

the glory that was B

"Here once was. . . ." But was not Buczacz destroyed, substantially in World War I and totally in World War II? The narrator of *Ir umeloah* is supremely aware of this grim finality, but he makes an aesthetic and existential choice to behave otherwise.

Because of the last calamity Buczacz was destroyed together with all the places where Jews had lived. Later on I shall tell of the calamity. For the time being, I proceed as if the world is orderly and intact and Buczacz is Buczacz and the Great Synagogue stands in its glory and the Old Study House is full of Torah. I continue to recount the praise of Torah and the majesty of prayer. (Pp. 212-13)

The promise "to tell of the calamity" is never fulfilled in *Ir umeloah*, whether Agnon's death deprived him of the chance, or, as I would assert, he declined to do so. Mention of the Holocaust is liberally scattered throughout the volume, serving often as the notation that closes the history of a family or the account of a custom. But the Holocaust is not dramatized within volume and instead remains its outer horizon. The main business of the book itself takes place in the "time being" [*le'et 'atah*], the great "meanwhile" that expands to encompass the account of the city. Within the medium of that indefinite present Buczacz stands whole and complete, and the institutions that represent the two chosen pillars of the city's best self operate at full tilt and full power. The tense structure of the narration is the progressive present, which the narrator instantiates when avers at the close of the passage that he continues to recount the praises of the city. The Hebrew is *ve'ani mesaper veholekh*, literally "I recount as I go." When the narrator explains "I proceed as if the world is orderly and intact" [*'oseh ani ke'ilu ha'olam sadur 'al siduro*], he is making two statements. First, treating Buczacz as present and undestroyed is a considered choice, even a willful one. Second, he is fully aware that doing so means proceeding on a "as if" footing. The knowledge of the later fate of Buczacz Jewry is neither suppressed nor denied but willfully suspended in favor of the more constructive undertaking of presenting the city in its fullness. *thru ? came back to, here emphasis on ing*

"I am building a city, Buczacz," wrote Agnon to Baruch Kurzweil on May 11, 1956.⁷ This simple statement helps us to understand a contradiction about the "presentness" of Agnon's description of Buczacz. In the passage above, on the one hand, Buczacz already exists in its fullness, and the author-narrator need only take us on a tour to point out its features. On the other, Agnon's statement to Kurzweil, written during the years he was at work on the stories, implies that the city is in the process of being built; it is a construction site in which the infrastructure, armatures and facades are being progressively fitted into place. The difference, to my mind, has little to do with one being the process and the other the completion. Rather, the contradiction lies between Agnon's desire to see Buczacz present and whole and the fact that that state of wholeness can be achieved only through the step-by-step, story-by-story labor of narration. The two positions can coexist because, for better and for worse, the Buczacz of *Ir umeloah* is a literary creation. The true historical Buczacz was destroyed by the Nazis and before that by the Ukrainians, and its classical greatness was degraded even before that by the forces of modernization. That greatness exists now only and wholly in the imaginative simulacrum Agnon has created. As a world made only from words, it is a poor thing compared to the Buczacz of flesh and bone, brick and mortar. But at the same time, as a world made only

⁷ Quoted in Dan Laor, *Hayyei Agnon* [S. Y. Agnon, a Biography] (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1998), pp. 485, 693.

form words it is a brilliant thing that brings back a glory that was lost in a form that can never perish.

(But even the wonder of Buczacz redivus in the totality of its presence and presentness can only be part of the story.) Having chosen to take responsibility for a period of two hundred years in the life of the city, Agnon can hardly relate to it solely within the "as if" of its classical distillation. And in fact he does not. The spatial axis of *Ir umeloah* is intersected by a historical axis. History and historical change have two meanings in *Ir umeloah*. One is an internal and traditional chronicle time, which focuses on the succession of scholars and religious leaders, works in units of generations and is particularly preoccupied with *yihus*, family lineage. The second is closer to a modern sense of history, and it identifies the agency of change almost exclusively as coming from the outside, from the politics of the gentile regimes that ruled Buczacz. In a very rough estimation, *Ir umeloah* is divided between these two senses of history, between what Agnon calls the early generations and the later generations, with the division of pages in a ratio of 5:4. The division correlates, again roughly, with the shift from Polish rule to Austrian rule in the late eighteenth century. Not only was the Polish period farther away in time but it was feudal in nature, the ownership of a whole town by one man, and seemed to belong to an unchanging, premodern world. The Polish magnates, moreover, left internal communal and religious authority relatively intact and related to the Jews of Buczacz as a self-governing corporate entity. Within this period, then, Agnon was freer to relate to the city as existing all at once in a classical configuration that could be laid out and approached spatially. When it came to the Austrian regime, not only was it closer to the present and accompanied by more abundant documentation but it actually modernized the very experience of time. The affairs of the Jews were now in the hands of a modern bureaucratic apparatus that allowed much less room for communal inner-directedness. The Jews of Buczacz were thus forced to be much more aware of and connect to the sweeping changes in European society.

Tour
Now the time has finally come to join the tour and to catch up with Agnon's narrator as he introduces his audience to the layout of Buczacz. The tour will proceed in two loops. The first is tightly wound around the Great Synagogue and the New Beit Midrash, the sacred objects they contain and the people who manage them, both lay and professional. The second moves outward to marketplace, where Jews and gentiles encounter each others in commercial exchanges, and then to the ornate and monumental city hall and other civic buildings built by the Potocki family, the owners of Buczacz. The banks of the Strypa are liminal area inhabited by the Jewish outliers of various sorts; it is the place of a kosher slaughtering house and the Basilian Monastery. Beyond the Strypa are the fields and woods of the Ruthenian peasant farmers, and even further beyond are the estates of the Polish magnates. There is a scattering of small villages that form a hinterland for which Buczacz serves as the market center. And even in these villages there are Jews who cannot afford to live in the city or find their livelihoods operating rural taverns. Even though Buczacz is not a large town, the tour on offer is long and detailed because of the boundless esteem and affection the guide feels toward this place, of which he is a native. He has made it part of his life's work to gather historical material and legends about the town, and it is of the ultimate importance to him to communicate this knowledge to us. Because the tour is so extensive, we shall be able to sample only a few of its stops, but they will give a sense of the whole.

The sacred core of Buczacz is a cluster of three buildings--the Old Beit Midrash, the Great Synagogue, and the New Beit Midrash—and each has its story. The Old Beit Midrash was the first to be built in the aftermath of the massacres of the seventeenth century, and the site on

ref. to stories!

which it was constructed was determined providentially. A fabric Torah mantel that had been ripped and desecrated in the massacres was caught up by a sudden burst of wind and buffeted in the air until it landed on a certain spot. Buczacz is built on a series of hills, and this spot turned out to be the only location in the town from which crosses and Christian statues were not visible. A *beit midrash* is a house of study, but at first the building had to serve also as a house of prayer. This arrangement was not suitable for long, and this was not only because of the increasing number of Jews who were returning to Buczacz after the massacres but also because of a fundamental divergence in the needs of two classes of worshippers. For the generality of the town—shopkeepers, tradesmen, artisans, peddlers, laborers—daily public worship in the morning and the evening was their central religious exercise and they were in no hurry to rush through it, despite the demands of the workaday world. The other class was the *benei torah*, men who spent their days in the *beit midrash* studying the Talmud and its commentaries and codes. This included adolescents who had finished *heder*, bridegrooms of well-to-do families, older men who had finished their working life, and scholars who devoted their days to learning, supported by their working wives or their own wealth. It was ironically the *benei torah* who wanted prayers to be conducted at a fast pace and be over quickly because, even though they did not have to rush off to the marketplace, they were zealous to get down to their studies as directly as possible. And so the elders of Buczacz, assessing and collecting the contributions each member of the community could make, erected the Great Synagogue, the *beit hakeneset hagadol*. It was built as a fortress synagogue, a structure of large proportions, thick walls, and a sunken floor so that it could serve as a refuge in the event of Tatar incursions.

As we are ushered inside the synagogue to be shown the special objects it contains, the guide's method will become apparent to us. At each stop along the way, the guide will describe the physical properties of the object or the place and its function in the religious or communal life of Buczacz. But the guide will do something more: he will attach to the object or place a story. Sometimes the story will be a brief vignette [*ma'aseh*] about how a sacred object came to be contributed to the synagogue or how a place got its name. Yet at other times, the object or place will serve as the impetus for a full-fledged story, one that we as modern readers recognize as an instance of "fiction" because it has an independent set of characters and a realized plot, or, to put it simply, it tells a finished story. (Whether Agnon would have owned to these distinctions is doubtful; in his own mind it was likely all part of the act of telling stories.) Two examples of the shorter, anecdotal exposition concern the synagogue's grand chandelier and a glass-enclosed board inscribed with the blessing for the new moon.

What is an ornate twenty-six candle chandelier made from polished Italian glass doing in a Galician synagogue? The answer concerns a *gabbai*, a treasurer, of the synagogue named R. Shalom, who was a merchant who traveled widely on business. Once in Trieste, he was invited to the home of a Christian merchant to celebrate a transaction that had just been concluded between them. Among the many magnificent furnishings, R. Shalom noticed a large chandelier which, in contrast to the other lamps in the room, remained unlit. The explanation provided by his host is that his grandfather's grandfather had been a Jew who had been forced by circumstance to convert to Christianity. He died before he could move to another country and revert to his Judaism. Although his children and their children's children remained Christians, in recognition of the patriarch's origins the chandelier was never lit after his death. As R. Shalom is about to embark on the return journey to Buczacz, a servant appears with a gift: a box in which the fragile glass pieces of the chandelier are carefully packed away wrapped in bunting. It shone

story

brilliantly in the Great Synagogue above the reader's stand "until the appalling abomination and its accursed defiled horde extinguished the light" (pp. 25-27).

The board with the blessing for the new moon is the last station on the first loop of the grand tour. The guide-narrator has already accompanied us outside the Great Synagogue and past the courtyard where dead bodies are purified and prepared for burial. The board is outside because the congregants have to come out into the darkness in order to see the moon during the first half of the lunar month. But if it is dark, how can they read the liturgy? Hence the vignette about a man from a distinguished lineage who, together with his grandson, was a house guest of a wealthy householder in Buczacz. The man took notice of the host's beautiful young daughter and regretted to himself that his relative poverty would make a match with his grandson impossible. When he visited the following year, the girl was nowhere to be seen. When pressed, his host explained that the girl had been stricken with somnambulism. Every month at the new moon she arises from her bed and walks from rooftop to rooftop in the town until the moon sets. None of the steps taken, from locking her windows to the ministrations of a *ba'al shem*, a wonder worker, and the writing of amulets, have availed. The guest proposes another solution. Let a large glass plate be procured upon which his grandson, who possesses this special skill, will etch the text of the blessing of the new moon. Let the glass plate be enclosed in wooden frame and placed in the courtyard of the synagogue. If the whole congregation will complete the ritual every month for twelve months, then host's daughter will be cured. And so they did and so she was. The girl became the boy's bride and the ancestor of many generations descendents until the last of them were killed by the Germans. Many years later the glass was shattered by drunken students from the monastery school, and its replacement consisted only of a board inscribed with the blessings cover by a plain glass (pp. 228-30).

In both of these instances—and this is the general case throughout—the narrator pauses to provide us with an extended explanation only when the object in question is not a typical synagogue appurtenance but an object unique to Buczacz or at least one with an unusual provenance. The explanation itself can be delivered only in the form of a story. For the guide in whose hands we have place ourselves is not an eager docent or an amateur anthropologist. He is a storyteller, and although he acquits himself of the conventional requirements to give physical descriptions of places and things, the truth of the matter can be conveyed only via the *ma'aseh*. Telling the *ma'aseh* typically takes us far away from the object and its sacred us before bringing us back. In the case of the chandelier it is Trieste and the history of a Jewish family forced to convert to Christianity. In the case of the board with the blessing for the new moon, it is rare case of "moon walking" that can be cured only by faithful adherence to ritual rather than by recourse to charms and wonder working. Not only are we taken back to the past in each instance but we are taken to an exotic place, whether it is in a foreign clime or in the human heart. With the conclusion of the vignette we are brought back to the present and the object before us, but we are not left there. There is a flash forward to the Holocaust in which the Jews and the objects sacred to them came to a final, violent end. This sudden and wrenching turn pole-vaults over all the complex intervening history of the Jews of Buczacz to make contact, if only momentarily, with its final horizon.

If the *ma'aseh* takes us to exotic places, it is not for long and it is only to bring us back to the object with an enlarged understanding of its origins. The *sipur*, the story, is another matter. It is a term that is so common and so fungible in Agnon's world that it is futile to try to tie it down. But in the context of *Ir umeloah* and even more specifically in the descriptions of Buczacz in Book One, a characterization may be attempted. In the *ma'aseh*, the vignette directly

serves the purpose of our better grasping the object or place at hand. In the story, the object or place is not so much an excuse as an occasion for the telling of the story; and although this anchor in the realia of Buczacz remains important, the story itself occupies an independent aesthetic field. The greater length is also a significant difference, not so much as a quantitative measure but as indication of the existence of conflicts and mysteries that must be submitted to a process of emplotment before they can be resolved. The greatest difference is the freedom the story arrogates to itself to expose the workings of the human heart.

The story "Ad sheyavo Eliyahu" [Until Elijah Comes, pp. 57-70] can serve as a brief example. (The story will be discussed more fully in Chapter X in the context of the theme of redemption.) The impetus for the story is, again, a unique object that requires explanation. This time it is a chest that has been resting for generations in the passageway between the Old Beit Midrash and the New Beit Midrash. The origins of the chest are connected to an ill-tempered shamash (synagogue sexton) of questionable principles who finds himself on the horns of a particular dilemma. A Sabbath is approaching on which the *tokheihah*, the catalogue of curses in Leviticus 26 or Deuteronomy 28, is being read in the synagogue, and unless he can find a poor person to be called to the Torah for that passage, he himself will have to take the *aliyah* and be exposed to the bad luck associated with the curses. One such seemingly gullible candidate from among the vagrant poor shows up in the synagogue just in time, and the shamash goes out of his way to court this promising prospect. The poor man turns out to be wise and gracious but elusive, and it is not until the end of the story that our suspicions are confirmed that he is in truth the prophet Elijah. But if he is a mystery—and he cannot be otherwise—the soul of the shamash is opened to us like a book. Although he is not a venal person, he has made promises to congregants that he has not fulfilled and his conscience afflicts him. He is afraid of the heavenly retribution that might be triggered by exposure to the curses, and so he seizes on the poor man as his chance to escape this fate. The burden of the narrative is an account of the shamash's strung-out emotional state at two levels. Consciously, he swings between self-satisfaction with his designs on the poor man and contemptuous rage over the latter's continual success in evading them. Unconsciously, despite his hardened temperament, the shamash has become almost smitten with the poor man and the graciousness of his presence, and he finds himself, to his amazement, longing for the man's return from his mysterious absences. The meaning of this attraction will be discussed at a later time. What concerns us in this context is the psychological examination that the story as a form makes possible and which cannot, by nature, be part of the story-telling mode of the *ma'aseh*. It is in the story that the narrator emboldens himself to make use of the powers of the sympathetic imagination to enter the thoughts and feelings of characters who lived long ago, or, if we adopt the stance of modern readers, may never have lived at all.

As the grand tour continues, the narrator-guide takes particular pains to point out not only places and things but practices as well. This is the wide realm of *minhag* (plural: *minhagim*) in which the narrator aspires to be an expert curator.⁸ One aspect of *minhag* simply refers to the text and performance of the liturgy, which existed in variations as Jewish communities developed in different parts of the world. Our narrator-guide takes every opportunity to aver that the Jews of Buczacz were unswerving in their loyalty to the *minhag* of Ashkenaz as it was developed by the eleventh century in the Rhine Valley (in such famous communities as Worms,

⁸ The diversity and complexity of the issues surrounding the role of *minhag* in Jewish practice are surveyed in Herr, Moshe David, and Menachem Elon. "Minhag." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. 2nd ed. Vol. 14. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 265-278. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 13 Dec. 2012.

Speyer, and Maynce). This insistence goes hand-in-hand with the narrator's assertion that Buczacz is the direct lineal descendent or extension of that ancient community⁹ and its spiritual and scholarly authority, although we know, despite the myth of origins Agnon opens his book with, that this was hardly the historical record. What's at stake is not so much the text of the statutory prayers as much as the poetic supplements, the piyyutim, which could indeed vary considerably from region to region. Even if the texts themselves were fixed, their musical realization offered only limited scope for innovation. We learn in the story "Hazzanim" (pp. 70-84) that although there were some *hazzanim* who succeeded in having their new melodies accepted into the tradition, many never departed from the melodies they received from their predecessors. The narrator's insistent rhetoric of continuity, in fact, diverts attention from the evidence of major liturgical innovations that swept through Buczacz and other Polish communities, all the result of the export of Lurianic Kabbalah from Safed and its domestication within Eastern Europe. The Kabbalat Shabbat service on Friday evenings, the Simhat Torah ceremony, the all-night vigil on Shavuot—all these inventions of the kabbalists took root in Galicia not earlier than the beginning of the seventeenth century. Nonetheless, the narrator speaks of them as if they had almost always been part of the hoary rite of the Buczacz community. Book Three of *Ir umeloah* touches on the even greater disruption that took place in the late eighteenth century: ecstatic behavior during prayer and alterations in the times for prayer that arrived with the ascent of Hasidism. There too, while acknowledging these challenges, the narrator will exercise his right to refrain from giving them much attention in order to buttress and burnish the image of Buczacz's loyalty to minhag.

In its non-liturgical sense, minhag can designate the practices that are unique to a particular community, and our narrator-guides takes particular pleasure not only in pointing out the unique minhagim of Buczacz but also in knowing their origins.⁹ And when he cannot provide an explanation, he is aggrieved and abashed. Such is the case, for example, with the custom on the first Shabbat after a wedding that the bride is accompanied on the way to the synagogue by her mother on her right side and her mother-in-law on her left. "There must certainly be a source for this," the narrator opines, "but I for my sins have not merited finding the source" (p.53). The importance of minhag is illustrated by the case of the man whose observance of the statutory commandments was weak but whose practice of the minhagim was fastidious. In the divine judgment after his death he could not avoid being sent to Gehinnom, but a decree was issued that Hell should be cooled off for him (p. 55). A special concern surrounded the appointment of a new rabbi, who most always came to Buczacz from another community with its own practices. Buczacz was therefore careful to make sure that one of the contractual provisions in the rabbinic letter of appointment addressed this issue: "The rabbi will be required scrupulously to observe the ancient minhagim of Buczacz, whether it is the recitation of piyyutim or any positive minhag has long been practiced, and he should not exchange them for new minhagim that have no writ from halakhic authorities" (p. 312).

Some minhagim were lofty expressions of communal spiritual will. This was the case with the 20th of Sivan, a fast day that commemorated the onset of the Khmelnytsky massacres with the attack on the city of Nemirov. (There is an extraordinary description of observances of

⁹ The narrator is aware that his readers may find his preoccupation with minhagim excessive, and he thus moved to offer a justification whose over-laden rhetoric speaks for itself: "It is because of the love I feel for the minhagim of the Jewish people with which the holy sages have distinguished ('itru) us—whom in turn the Holy One has distinguished with the Torah—that I have rendered a detail by detail account and explained to you each minhag; for if the matter is trivial in your eyes, it was significant in the eyes of our ancestors (p.42)."

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this solemn day, complete with the dirges composed for the occasion, in the story "Hamashal vehanimshal" [The Parable and its Lesson, pp. 419-31]). The observance of the fast was not unique to Buczacz, but the community took special measures to combat the attenuation of this historical memory.¹⁰ In the same letter of rabbinic appointment, it enjoined the rabbi not to provide exemptions for newcomers to the city from German or Ottoman lands who might argue that the fast did not pertain to them and their ancestors (p. 312). In a similar but less funereal vein, there are minhagim whose goal is to help the community be its best self, especially when it comes to the challenging task of synagogue decorum. Over and over again the narrator-guide declares that chatting during the sacred service, especially during the reading of the Torah, was something that simply was not done in Buczacz, or if such a violation did perchance occur, one could be certain it was accountable to a visitor to the city, not a native. In the story "Hamashal vehanimshal," an aged shamash astounds his listeners with an account of a journey to Gehinnom taken decades earlier in which he witnessed great scholars enduring horrendous suffering for the sin having spoken, even about exegetical matters, during the Torah reading. Buczacz boasted a special *mi shebeirakh* prayer, a prayer recited by the leader of the service on behalf of all those who "keep their mouths from utterance during prayer in the synagogue" from the time the prayer leaders calls the congregation to order (the *barekhu*) through until the conclusion (p. 21).¹¹ In the untoward case of any audible murmuring in the midst of the congregation, the shamash also had at his disposal another instrument. This was a bunch of empty pages bound together like a book, called *sefer haperlnik*, which sat on the reader's table and upon which the shamash would bang "with the same vigor a woman beats her laundry to get out the water" (p. 436).¹²

The last station on the first loop of the tour is the New Beit Midrash. Here, as opposed to the grand synagogue, the structure and its appurtenances hold no special wonder. Yet despite the absence of visual interest, it is abundantly clear that the batei midrash, both old and new, form the core of the narrator's loyalties. As a guide to Buczacz, he is responsible for the whole of the Jewish life of the city; but he himself is a creation of the beit midrash and its values, and he cannot help lavishing upon it special attention. This comes in the form of an extended account of its origins (pp. 43-57), which is cast not so much as a story (in sense we have been using the term) as a protracted *ma'aseh*. What differentiates the account of how the New Beit Midrash came into being from that of the synagogue and the Old Beit Midrash is the factor of individual enterprise. The older buildings are presented as being the result of an organic upsurge of communal will in the aftermath of the massacres. In the case of the New Beit Midrash, despite the urgent need for a new structure—young men with nowhere to sit were learning standing up outside—no collective groundswell arose to meet the challenge. The building got built only because of the resolve of one family and because of the resources released by marital alliance; and all this, the narrator implies, is hardly by accident.

The marriage in question, which almost did not take place, is between the son of R. Yosef and the daughter of R. Noah. R. Yosef is the son of a father whose first family was killed in the Tatar invasions. His great desire is to expand the beit midrash, but he lacks the funds to make this possible. He has a son who is both an *'ilui*, a Talmud prodigy, and a *matmid*, a student

¹⁰ The narrator, slipping back into the role of the modern author, testifies that when he was growing up in Buczacz the urgency of 20 Sivan had so waned that there was only one minyan of worshipers, of which he was one, who still observed the fast (pp. 38-39).

¹¹ Two explanations are given for the origin of this prayer. In this context (p. 21), we are told that it was brought to Buczacz from Ashkenaz by the ancient founders of the city. In the story "Hamashal vehanimshal" it is ascribed to the revivalist response of the community to hearing the shamash's account of his journey to Gehinnom (p. 436).

¹² *Perlnik* is presumably a Polish word for beating laundry. (source?)

capable of devoting innumerable hours to study, and who attracts the attention of the wealthy wine merchant R. Noah, whose family background is also steeped in persecution. Although these exigencies have prevented him from becoming a scholar, he loves Torah scholarship. He sees the marriage of his daughter to R. Yosef's son not the way an *arriviste* sees an opportunity for social advancement, a phenomenon the narrator elsewhere decries, but as a genuine chance to ally himself with the fortunes of Torah. In the meantime, R. Yosef ingeniously leverages his son's high value as a bridegroom to high purposes. He agrees to the match but will not allow the wedding to take place until R. Noah completes the building of a new beit midrash. R. Noah, in turn, agrees to the terms, but only reluctantly, and not because of the outlay of the money for building. He and wife are anxious over the unusual delay between the engagement and the wedding because of the many contingencies that could arise during this interval and undo the match.¹³

And what is feared is what happens. There are unanticipated and indefinite delays in the construction project, and the match is therefore put in jeopardy. The Zebulonites, an exemplary family of honest artisans, have been engaged to build the beit midrash, but in the midst of the process a wagon full of workers is kidnapped by the lord of a neighboring town and diverted to work under duress building his summer house. The other source of delay is surprisingly close to home and results from a very curious illness. The bridegroom is so devoted to his studies that he goes at it fourteen hours a day and all night on Thursdays. The idea that his wedding and the subsequent celebrations will result in the loss of study time causes him anguish. To make up for the time he anticipates losing he embarks on a plan to emulate Moses's sojourn on Mount Sinai and stay awake for forty nights before the wedding. On the thirty-ninth night, he becomes delirious and imagines himself racing through all the Talmud tractates he has not yet studied. He falls, hits his head, and is found unconscious on the floor of the beit midrash in the morning. He is nursed back to health, the building is completed, and the New Beit Midrash dedicated. Yet the monitory example of Torah study as hubris and obsession lingers in the air as an ominous possibility.

Despite the narrator's preoccupation with liturgical practices and matters pertaining to the synagogue, there is no doubt that his allegiance lies with the beit midrash, whether old or new. It is the *axis mundi* of his worldview, the sacred center of Buczacz. It is a space that is constantly in danger of being encroached upon by other, legitimate needs of the community (circumcision ceremonies and meetings of the rabbinic court) or being polluted by mendacity. Parties to lawsuits are sometimes required by the court to render solemn oaths, and often only one can be truthful. The prospect of the beit midrash being violated by perpetration of deceit in its precincts was so disturbing that even though the court proceedings were held there, the administration of oaths took place elsewhere, sometimes outside the bounds of the city altogether. The narrator-guide concludes his remarks on the construction of the New Beit Midrash by jumping from a concrete sense of space to one far more sublime. The new building made provision for forty additional places or study stations, and to this precise notation is added the citation of a famous statement in the Talmud (Berakhot 8a):

¹³ P. 50 contains a long list of bad things that can happen to people, not just betrothed young people, during such an interval. The list leans heavily on imagined horrors and folk beliefs, e.g., a woman goes to purify herself in the mikveh and the local squire in the body of a pig stands in her path. But it contains real dangers as well. On the desirability of early marriage, see the discussion in Chapter X.

It is said in the Gemara: "From the day that the Temple was destroyed, the only room left for the Holy One is the four cubits of halakhah." Happy is he who builds houses for Torah for, as it were, he expands God's world.

In the local context of the story, this statement has a congratulatory, homiletic ring that calls down blessing on R. Yosef, the man whose initiative is to be credited with the successful construction of the new building. In the broader context of the grand tour of Buczacz, the statement has a much larger resonance. The passage is conventionally understood to describe the way in which observance of commandments and study of Torah replaced the Temple ritual as vehicles for the divine; in other words, the holiness that inhered in a specific edifice and its protocols has now been transferred to forms of religious experience that are no longer dependent on a specific place. Agnon's exegesis of the passage makes it rotate back in the direction of valorizing space. Yes, houses for study can be built anywhere after the Destruction, but the very fact of their being built or expanded cannot be taken for granted. And it is within these special places that God dwells; he who builds them does nothing less than to expand God's presence in the world. The entire project of *Ir umeloah* can be taken as an effort to re-spatialize Diaspora Judaism by making a single, concrete place come to life. In this sense Agnon is practicing a kind of inverted Diaspora Zionism. He espouses the need to reconnect soul to body and spirit to place, but he demonstrates that that unity, in its own way, was found in a place like Buczacz in its heyday well in anticipation of the later fulfillment in Eretz Yisrael.

There is a break now in the grand tour. The loop of the sacred institutions has been completed, and the tour will continue shortly with a briefer circuit of the marketplace and the municipal buildings. Between them is a lengthy delineation of the communal functionaries and leaders of the beit midrash and the synagogue. If the trope of the guided tour can be extended even a little more, it is as if the group is taking a midday break from walking the town and viewing each site in order to sit down for a series of brief lectures on the part of the landscape of Buczacz that cannot be seen, the *human* landscape. By means of anecdotes and individual profiles, the exposition lays out the hallmarks of the following groups: the shamashim, the sextons or beadles who are responsible for the day-to-day operations of the synagogue; the hazzanim, the cantors who lead services on Sabbath, holidays, and special occasions; the rabbis, who serves as the halakhic authority for the town and preaches a number of times a year; the gabbaiim, the treasurers of the synagogue responsible for its maintenance; and the lomdim, scholars who spend the whole day or portions of it engaging in Torah learning for its own sake in the beit midrash. The shamashim, hazzanim and rabbis are employees of the community. The gabbai is an unpaid officer selected by the community. The lomdim are self-selected and unappointed. (It's worth point out in passing the positions that fail to merit substantive attention in *Ir umeloah*: parnasim, wealthy merchants who take turns serving as heads of the community, especially in relations with gentile rulers; shohatim, ritual slaughterers; and melamdim, teachers of elementary-age children who maintain private classrooms in their homes. Although these positions and occupations figure prominently in much Hebrew and Yiddish literature from Eastern Europe, they are not part of the cavalcade of types in Agnon's account. The reason, I would suggest, lies in the parameters Agnon has imposed by making worship and study the foundational categories for the recreation of Buczacz.)

In the case of the occupations and positions that Agnon *has* chosen to represent, three (hazzanim, gabbaiim, and lomdim) are presented—in that order—in the presentation of Buczacz

that constitutes Book One of *Ir umeloah*, which we have been calling the grand tour. The shamashim are not treated as a class under a separate heading, but they do figure as protagonists with rich inner lives in two stories: “‘Ad sheyavo’ Eliyahu” [Until Elijah Comes, pp. 57-70]¹⁴ and “Hamashal vehanimshal” [The Parable and its Lesson, pp. 394-441].¹⁵ The rabbis are the preoccupation of Book Two and many of the stories in Book Three. The sequence of three stories that deal with the hazzanim will be discussed in the chapter on worship. This leaves us to take some note of the gabbaiim and the lomdim before moving on.

There is something curious about the presentation of the gabbaiim. Four are named, and each is given his own entry; together they form a substantial swath of material (pp. 123-50). Yet we find out almost nothing about what they actually do as gabbaiim, the demands of the position, or their aspirations, successful or thwarted. Instead, the pages are filled with fascinating anecdotes and melodramatic events that impinged on their lives. But, again, there is little about the task in connection to which they presumably come into the picture in the first place. Has Agnon lost his way and given in to his congenital weakness for digression? Yes, in a sense, but in his giving in there is something creative and instructive. If Agnon had in fact focused his attention in a disciplined way on describing the work of the gabbaiim—the raising of funds, the supervision of the shamashim, the implementation of maintenance and repairs—he would have bored his readers and himself. As a form of creative denial, he therefore allows his narrator to be drawn to all manner of intriguing incidents and stories associated with the figure and times he lived in. The essence may be missing, but the piling up of secondary reports and curiosities teaches us much and keeps us, and apparently the narrator as well, engaged.¹⁶

R. Tsvi, earliest of the gabbaiim, is one of many whose life story is more interesting than his—in this case, non-existent—achievements in office. He is a man whose life is marked by a great renunciation. As a brilliant student from a poor family, he is snapped as a bridegroom by a wealthy merchant and set on course for a life devoted to scholarship. During the engagement, the merchant loses his capital and is wiped out; the boy’s family has every right to return the marriage contract, but, as a matter of honor, the boy insists on going ahead with the marriage. He gives up the life of a scholar and dedicates himself to restoring his father-in-law’s fortunes, which over time he succeeds in doing. When he is in a position to devote himself to the affairs of the community and is appointed gabbai, he ends in performing the job poorly. Because of the sacrifice all those years ago, the desire for learning was suppressed and unfulfilled, and now all he wants to do is study. Each day on his way to manage the affairs of the synagogue, he pops into the beit midrash to look something up and never emerges. Eventually he gave up his office to someone better suited to the job. He is best remembered in Buczacz for his longevity; he merited participating in the Blessing of the Sun ceremony (*birkat hahamah*), which takes place every 28 years, three times in his life. At the first of these, when he was four, he was privileged to glimpse Ham, son of Noah, from the Bible who, according to legend, missed the first blessing of the sun ceremony because he was busy feeding the animals in the ark; therefore during each new cycle he is roused from heaven to be present at a different community each time.

So the pattern continues with the other gabbaiim. R. Moshe Aharon is a mead merchant with a knowledge of worldly matters and political affairs outside the confines of Galicia. As a

¹⁴ See Chapter X

¹⁵ Discussed in *Agnon’s Descent into Hell* . . .

¹⁶ See the fruitful interpretation of the gabbaiim stories in Roman Katzman, “Sh. Y. Agnon’s Community Rhetoric: The Heroism and Crisis of Power in Two Tales of the Gabbais (Treasurers) from *Ir U-Meloah* (The City and All It Has In It,” *Hebrew Studies* 52 (2011), pp. 363-78.

purveyor of mead, the honey-based alcoholic beverage, he comes in frequent contact with the Polish nobility. It is in fact the melodramatic account of one such powerful noble, whose quest for atonement for a great crime moves him from Poland to Egypt and then to Buczacz, that entirely overwhelms the story of R. Moshe Aharon himself, not to mention his work as gabbai. The next is R. David Shlomo, a substantial shopkeeper, whose effective in office is diminished by an act of sentimental foolishness. On his way to a commercial fare to purchase merchandise for the season, he comes across two men who have acquired a cache of etrogim, the citrus fruit essential to the celebration of the festival of Sukkot. It had been three years since an etrog had been seen in Buczacz, and his desire to have one is so great that he ends up parting with his entire bankroll and nearly impoverishing himself. His story, too, is overshadowed by the his far stronger wife, Henegidah Marat Sarah, who in turn figures in the denouement of a ripping tale about the local Polish magnate, who brought back from Paris a lover disguised as a man servant. In contrast, there are no colorful anecdotes that attach to the brief account of the life of the last-mentioned gabbai, R. Shalom. It turns out that, retiring from business to devote himself to synagogue affairs, he is the only one who accomplished something. The plaza in front of the synagogue was cleared of refuse and paved, the peeling walls of the synagogue were painted, and a sundial was installed on the tower. Having done his duty by describing R. Shalom's having done his duty, the narrator moves on.

There are similar challenges when it comes to describing the life of the lomdim. The lomdim of the Old Beit Midrash stand at the absolute center of the structure of values elaborated in *Ir umeloah*. Their devotion to the study of Torah is unmarred by all the factors that make a rabbi's life difficult and often compromised. They are not appointed to positions; they are not dependent on the community for their livelihood; they are not vulnerable to the whims of the gentile rulers; and because they do not issue legal determinations, they don't have a constituency to please or displease. Rather than simply reading and reviewing the Talmud and its commentaries as a reverential homage to the tradition, the lomdim actively reexamine, re-argue and re-stage the teachings and controversies that have been passed down to them and thereby become themselves part of the tradition as it move forward. Yet as important as this drama is and as close to the core norms of the book's worldview, it remains an experience difficult to represent to outsiders. Agnon attempts to suggest something of the dialectical confrontation—although not the scholarly substance—in the encounter between two scholars in his epic story “Hamevaqshim lahem rav” [Seeking a Rabbi,” discussed in Chapter X].¹⁷ Here, in the section of *Ir umeloah* that deals with sacred occupations, Agnon decides not to bring us inside the beit midrash proper, and his reasons are likely the opposite from those that led him to steer the story away from the work of the gabbaiim. There the matter was tedious; here, the give and take among the scholars in the beit midrash is electric with excitement. But the problem is that this excitement is so heavily coded that it cannot be easily conveyed to the reader.

He gives us instead a miniature family saga. If not the scholarship of the scholars, then at least the lives of the scholars. “Hayerahmi'elim” [The Yerahmielites, pp. 163-94] is a cluster of anecdotal stories about a patriarch named Yerahmiel and the grandson born just after his death and given his name. The first Yerahmiel lived during the period of the Tatar and Turkish wars,

¹⁷ Agnon came the closest in the story “Shenei talmidei hakhamim shehayu be'ireinu” [Two Scholars Who Lived in our City]. The story first appeared in *Luah Haaretz* in 1957 and was included in the volume *Samukh venir'eh* [XXX]. I regard the story as belonging to the corpus of *Ir umeloah* materials. The reason it was not included in the book was because it had already been published in an earlier volume, and Agnon appears to have been insistent that *Ir umeloah* contain only material that had not previously appeared in book form.

and he was not only a scholar but also a fighter, who, when the hour required it, donned armor and took up the sword to defend Buczacz shoulder-to-shoulder with his Polish neighbors. These were times when the city truly found itself on the frontier between Christian Europe and the Ottoman Empire, and the story of R. Yerahmiel's life is intertwined with tales about Jews who were captured in combat, sold as slaves and years later returned to their original identity or returned to surprise those who had assumed that they were gone forever. When peace returns to the region, R. Yerahmiel's energies are divided between his role as a communal leader and his commitment to completing the study of the entire Mishnah each year. The two come together when he travels as a delegate to the Council of Four Lands at a time of fractious deliberations. Because of his devotion to Mishnah study he merits a visitation from Heaven by R. Shimon ben Halafta, the sage whose words close the six orders of the Mishnah at the end of the Treatise Uqetsin. Those final words are, "The Holy One Blessed Be He found no vessel that could hold the blessing for Israel save peace." R. Shimon accompanies him into the great chamber and through his inspiration R. Yerahmiel finds a way to overcome divisiveness and bring the assembly to order.

The grandson is less accomplished in communal affairs but the greater scholar. His business is just profitable enough to allow him to be charitable and afford time for study. Some of the public projects he seeks to advance on his own initiative succeed (a new road for village Jews to find their way to the synagogue) and others fail (digging a well for the inhabitants of hilly neighborhood so they don't injure themselves on the icy hillside in winter). The turning point in the life of this R. Yerahmiel is the death of his beloved wife Tsvia. He refuses to remarry and becomes somewhat withdrawn from his growing family. In his studies in the *beit midrash* he becomes preoccupied with a book called *Sefer ma'avar yabok* (Mantua, 1626), which deals with prayers and ceremonies having to do with the journey of the ill through death to the grave.¹⁸ His children are having children and the family network is burgeoning, but R. Yerahmiel can provide little of the guidance they need from him. His unavailability is felt especially acutely in the case of the one family that has not been fruitful. His son Mordechai's wife Pesele is disconsolate after two miscarriages, and although R. Yerahmiel accedes to his son's pleas to comfort her with word of faith and Torah, it is a very difficult task for him to discharge, and the consolation taken by his daughter-in-law is slight and temporary.

As writing, the story of Yerahmiel and his family is unusual. It is a miniature family saga that, branching out through the potential stories of the children and grandchildren, could well have served as the outline for a whole novel. But those plot lines are unelaborated, and the story has about it a kind of episodic lightness that is not weighed down with the asides and obiter dicta we have come to expect in this volume. The mode is domestic, and despite our expectations for a glimpse into to the scholarly wrangling within the *beit midrash*, Agnon instead takes us outside and renders the emotional life of one of its principle denizens. Yerahmiel is not a *zaddik* or a rabbi of legendary repute whose every deed is wrapped in mystery and moral instruction. He is also not a simple everyman. By embodying a mixture of humanness and devotion to learning, Yerahmiel emerges as a certain kind of Agnonian hero.¹⁹

¹⁸ On this genre, see Avriel Bar-Levav, "It Is Good to Die for Life," [Hebrew], *Haaretz*, Dec. 18, 2009.

¹⁹ Following the stories about Yerahmiel the grandfather and Yerahmiel the grandson on pages 195-205, there are a series of vignettes that underscore and illustrate the centrality of Torah study in Buczacz. One concerns the famous scholar R. Yaakov Yehoshua Falk, the *Penei Yehoshua*, who found the town a hospitable place to settle when he had to flee Levov after being dismissed as the rabbi of the city by the rulers. Another tells of his intransigent son whom only the learned air of Buczacz could turn toward the study of Torah. Another tells the story of R. Meshulam Igra, who grew up as a prodigy within the *beit midrash* of Buczacz and became the rabbi of Tismanitz before going on the

At last we are ready to embark on the second loop of the tour of Buczacz. This loop is structured as an outward spiral. It begins with the marketplace and its well and then moves to the city hall, and from there to a marginal neighborhood formed by the Strypa and a canal that connects to it. On the other side of the Strypa there is a kosher slaughterhouse, a convent and a monastery—and later the gymnasium. On one side is the Fedor Hill, and on the other are fields and forests leading to the surrounding villages, and beyond that are estates of the Polish magnates.²⁰ For the most part, this is the realm of gentiles, and the narrator-guide's not only gives it much less attention but that attention requires justification. At the beginning of this loop of the tour, he is constrained to offer the following rationale.

I now turn from the synagogues and study houses to the marketplace. For as long as Jews are occupied with Torah and worship and trade in good faith, the Holy One Blessed Be He gives them livelihood from the marketplace. They receive livelihood so that they can occupy themselves with Torah; and they study Torah so that they should merit livelihood. It therefore follows that the marketplace is an extension (*snif*) of the realm of Torah. (P. 230)

The interdependence between Torah study and commerce is an idea well established both in Jewish sources and in Jewish historiography. The narrator-guide takes the idea one step further by making it into a syllogism that proves that the marketplace is subsumed by Torah. To apply the syllogism to the work of narration means that dealing with gentile spaces such as the marketplace can also, potentially, be construed as occupying oneself with Torah. Whether or not the argument is convincing, it attests to the narrator's conviction that the description of gentile space is justified only if it can be understood as Jewish space as well.

This is not so much an apologia for exploring gentile space as a description of the narrator-guide's practice. The most magnificent building in Buczacz, with its high tower and its sculptures, is the city hall commissioned by Mikolaj Potocki. As mentioned in the historical section earlier in this chapter, Agnon chose to disregard the fact that the architect and sculptor came from German lands and instead gave us Theodore, the Italian artist and master craftsman, who was converted as child and whose early Jewish memories are rekindled by his time spent among the visibly Jewish Jews of Buczacz ("Beit hamo'atsot hagadol" [The Great City Hall, pp. 233-39]). It is not only the fact of his origins that turns the city hall into a Jewish space; Jewishness is encoded in the faces of the sculptures themselves that look out over the city, which are modeled on a combination of present-day Buczacz types and the now-recurrent memories of the Yom Kippur of his childhood. Locked away in the tower and facing starvation, Theodore's fate, in its heroic last moments, connects with the martyrdom of other artists in *Ir umeloah*, especially the hazzanim. It is no surprise, then, when the city hall at the city's civic center

Pressburg. Still another describes the famous rabbi of Levov, the Turei Zahav, in disguise overhearing the give and take between two porters in Buczacz, a father and son, as they critically evaluate his work.

²⁰ A survey of the spaces of Buczacz would not be complete without mentioning the Netherworld, i.e. Gehinnom, which can be accessed, as the astonished Jews of Buczacz learn in the story "Hamashal vehanimshal," from a portal not far from the town. When it comes to the construction of space, this one exists, it needs hardly be said, at a different level altogether.

becomes linked to the hill on its outskirts, named for the Jewish Icarus who crashed and died there, where the Jews of Buczacz were buried alive some two hundred years later.²¹

necessary?

The penetration and appropriation of gentile space reach their apotheosis in the story that follows: "Hashutafim" [The Partners, pp. 239-55]. The telling of the story is provoked by a stunning fact: In the basement of this august building, the civil hub of Polish dominion, there lived for generations a Jewish family. How is such a thing possible? There once was a poor Jew named Nahum Ber, the narrator explains, who had been ousted by the local lord from the operation of a tavern his family had run for generations. He wandered in the woods with his family until he met an old gentile peasant who had once been a customer. The peasant teaches him how to cut down trees and prepare charcoal, which is then brought to the city, which happens to be Buczacz, for sale. He applies himself to this difficult work and ekes out a living; his only complaint is that living in the forest makes it hard for him to attend daily prayers with the community. One day, Count Potocki is out hunting in these, his woods when, separated from his party, he becomes weak and collapses. Nahum Ber finds him, carries him to his hovel, and nurses him back to health. When Nahum Ber puts on talit and tefilin and says his prayers, the count is astonished by what he sees, because, although 1800 Jews live on his estates, he knows nothing about them, their beliefs or practices. When the count is strong enough to travel, the charcoal maker carries him in his arms back to the castle. The question then becomes how the count can express his heartfelt gratitude. The nobleman's counselors are surprised to find that Nahum Ber is not interested in money; the only thing he wants is to leave the forest and move to Buczacz so he can be part of synagogue life. But because of a recent fire, there are simply no apartments or houses in town to be rented. The negotiations result in Nahum Ber being granted a leasehold on the basement of the city hall. Because it is a cavernous space, he lives with his family in only part it; he donates the rest as a storage space for the hard-working stall holders in the market who would otherwise have to cart home their merchandise every evening. The count makes sure that the lease is granted in perpetuity so that his descendents cannot roust Nahum Ber's descendents, who for generations remain the "partners" of the Potockis until World War One brings an end to the wellbeing of both families.

"Hashutafim" is a wryly carnivalesque story when considered in the spatial terms through which we have been getting to know Buczacz. The only reason to live at a distance from the Jewish community is economic hardship, and living in town requires a decent trade and a dwelling. After being turned out of the tavern and the hard-working but decent life it provided, Nahum Ber and his family might have joined the ranks of the itinerant poor and been reduced to begging. But he adjusts to physical labor and keeps his family at a level of subsistence. (It is not un-ironic that he learns the rough work of making charcoal from a grateful Ruthenian peasant, a member of a group supposedly exploited by Jewish tavern keepers.) The price of economic survival, however, is life in the forest and the painful removal from the center of Jewish life. Although the forest he lives in belongs to Count Potocki, it is the count who finds himself lost in the patch of the forest that is Nahum Ber's home. That providential reversal eventually results in a Jew being allowed to penetrate and colonize the subterranean level of Polish authority. The resulting living arrangements nicely serve as a figure for the unwanted but ineradicable place of the Jews in the mind of Galician Poles. Nicer still is the fact that the perpetuity enforced by the arrangement is not in fact perpetual; it can be guaranteed only up until the point that Galicia as a construction ceases to exist.

²¹ One wonders whether Agnon's story has its origins in a kind of back formation or midrash on the curious, longstanding name of the place as the Fedor Hill.

Next to the great city hall is a building called the little city hall. The story of that title (“Beit hamo’atsot haqatan” [The Little City Hall, pp. 255-69]) provides the exact inverse of the situation described in story just discussed. If in case of the great city hall it is the Jews who take up a small part of a gentile space, in the case of the little city hall it is a gentile who (once) occupied one unit of a building otherwise occupied by Jewish families. The building was originally built to serve a municipal function, but the steep ransom that had to be paid to the Tatar raiders meant that a proper roof was never built. An improvised roof was fabricated and the building sold to Jews. The story is an amalgam of two vastly different but ultimately related narratives. One is an account in internal Jewish economic competition. The gentile peasants entering Buczacz to buy goods come across this building before they get to the marketplace; and so those Jewish families that could buy apartments in the little city hall and also use them as shops had the advantage over the Jews who maintained stalls and stands in the marketplace proper. Buczacz divided into two warring factions over this issue; but the conflict was put aside when Mikolaj Potocki, frustrated by having found no game on a hunting day, made a Jewish woman climb a tree and shot her and shot two Jewish men shortly thereafter. The second narrative concerns a gentile knife grinder, who is rented a space in the building because the Jewish tenants do not want the competition from an additional Jewish merchant. The knife grinder is a foreigner who is said to have escaped the hangman’s noose in another country. In a city in which everyone loves to gossip and to haggle about prices, the knife grinder is an alien figure because he refuses to do either. When a headstrong young peasant abuses him for not lowering the price to sharpen a scythe, the knife grinder ominously tells him that the instrument will be so sharp that it will take off the head of his wife and his mother-in-law. The young man is unmarried but he does have his heart set on a young maiden. Yet instead of respecting the village mores and approaching the council of elders to ask for her hand, he rushes ahead recklessly, and through a concatenation of circumstances ends in killing the woman he wished to marry and her mother and in getting killed himself, all via the selfsame scythe. The knife sharpener takes his wheel and disappears and the shop in the little city hall is boarded up and never again occupied.

It is natural for us as readers to take the lurid melodrama surrounding wheel and the scythe as confirming a stereotype about the potential for murderousness at the heart of peasant life. Such an identification places us squarely and reassuringly on one side of a divide between the commanded civility of Jewish life and the unpredictability of gentile violence, which includes not just peasants but also a capriciously homicidal Polish magnate. But a second reading of the story goes some distance in blurring that border. On the economic ladder of Jewish life in Buczacz, the shopkeepers who take space in the little city hall are already a rung or two above the keepers of stalls and stands in the marketplace, yet they seek to gain even more advantage by preempting the peasant foot traffic and cutting off the flow to the marketplace. Within the framework of Jewish values and behaviors, this is certainly a kind of violence, even if heads are not being sliced off by agricultural implements or being shot at by hunting rifles. The economic oppression has a hardness to it precisely because it is pervasive and unrelenting and goes unflagged as a clear offense under the law. The single boarded up storefront among the Jewish shops of the little city hall becomes a symbolic wound or vacancy. It hints not only at the vulnerability of Jewish space to penetration from the outside but also at a source of infection within.

The penultimate stop on the tour provides another example of a very specific site to which, through the resourceful collective memory of the guide-narrator, a vivid story is attached.

Again, the directions are precise: "Moving uphill to the left from the city hall, you will find seven or eight shops. . . ." (p. 272). Before the great fires and before the shops were built, the peculiarity of this spot was that kohanim, Jews of priestly lineage, would not walk there because of a long-held tradition that it was the site of the grave of a young woman. Her headstone had been inscribed with the verse from Deuteronomy (22:27): "Although the betrothed girl cried for help, there was no one to rescue her." The story that explains the unusual inscription and the singular location of the grave could not be more chilling. A pious, widowed merchant who imports spices and dried fruit from Turkey settles with his only daughter in Buczacz. The girl, who became engaged to a young scholar, has a gift for preparing sweet deserts, and she is engaged to do so for a large celebration to be held in the local palace. During the preparations, a pet bear breaks free of his chains. The lord's son, who has been observing the girl and desiring her, exploits the ensuing confusion to grope her. The girl runs away from him but falls and dies; not knowing she is dead, he rapes her. Her distraught father insists on burying her on spot on which she fell and emblazoning on her stone a reproach to the bystanders who did not save her.

This grim little tale illustrates a dimension of space that is especially important to the guide-narrator: what lies underneath rather than just what lies just on the surface. This is Buczacz as *tel* and the narrator-guide as archeologist. The shops standing on the site were built after the great fires; beneath were the grave and the gravestone, and, in a figurative sense, beneath *them* are the girl and her story, as well the feudal milieu of spice merchants from the East and autocratic nobles with their pet bears and wayward sons. What gives us access to these buried layers, it should be noted, is a memory cultivated by the kohanim of Buczacz in their vigilant attention to the sacred geography of their town.

Agnon brings to a close the grand tour of Buczacz—and Book One of *Ir umeloah*—with the most powerful and disorienting instantiation of the paradigm of place + story. We are directed to take the road that leads from the city hall and the marketplace, cross the bridge, and arrive at the land on the other side of the Strypa, an area formed by the bend in the river and a canal dug to power water mills (pp. 274-79). To the right is the kosher slaughtering house, and to the left is the gymnasium built by the Austrians in the nineteenth century. There was once a Jewish neighborhood there with a well of bubbling fresh water; the houses were torn down to build the gymnasium, and the well was fenced in and placed off limits. Somewhat beyond is the great Basilian Monastery. Beyond that, in the shadow of Fedor Hill, is a secluded section that was centuries ago the place of the first Jewish settlement in Buczacz and probably a cemetery. The fortress that overlooks the area lies in ruins because the people of Buczacz were forced to demolish it themselves when they were conquered by the Turks. The synagogue was destroyed in the 1648 massacres and church built in its place. It is the place where the kabbalistic holy man, the Yehudi Hatov, described in some detail in the story "The Hazzanim" (pp. 77-78), once lived. When the narrator was a boy, aside from a few gentile who worked in the city, only one or two Jews live there, and they chose to do so "either because there were eager for the clean air, or because of the low rents, or because they were negligent about observance of the commandments and wished to escape scrutiny by their neighbors" (p. 275). The area, on the other side of the Strypa, is truly a liminal space, a space "in between" Jews and gentiles, the city and the countryside, the river and its man-made canal.

Is this a fitting end to a grand tour? Have we been accompanied to sites of compelling interest only to be left in this no-man's land? Agnon in fact organized this last stop with great care and gave us an ending to Book One that is a bang rather than a whimper. This big effect derives precisely from the connection of this strange space to the story it anchors. The story is

"Feivush gazlan" [Feivush the Thug, pp. 280-97], and it concerns the implementation of the hated candle tax. After annexing Galicia, the Austrian government sought ways to extract income from its new Jewish subjects, and, in addition to taxing the sale of kosher meat, it put into effect a tax on candles. Because candles were an important part of Sabbath observances and wedding celebrations, Jews were constrained to put up with the tax. The implementation of the tax was put in the hands of Jewish "tax farmers," who were chosen for the concession because they promised the largest yield. They in turn placed the enforcement of the tax in the hands of Jewish thugs who, accompanied by gentile helpers, who, on the suspicion of non-payment, would march into people's homes on Friday evenings and extinguish all their candles—it was the gentiles who did the actual extinguishing—if the tax hadn't been paid. The enforcer in Buczacz is Feivush the Thug, and his portrayal is surprisingly sympathetic. Rather than being a screed against gentile oppression, the story makes a point of asserting the complicity of Jews in their own persecution and presents the community, even the denizens of the *beit midrash*, as hypocritical and morally flawed. Feivush too is culpable, but he is also exploited, and he and his wife end up paying a dear price. It with this strong, de-idealizing gesture that Agnon brings the first great section of his book to a close. The analysis of the story proper belongs to the discussion of social injustice in Chapter X.

It is, again, the physical place where we are left that retains a troubling resonance. The beginning of the story adds a subversive detail to the already disorienting list of strange features of the little valley on the other side of the *Strypa*.

There, at the far end of the courtyard valley, facing the street where the synagogue destroyed by Khmel'nitski once stood, Feivush made a home for himself. Wood and stone debris from the demolished house of Jacob Frank lay there, untouched by human hands. Feivush collected it and built his home out of it. (P. 280)

We already know that for the Jews this is a place of destruction that has been abandoned as a place of settlement. What is new and shocking is the mention of the name of Jacob Frank, the infamous Polish Jew who considered himself the reincarnation of Shabbatai Zvi and led his followers to a mass conversion to Christianity in 1759. In contrast to most historians, who identify Frank's birthplace as Korolivka in Podolia, Agnon held that he was born in Buczacz and returned there to live for a time later in his life (p. 221). The fact that Feivush, knowingly or unknowingly, built his home with the detritus of a great heretic points to a darkness that comes from within—even it is from the margins and not the center, of the holy community of Buczacz.

A BAEDEKER TO BUCZACZ

A MYTH OF ORIGINS

When was our city founded and who founded it? Long have all the chroniclers labored to find this out in vain. But some few facts have been revealed to us, and I am herewith setting down a faithful record of all I know¹.

With this simple and appealing declaration Agnon's narrator begins the first story in *Ir umeloah*, an account of Buczacz's origins. Yet despite this profession of modesty and truthfulness, any historically informed reader will soon realize that the account rendered in the following pages is a fabrication. We should already be alerted to this fact by the implied contrast between "us" and the chroniclers, who are referred not as historians but, in the antique locution *dorshei qorot ha'itim*, as investigators of the events of the past. Whereas their arduous labors have borne meager fruit, the narrator, who begins speaking as "we" and then goes over to "I," has been vouchsafed his knowledge about Buczacz's origins, however slight it may be, by a different means. It has been revealed [*nitgalah lanu*] rather than gathered through investigation and inquiry. The narrator is thus in possession of a truth which, given as an act of grace, is superior to the hard-won results of the chroniclers' exertions.

This superior alternative truth that Agnon set out at the beginning of his grand project is a version of what anthropologists call a myth of origins: a story told by a community about how it came into being that accords with its present identity. Yet whereas most myths of origin are products of the collective folk imagination, this one is Agnon's own.² And it is self-consciously fashioned rather than being thrown up by the folk unconscious. As a modern Jewish intellectual, Agnon knew full well that the Jews who settled Galicia came from neighboring Poland, that they were escaping the economic exclusion created by the assertiveness of guilds of Polish tradesmen, and that brunt of the migration took place in the sixteenth century. The account of the origins of Buczacz placed in the mouth of the narrator at the beginning of *Ir umeloah* is woven out of different cloth: The settlers came directly from the ancient Jewish communities of the Rhineland Valley, their motives were spiritual, and the time of their arrival earlier by several centuries. What were Agnon's reasons for launching *Ir umeloah* with a narrative that is so starkly at odds with the historical record? And if it is indeed a myth of origins, what are the values it is intended to serve? Let us first attend to the story that is told.

The caravan of Jews who sold all their belongings and left their homes in Ashkenaz in Western Europe had before them only one aspiration: to "ascend" to the Land of Israel. They possessed no map and knew only that the Land of Israel was in the east, and so pushed on eastward. Because of their holy purpose, the Holy One Blessed Be He protected them from princes, brigands and wild animals as they passed through distant gentile lands. They pass far beyond areas of human settlement and find themselves of the eve of the Days of Awe in the

¹ *Ir umeloah*, p. 10; translation by Raymond P. Scheindlin, *A Book That Was Lost and Other Stories* by S. Y. Agnon, pp. 233-39.

² See X's admission that he had never hear this story spoken of growing up in Buczacz. Note the nearly imperceptible shift from "us" to "I" in the second sentence of the passage above.

midst of trackless forests. There they make an encampment and observe the round of the holy days in joy and faith. But there in the land of the Slavs winter comes early, and it was barely possible to observe the commandment of dwelling in booths. They become reconciled to the necessity of remaining encamped there for the winter before continuing eastward.

As they shudder from cold in their hastily improvised cabins, a hunting party of Polish nobleman on horseback suddenly appears. Every year in early winter they come here to hunt, and they were astonished to find a group of Jews in a place that had been utterly devoid of human habitation. Through exchanges that take place in Latin, the nobles discover the wisdom and civility of the Jews, and, citing the difficulty of surviving the winter in the open, they invite the Jews to split up and return with them to their scattered estates, as well as to trade because there is no one in the area with commercial experience or ability. The Jews accept the offer, and their presence brings great benefit to their hosts. Each year the Jews gather together in the same place in the forest from Rosh Hashanah through Sukkot so that they pray and read the Torah as a community.

It is the dissatisfaction with this arrangement that provides the kernel from which Buczacz eventually grows. The Jews long to pray in a minyan and to hear the parts of the service, especially the reading of the Torah, which can be recited only in public gathering. First they build a synagogue on land granted to them by the local magnate, and individuals undertake to travel from their dispersed locations to be present on the days when the Torah is read. From a love of public prayer and study, some build homes adjacent to the synagogue; a mikveh, a ritual bath, is also built, and, rather than traveling the countryside to trade, shops are opened there as well, which in turn attract the peasants from the surrounding villages on market days. And so the *qehilah qedoshah*, the holy community of Buczacz came into being.

Looking at this introduction to Buczacz with the eyes of a modern reader, we are first struck by its indifference to chronology and geography. A gauze of biblical antiquity, even eternity, is spread over the story. We know that the band of Jews sets forth from the Rhine Valley and moves eastward, but their route and final stopping place remain dim and indeterminate. When it comes to time, we are at an even greater loss. For most of the story we are given the sense only that all this happened a very long time ago in the depth of the European exile. But toward the end, when Buczacz has already been established as a secure community, we are informed about the arrival of "Jews from other places, especially from Germany. Disaster had overtaken the people of God, the holy community of Worms, Mayence, Speyer. . . because of the filthy infidels whose arrogance moved them to go up to the Holy Land to fight the king of Ishmael and to conquer the Land" (p.13). The first round of the Crusader massacres in the Rhine Valley took place in 1096, and by this time, supposedly, Buczacz was sufficiently established to serve as a refuge for the survivors. Let us grant that precise time coordinates are not important in the mythic mode in which Agnon's introduction to Buczacz is written. Nonetheless, a discrepancy of five centuries between the hoary antiquity implied in this telling and the standard historical accounts of the town's settlement in the 1500s is far from trivial.

The depiction of the encounter between Jews and gentiles is notable for the amity that prevails in the relations with the Polish nobles and the complete absence of anyone else. The indigenous Slavic population, the Ruthenians who are later called Ukrainians, who were ruled by the Polish magnates and in many cases owned by them, who were served by Jewish tavern keepers, who brought their grain to Jewish mills and who bought their necessities in Jewish shops—of these there is no mention. The place of hills and streams and forests where the caravan of Jews makes its encampment is a virgin, uninhabited land. The Jews serve the Polish

nobles as wise counselors and estate agents by invitation and not duress. These great land owners need the Jews because the commercial skill required to develop their estates is both beneath them and foreign to them. When the bloody massacres of the seventeenth century rage, it is not the Poles that are responsible for Jewish suffering but the Cossacks, the Tatars and the Turks, who are the enemies of the Jews and the Poles alike.

Buczacz is a city and not a village—we shall deal with the relevant Hebrew and Yiddish terms later on—and Agnon emphasizes how the Jewish families scattered throughout the countryside coalesced to form a Jewish city. In this account, there is only one driving force that matters, and it has little to do with the economic explanations put forward by historians for the great migrations of Jewish life in Europe. The Jews of Buczacz, to be sure, need to make a living, but their economic self-interest would dictate that they remain dispersed and close to the various lords whose estates they help to run. Their motive for moving to town is to be close to the synagogue, and it is only once they have taken that step, presumably at some material sacrifice, that they set up shops and enter into trade to make the best of their situation. Their inability to engage in communal prayer and hear the Torah read when they are dispersed in the countryside is depicted as if it were a painful deprivation and the suppression of a deep and essential longing.

Finally and most pointedly, the founding of Buczacz is presented as an arrested ascent to Zion. "There once was a band of Jews who were moved by their own pure hearts to go up to the Land of Israel, together with their wives and their sons and their daughters." So begins the story with no further explanation or elaboration. No persecution is mentioned, no economic hardship. The desire to overcome the Exile and return to Eretz Yisrael is laid down as a truth that needs no further justification. Yet it is the very purity of their aspiration, however self-evident it may be, that ends in compromising their high errand. The other side of their innocence is their unworldliness. They sell all their belongings and move eastward with no practical notion of the route of the journey, and so they find themselves stranded in snowy forests deep in the land of the Slavs. The preservation of life dictates their acceptance of the offer to disperse and winter with the Polish nobles. What was a necessary improvisation, however, becomes an unspoken accommodation, and thus begin the many centuries of Buczacz's continuous life as a holy community "until the Enemy came and eradicate them all" (p.13/239).

As an introduction to the grand enterprise of *Ir umeloah*, the story "Buczacz" is at one and the same time an excellent entrée into Agnon's aspirations and a misleading guide to their realization. Little that follows has spread over it the veil of mythic totality that surrounds this telling of the founding of Buczacz. Although its inhabitants are frequently and variously praised for their virtues, the prevailing principle is ironic realism. This is not realism after the manner of the stylistic trend in nineteenth-century European fiction; this is moral realism in the more general sense of a commitment to represent the problems and shortcomings of a society as part of the larger enterprise of truth telling. The idyll of Jewish-Polish relations presented above, for example, contrasts pointedly with many stories about casual humiliation and violence meted out by Polish overlords. The image of Buczacz as a *qehilah qedoshah* acting in concert is undercut by numerous instances of divisiveness and sectarian strife. Its image as a caring community is similarly dispelled by accounts of oppression of the poor and the marginal. And even when it comes to study and worship, the needs of the self often confound sacred purposes.

This gap between what might crudely be called the idealization of Buczacz and its reality is not, I would argue, an expression of false consciousness. Rather, in this opening myth of origins Agnon establishes the key signature in accordance with which, and against which, the

rest of his large composition will be played. The idealization of Buczacz as a *qehilah qedoshah* is not a mystification but a truth of its own. It represents a structure of values that may not often have been fulfilled but whose existence makes sense of everything else. To put the matter in a helpfully tautological way: Although deviations from the norm may have in fact been the norm, the deviations cannot be recognized as such without the existence of the norms themselves. Yet we will have occasion later on to savor the fact that, when it comes to writing stories, norms provide little nourishment. The great imaginative creations within *Ir umeloah*, the fully realized stories that stand out among all the rest, are all rooted in imperfection. For art it perhaps cannot be otherwise.

This introduction to Buczacz thus should be understood as the presentation of a schema of normative truths that transcend historical facts. By charting a journey directly from the Rhine Valley to the forests of the western Ukraine, for example, Agnon is establishing a spiritual genealogy that insists that those fabled Ashkenazic communities are the source for the liturgical practices of Buczacz and the authority of its scholarly traditions. By backdating the founding of the city by many centuries, Agnon is not only asserting its hoary antiquity but also declaring his intention to tell the story of Buczacz according to the canons of chronicle time rather than the precise metrics of modern historians. By making the longing for public prayer rather than trade the motive for urban life, Agnon is signaling his plan to reframe the life of Buczacz under the twin signs of prayer and learning.

Agnon's boldest arrogation is to imagine the founding of the city as an indefinite hiatus in the return to Eretz Yisrael. To say that this was a projection of Agnon's religious Zionism is true but insufficient. He was writing the stories of Buczacz in Israel after 1948 and during a time of intense state building. Attitudes toward traditional Jewish life in Eastern Europe, whose disappearance had been predicted by Zionism and whose destruction has just been carried out, were tortuous and complex. By framing the beginnings of the city as a compromised ascent to Zion, Agnon is able to draw Buczacz into the millennial dialectic Homeland/Exile/Return. Buczacz remains ever a station rather than a destination, even if the duration of the stay is many, many centuries.³ And if that other-directed consciousness was not always present to the Jews of Buczacz, Agnon's re-evocation of their lives in *Ir umeloah* provides a retrospective correction. It is in fact the vocation of his writing to identify and disclose moments of potential redemption—together with the human complexities that lead to their tragically being squandered-- within the flow of historical occurrence.

BUCZACZ IN HISTORY

Buczacz (Buchach in Ukrainian) is a city in the west of Ukraine and the east of the historical region of Galicia, about sixty miles southeast of Lwow (Lviv, Lemberg). The city is located on the banks of the Strypa River, a tributary of the Dniester, in an area of hills, valleys and lakes. In the early Middle Ages, Buczacz was ruled by the Orthodox principality of the Kievan Rus'. Beginning in the fourteenth century it came under Polish rule and a Roman Catholic was established as a sign of Polish dominance. In 1569 the Union of Lublin established the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and formalized the annexation of the Volhynia and

³ Nevertheless, Buczacz is itself portrayed as drawing some of its natural charm from the Land of Israel. In the text that immediately follows "Buczacz," the narrator states that "the Holy One Blessed Be He, as it were, borrowed from the majesty of His land and loaned it to our city" (p. 14).

Ukraine. It was during the sixteenth century that Jews began to settle in Buczacz; the oldest tombstone in the town cemetery is from 1587. They were motivated to emigrate southeastward from Poland because of the economic competition that resulted from the rise of a Polish bourgeoisie. The Polish noble possessed vast agricultural estates and ruled large numbers of Ruthenian serfs. Because they lacked a managerial class that could make their estates profitable they welcomed the Jews into their lands and offered the right of residence and internal rule in return for the Jews' leasing breweries, saw mills, and flour mills, money lending, marketing agricultural produce, and providing supplies to the peasantry. Cities and towns were owned wholly and outright by the nobles, often called magnates. Buczacz was one such city. At first it belonged to the Buczacki clan and, through marriage and inheritance, passed to the Potocki family, in whose hands it remained until the period of Austrian rule. Already in 1539 the Polish Crown had placed the jurisdiction of the Jews residing on the lands of the nobility directly in the hands of the magnates. The Jews were not owned by the magnate, as were the serfs, but they lived in towns owned by him in which his word was the ultimate law. The Jews proved their usefulness and prospered.

The second half of the seventeenth century, however, turned into a time of carnage and destruction. The annexation of Ukraine represented the farthest assertion of Polish power, and the region under Polish rule was exposed to hostility on all sides. To the west was the Habsburg Kingdom and to the east was the increasingly powerful Moscovite sphere of power, together with the Cossack Hetmanate and Zaporozhia. Most provoked by the Polish expansion was the Ottoman Empire, whose northern reaches extended to Moravia, Bessarabia and the Black Sea. Each side used proxies to defend or contest this southern frontier. The Polish nobles engaged the services of the Cossacks to repel the Ottomans, who in turn used the Crimean Tatars to harry the Poles. The situation changed dramatically when the Cossacks, under the charismatic leadership of Bohdan Khmelnytsky, defected from the service of the Polish lords, made an alliance with the Tatars, and cast themselves as the liberators of the oppressed Ruthenian peasantry. Although the Poles were the target of the rebellion, the Jews, who served their interests, ended up faring the worst. A large percentage of Galician Jewry—somewhere in the many tens of thousands—were killed and their homes, shops, and synagogues destroyed. The brutal and gruesome ways in which the Jews met their deaths, recorded in such chronicles as Nathan Nata Hanover's *Yeven metsulah* [The Abyss of Despair, 1653], remained inscribed in the collective memory of East European Jewry for many centuries to come. What was an unremitting calamity for Jewry was remembered in Ukrainian history as the great rebellion against the Polish overlords; the simultaneous existence of distinct and contradictory national narratives was to become a permanent feature of this region.

It was the special fate of Buczacz to be spared the worse during the Cossack uprising of 1648 but then to suffer more than others twenty-five years later. Because of its geographical situation and its castle and fortifications and because of collaboration between Poles and Jews in defense of the city, Buczacz succeeded in withstanding the siege placed upon it, although many died from famine and epidemics. But that same location along the southern flank of Polish territory exposed it to ongoing attacks from the Ottoman sphere of influence. Khmelnytsky proved to be a mercurial leader, and soon after they had unleashed so much slaughter and devastation, the Cossacks returned to the eastern bank of the Dnieper and ceased to be a military threat. Incursions by Tatar raiding parties were common during these years. In 1672 Buczacz was besieged by a vast Ottoman army. Jan Potocki, the lord of the city, was off fighting the Ottomans elsewhere, and with only his wife and children left in the castle, the city soon

capitulated, and the resulting damage was minimal. In the meantime Potocki returned to Buczacz, and elaborate plans were made for Jews and Poles to take responsibility for the defense of different quarters in the case of a future attack. That came soon enough. The Ottoman army laid siege to Buczacz again in 1675 and this time encountered considerable concerted resistance. But the defenses of the city could not prevail against massive military force; the ramparts were breached and the Turks rushed inside and put the city to torch. The great synagogue and most all Jewish shops and dwellings were destroyed, and a great many Jews—we do not know the exact numbers—were slaughtered. The Ottoman threat was eventually neutralized by Sobieski, who was elected as King Jan III of Poland in 1674. His success in repelling the Ottoman siege of Vienna eleven years later was a turning point that ushered into the region two centuries of relative stability. These are the years that are covered in *Ir umeloah*, the great classical period of the city as a Jewish community, a *qehilah qedoshah*, when, as Agnon repeatedly avers, Buczacz was Buczacz.

Under Stephan Potocki, the lord of the city from 1675 to 1733, Buczacz undertook a program of reconstruction. A new synagogue was built—at first a wooden structure and then a massive stone edifice in 1728—as well as a beit midrash, and the Jews were granted expanded privileges and commercial advantages. Under a broad policy of toleration, the Jewish community enjoyed internal autonomy. Jews paid taxes and were represented in municipal life, and they were expected to participate in the defense of the city when necessary. But within the community, disputes were adjudicated by rabbinic judges (*dayanim*) and communal affairs generally governed and enforced by *parnasim*, well-to-do leaders appointed by the community. Buczacz came under the rabbinic umbrella of Levov, and together they were represented in the Council of Four Lands, which set internal policy for all of Polish Jewry until its abolishment in 1764. 11th Christians

Stephan was succeeded by Mikolaj Potocki, who ruled Buczacz until the Austrian annexation. Mikolaj Potocki was both pious and dissolute, and he embodied the figure of the capricious, all-powerful magnate in his feudal relationship to his subjects. He contributed generously to all the branches of Christianity and himself converted from Roman Catholicism to the Greek Catholic faith and spend the last years of his life in a monastery. (Greek Catholicism, also called the Uniate Church, combined the practice of the Orthodox rite with loyalty to the Pope.) He built the Basilian Monastery in 1753, which was one of the great edifices of Buczacz; it was a school for priests and regular students and the first institution of formal education in the city. (The students from this school were also responsible for destructive and vicious pranks played on the Jews of Buczacz over the course of many decades; in one story, it is related that while the Jews were in the synagogue, all the sukkot of the town were vandalized and rendered unfit for during the holiday.⁴) The most imposing architectural achievement of the city was the city hall, completed in 1751, a lavish building that distinguished Buczacz from other even larger Galician cities. It was adorned with sixteen sculptures representing of the Twelve Labors of Hercules and biblical figures and topped by a 115-foot tower. The city hall is the work of the architect Bernard Meretyn and the sculptor Johann Georg Pinsel. Yet in Agnon's telling, an Italian architect named Theodore is brought to Buczacz for the job; Theodore turns out to be a Jew who was forcibly converted to Christianity as a child, and the features of the biblical figures he sculpts are drawn both from early recollections of attending synagogue on Yom Kippur and from the Jewish faces he sees during his stay in Buczacz. After completing the city hall, Theodore is locked away in a tower in the castle by Count Potocki so he will be able to design no figure in stories

⁴ Ish levush habadim

buildings more beautiful elsewhere. To escape starvation, he fashions a set of wings and, Icarus-like, flies out of his cell only to crash and die on a nearby hill. To this day, we are told, the spot is called the Feodor Hill, after the Ruthenian pronunciation of his name. It was on that same hill, Agnon concludes the story, that the Germans and their local helpers later buried alive five hundred Jews.⁵

Galicia was created as a province of the Habsburg Monarch as a product of negotiations with Russia and Prussia that led to the partition of Poland in 1772. And it ceased to exist as a political entity in 1918 with the defeat and dissolution of the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. Rather than being a land with a longstanding identity of its own, Galicia was an invented land, an artificial entity that acquired meaning over the course of its historical experience. Yet for the Jews, Poles and Ruthenians who the borderlands north of the Carpathians between the Dniester and Vistula rivers, the experience of Austrian rule for a century and a half left a profound imprint. In the case of Buczacz, some effects were drastic and immediate. The city ceased to be owned by the Potocki family in the sense that its autocratic judicial authority was abrogated. Buczacz was now a city within an administrative region within a province of the Austrian Empire whose affairs were administered by a civil servant appointed in Vienna. The great Polish nobles maintained their titles, but they were no longer the law of the land. For the Jews of Galicia generally the annexation presented a complex new reality. On the one hand, the Jews were made to bear special financial burdens: a toleration tax, a tax on kosher meat, and, as a special insult, a tax on the candles so necessary to the observance of Shabbat and holidays. On the other, the Jews were treated like other minorities in the Empire, and it was, perhaps ironically, these more general measures, which has their origins in the "enlightened" reforms of the new centralized state, that turned out to have the most corrosive effects on traditional life and communal organization. Nevertheless, under the Austrians Buczacz grew considerably. The Jewish population was 1,464 in 1814 and 6,077 in 1870, which represented well over half the population of the city.

Rabbinic courts, for example, lost their authority over civil matters involving Jews, and the *qahal* as structure of communal leadership that could impose its will on the community was disbanded. The imperial army was now open to Jews, and each city was required to produce its quota of young men, whose long years of service in remote locations made religious observance impossible. (The moral corruption this led to as communities handed over to the authorities the poor and unlettered is the theme of "Hane'elam" [The One Who Disappeared] in *Ir umeloah*.) Out the aspiration to turn Jews toward "productive" occupations such as agriculture, Vienna, among other measures, prohibited Jews from operating taverns in the countryside; but instead of producing Jewish farmers, the law created a class of uprooted and destitute men who were forced to wander widely in search of subsistence, often abandoning their wives and families in the process. The introduction of German culture brought by Austrian rule had consequences that were less material but farther reaching. Jews were required to take German names. A gymnasium was established, which presented an educational track separate from the Basilian monastery school. German as a language of enlightenment and modernity was in the air in Buczacz.

Yet despite these exposures and constraints, Jewish practice and learning remained strongly established in Buczacz during the first seventy-five years under the Austrians. This was exactly the time of the explosion of Hasidism in Eastern Europe, and nowhere more so than in Ukraine. As town after town came under the sway of this movement of religious enthusiasm and

A's account
revivalism, Buczacz stood apart. The mitnagdic lay and rabbinic leadership of the town closed ranks to prevent Hasidic rabbis or zaddikim from taking up residence in Buczacz. The existence of a number of Hasidic prayer houses (*kloyz*) was tolerated, but Hasidic leaders themselves were allowed only to visit but not to stay overnight. The boundaries, however, were not entirely impermeable. One of the important figures of this period, Avraham David Wahrman—he served as rabbi of Buczacz between 1814 and his death in 1841—was a follower of the Hasidic master Moshe Leib of Sassov, and although he was an imposing scholar in the mitnagdic mold, his Hasidic tendencies were a source of contention for learned elite of the town. (Agnon's own grandparents were Chertkov Hasidism; by the late nineteenth century the sectarian struggles had waned.) This antagonism can be understood in part as a reaction to the memory of Shabtai Zvi, the messianic figure who, during the Turkish wars a hundred years earlier, had a not insignificant number of followers in Buczacz. His conversion to Islam and the bitter end to the millennial expectations he had aroused made the faithful of Buczacz vigilant against the least signs of antinomianism. Yet separate from this historical memory, the resistance to Hadisism can be read as a sign of the robustness of traditional Talmud study in Buczacz, which remained dynamic and prestigious. The hallowed norms of learning and public worship were apparently not experienced as being so desiccated and remote as to require radically new forms of religious experience and leadership. Finally, the other transformative tendency in East European and Galicia in particular, the Haskalah (Enlightenment), established a tentative hold in Buczacz during the first half of the nineteenth century. Never a mass movement, the Haskalah in Buczacz was rarely militant; it engaged the sympathies of select individuals, often among the commercial elite, who combined their interest in wider Jewish affairs with traditional observance.

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The Jews of Galicia were emancipated in 1867 and given the right to vote. In Buczacz, Jews formed a plurality on the municipal council, and Bernard Stein, a Jew, served as mayor from 1879 until 1921. Buczacz was combined with Kolomea and Sniatyn to form a single parliamentary district to elect representatives to the Galician Sejm and the Austrian parliament. Orthodox parties vied with more nationalist parties for the Jewish votes, and various and changing alliances were made with the Ruthenian and Polish parties to form voting blocs. As time went on members of the intelligentsia of Buczacz were drawn either to the Polish or the German sphere of culture and national identity. Buczacz was an especially fertile ground for Zionist sentiment and organization. The Zion Society was founded in 1893, and by the eve of World War One every Zionist party was represented in the town. Socialism in its Jewish and general manifestations also had a strong presence in Buczacz. Economic conditions in the region remained grim, and the greatest response to the situation was neither electoral or ideological. Many Jews simply left Buczacz. Some left for the imperial capital of Vienna, where there could attend university and train for professional careers in marked contrast to Russian Jews, who were barred from Russian universities. (An early example was the settlement in Vienna in 1865 of the parents of Sigmund Freud, whose ancestors hailed from Buczacz and Tysmenitz.) And not a few Buczacz Jews emigrated to North America.

Like other Galician Jewish communities, Buczacz suffered horribly during World War I. [COMPLETE!]. In midst of fighting both the Red and the White armies during the Russian civil war in 1919-20, Symon Perliura's Ukrainian troops perpetrated acts of pillaging, rape and murder on the Jews of Galicia; the number of Jews killed in the pogroms is estimated to be between 35,000 and 50,000. Only 3,858 Jews, half of the pre-war population, were left in Buczacz when the city was conquered by Poland and became part of the restore Polish state; many had fled in anticipation of the violence and had become refugees elsewhere. Jewish life

9 next

gradually reconstituted itself during the interwar period, and it is estimated that there were some 10,000 Jews in Buczacz at the outbreak of World War II.

The final fate of the Jews of Buczacz during the Holocaust is grimly predictable, but the stages of arrival are complicated. The first action taken by the Germans when they occupied the city in July 1941 was to murder several hundred "intellectuals" on Fedor Hill. 1,600 Jews were deported to Belzec in October and another 2,500 in November. Each *Aktion* was accompanied by the shootings of hundreds of Jews. A ghetto was established in Buczacz in which Jews from surrounding towns were concentrated. In February 1942 approximately 2,000 Jews were shot to death and buried in mass graves on Fedor Hill. Those who were thought to be the last remaining Jews were shot in the cemetery in June 1943. But it turned out that over 800 Jews had survived in hiding, some presumably assisted by local gentiles. They came out of hiding when the city was liberated by the Red Army in March 1944. Tragically, the city was retaken by the Germans shortly afterward, and the survivors were slaughtered. Of the Jews of Buczacz and its environs only 100 were left after the Germans were finally driven out. No Jewish community was reestablished in Buczacz after the war.

{THE GRAND TOUR}

How does Agnon's Buczacz in *Ir umeloah* compare with the historical Buczacz? In answering this question we have the incredible good luck to be able to consult *The Voice of Your Brother's Blood: Buczacz, Biography of a Town* by the distinguished historian Omer Bartov. Much of the historical account of Buczacz in the previous section was in fact drawn from this study. Bartov's "biography" of Buczacz is founded on a commitment to historical comprehensiveness. He tells the story, with an artful interwoven simultaneity, not only of the Jews but also of the Poles and of the Ruthenians/Ukrainians. It is a challenging task because each narrative, understandably but unhelpfully, tends to devalue, dismiss or exclude the other two. Bartov's comprehensiveness extends also to the time frame of these narratives. He begins with earliest records before the arrival of the Poles and the Jews and then takes the story through the centuries of Polish rule, the one hundred and fifty years under Austria, the return to Polish rule between the two world wars, the Holocaust, Soviet rule and then the Ukrainian state.

The rich multi-dimensionality of Bartov's study provides a valuable control for grasping the radically delimited nature of the choices made by Agnon and their rationale. From within the broad historical arc Agnon chose to focus on roughly two centuries: from the Khmelnytsky massacres of 1648 to the emancipation of Galician Jewry in 1867.⁶ Although the murder of Buczacz Jewry in the 1940s is mentioned throughout, the Holocaust serves only as a horizon of knowledge that remains outside the frame of the main narrative. When it comes to the multiplicity of national narratives, it goes without saying that Agnon is interested in telling the story of the Jews of Buczacz and from their point of view, although there is constant reference to

⁶ I use the term focus because there are mentions of later developments in the last section of Book Three of *Ir umeloah*. The more crucial question pertains to Agnon's intentions as to the later boundaries of his project. In one of his few remarks about the project, as reported by Canaani (title, etc.), Agnon declared that the final book within the volume would deal with modern times and the spread of Zionism and socialism in Buczacz. Was Agnon prevented from accomplishing this goal by his death or did he change his plans in the course of writing the earlier sections and decide not to bring the narrative into the World War I period? I would argue for the latter option in light of the internal evidence of book itself and the author's repeated insistence that he wishes to deal with the history of this town "when Buczacz was Buzczacz," that is when it was governed internally by the rule of Torah.

the gentile rulers, be they Polish or Austrian, because of their generally baleful effects on the life of the community. Even within the Jewish milieu Agnon's exclusions are far-reaching. To be sure, many aspects of Jewish life in the city are touched on, including commerce, class relations, crime, and communal conflict. Yet the author repeatedly declares his intention to concentrate on matters relating to public worship and Torah study, and his departures from this focus take on meaning as deviations from these norms.

Now it may seem incongruous, even absurd, to compare the work of a historian writing within the canons of the academy in English in America to the fiction of a Hebrew writer in Israel some sixty years earlier. But the juxtaposition serves to delineate what is distinctive about Agnon's project. There is a striking duality, to begin with, when it comes to the amplitude of focus. On the one hand, the parameters are tightly restricted in terms of themes and time period. On the other, *within* those restricted categories the sheer amount of story and lore is enormous. Agnon truly gives us, literally, the city and the fullness thereof. The status of *Ir umeloah* as history writing displays a similar duality. Agnon expressly seeks to do what the best historians do, especially more recent historians who, freed from writing about the succession of political elites, attempt to render the deep material culture of a time and a place. But instead of a commitment to historical method however broadly construed, Agnon wants to write history through the medium of fiction. Yet this is not the historical fiction we are familiar with from nineteenth century Europe such as Walter Scott's *Waverley*, or Alessandro Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* or George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. After his own very different fashion, Agnon wrote a historical novel, *Hakhnasat kalah* [The Bridal Canopy, 1931], that undertook an epic recreation of Jewish life in Galicia in the beginning of the eighteenth century. But the novel form itself would not answer for the new task at hand. For even if *Hakhnasat kalah* is episodic, picaresque, and digressive to the point of often devolving into aggregations of tales, it must track the adventures of Reb Yudel, its central character within a single historical moment. In *Ir umeloah*, Agnon needed to be able to range over a period of two hundred years, and to do so without the constraints of a plot. Furthermore, although he aspired to the epic totality of the historical novel, he sought a form of composition that was more heterogeneous and multi-vocal. *Ir umeloah* mixes up long texts with short texts and conventional stories with ethnographic essays; its narrator selectively invites other narrators to share the stage; and it ranges freely between illustrious historical figures and those whose reality may be wholly imaginative.

This is a book, in short, that manifestly refuses to slip into the berth of any conventional genre. With that stipulation stated, I wish to propose a rubric for reading *Ir umeloah* that views the work as organized along two axes: an axis of space and an axis of time. The spatial axis takes the form a guided grand tour of Buczacz. The narrator introduces us to the key institutions and customs of the town by taking us in hand and walking with us from site to site. We the readers are construed as belated tourists who have enough curiosity to bestir themselves to join a long and demanding tour but who are ignorant of the local manners and mores. Even with that provisional good will, the guide feels the constant burden to make the information he is purveying as piquant and lively as possible. Therefore at each station of the tour, whether it is the town well or the candelabrum of the synagogue, the guide accompanies his explanations with vignettes about the history of the site and the personalities associated with it, and often he has his listeners sit down and sit back in order to take in a full-fledged story.

The guided grand tour rests upon a rather startling assumption: Buczacz exists! Within the reality of the walking tour the narrator takes us on, the city exists in the here and now. This is not a tour of the ruins of Buczacz with each stop along the way introduced with some versions of