then, to place the reader within the annals of history, to make sure that Kivke's story and the miracle that took place on Hoshana Rabbah, continue to be told.

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