

מאָס היינרייך-צענטער

האַרבסט 1976

ידישע בעלעטריסטיק אין 20סטן יאָרהונדערט 1:
המשכדיקייט און מרידה נאָך די קלאַסיקערס, 1918-1900

ד"ר דן מירון

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● Yiddish Fiction in the Twentieth Century I : Continuity and Revolt After the Classics (1900-1918) Fall 1976

Subject matter: tendency toward shrinking in Heb. & Yid. lit.

(cf. English novel, geographically larger in 18th than in 19th)

- trend toward smaller areas which can be fictionalized
- shtetl as mimetic object in 19th c.
 - a) external view which is colorful & critical
 - b) one principle of shtetl life: myth of founding; foolishness
 - c) which in turn → greater satiric possibilities

Shtetl fiction in 20th:

- a) search for new way of recreating the continuum (semi-mystical interpretation of Agnon, Singer)
- b) surface picture; artist concerned only with what can be seen outwardly (Bergeron). ~~Do not~~ Demythologize the shtetl.

Form: temporary decline of the novel 1890-1910

Prevalent 19th cent. forms

- a) monologue: confessional or causerie (à-la Sterne)
 - b) naive romance
 - c) anatomy - long piece of fiction (פירמ-נסיון)
- problem in 20th cent: transcend dimension of speech without losing vitality
 - Hebrew lit: 19th cent novel based on assumption that the Hebrew writer, by being a Hebrew writer, assumes responsibility for entire Jewish people
 - a) picaresque
 - b) roman à thèse

- in 20th, with loss of this assumption → consciousness of a young Jewish author who historically views himself as a leader of the Jews but knows he has nothing to offer → highly modernistic fiction of a consciousness preying upon itself.
- this happens 20-30 yrs later in Europ. lit, but not in Yid.
- while Hebrew writer had to establish some greater contact with real life, Yid writer needed to free himself from the "little Jew" and achieve some self-awareness, philosophical overview
- opp. sides of same coin, i.e. very similar
- much more pressing need for the novel in Yid.

1850's → 1880's

- Reyzen, Asch, Nomburg were considered the three young heirs of the classicists
- Reyzen accepted and liked because he was a characteristic writer of his time and not an innovator

שם 60/8 ש"ס → 1880's : some 8-9 stories about artisans who are not needed, or are too old

- begins with false image for which Avrom himself is to blame
- he is presumptuous
- "large forehead" at beginning and end → will let him learn a new trade.

Narrator - close to but extrinsic to the town

not a stranger, but doesn't identify with Avrom
a big town narrator not using lang of the shtetl

Arrom is both pathetic victim and nasty egoist

- wants rain regardless of other's pain but is a victim to progress

Structure: two parts

One:

encounter between A & town

home scene with 8888

confrontation w/ town in power & glory

time: undifferentiated autumn

nastiness comes out

- last scene corresponds to 1st.

- narrator: someone who was part of shtetl but left it to widen his horizons & is talking to others whose horizons are also broadened.

Two

talks with 88888888

home scene with 8888

confrontation at his downfall

specific time

pathos

View of the shtetl

- does not seem a unified community

- people are indifferent, even cruel

- we are in a small, intimate society which is not at all sympathetic

- Mrs. weeps and no one cares

- mud = Old Russia & choice of profession are imp.

- def. a post-classical phenomenon

0/2 883

Nature: for 10 yrs a repeated pattern of autumn → summer

- finally, a particular autumn; no vitalistic apprec. of nature

- unsympathetic treatment of children

- person dies of TB - tree lives on - tree dies too

- ques of life and death, not a national allegory

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- - one of few Yiddish intellectuals (many in Hebrew) זיבא מירן 13 →

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- theme of suicide not new, but psychological insight — is
- 1st part: detailed desc. of Felje's first near suicide attempt
- black/white colors predominate
- dramatic, histrionic
- Felje: too serious about herself
- has revelations too mystical & great to verbalize
- story very much about verbalization
- New narrative technique: see things thru Felje's eyes but allow us to distance ourselves from her, to judge her as being melodramatic
- quite subtle satire throughout.

פּוֹלֶט פֿֿֿ - name indicates uprootedness

- almost every chap. falls into 2 parts

① satirical portrayal of F ② confrontation between F & Levant.

- will pay more for a room as long as it has moonlight
- chooses as confidant the man who cannot understand him because Levant cannot expose him either
- the latter, a poet, needs F as an audience

Chap 3 introduces sympathy/empathy w F

philosophical outrage: the lamps of my green neighbor

Asch: before *Ṭvce cḵz* wrote bilingually in two categories

① minor Numborg - character portraits

② shtetl portraits à-la *Ṭvce*

Ṭvce cḵz describes Kuzmir in mid 19th cent

- how hasidim came to power

- concept of community as unified, holy, divine human entity

method: build up narrative momentum, solve it, weave new tension

into narrative - conflict - possible dramatic confrontation

- lyrical movement, not around a character

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Burman about to lose rabbinic position to son of a local merchant

Froyke / Elisha - hated in town

- Great conflict, but unlike 19th cent works, not a conflict between two camps, two types in Jewish life

Structure

I Burman - thru 3 women

II Froyke - abandonment by Manya

III Elisha - 6, 7

IV Conclusion 9, 10 Burman & Froyke

motif of windows

a) beg of chap 2: Elisha's house overlooks town; wife hanging up curtains as Burman passes

b) chap 3: Burman faux pas at window

c) last page: windows opened bc of dead body

Total ~~is~~ chaos: violence out of all proportion to its motivation

(~1919) "The Crucifixion" - 18 1/2 pages

B's death = crucifixion & 23:78

- he is no Christ figure though; has raped a girl for revenge
- presented as 1/2 bestial
- trial at end refers to Valley of Jehoshaphat where all the families of earth unite

p. 32 cemetery: sentence which will appear at end

whitewashed stones = New Testament allusion = hypocrisy, outward purity covering corruption

p. 34 betting: betting under Jesus' cross

p. 37 B distributed pages of John: Jesus at Last Supper

p. 7 opens with pagan crucifixion - ~~destitute~~ Indian ritual → destruction of Indians

Jesus figure is an animal-like savage

∴ Everyman includes Jesus & savage within himself

- three Jews are also 1/2 Jesus 1/2 savage

- the Jew who was forced by hist. to play the role of Christ can lose all humanity & become the savage figure

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(1920) נצחון ירידה 3 ימים .5

- pogrom began 3 weeks after ניצחון and lasted 3 days
- story begins on ניצחון ירידה
- story bypasses pogrom; we learn of it thru snatches, descriptions we see afterwards - whipped rabbi, raped wife
- omission of details brilliant, as is their filling in

I : Chap 1-6 at chap 6 everything is torn apart

- you can still think this is all a story about the young couple
- ends with death of rabbi's wife

II Chap. 7-10 After pogrom 6-7 yrs condensed into 2-3 chaps

- chap 7 : cyclical rhythm of seasons

Menahem = one who brings comfort

נצחון ירידה refers to relationship between Jews / God

presentation of the Covenant as a commercial transaction

Gershon's decision to stop slaughtering = rebellion against God

- Old Slove takes over at end → blind life force is only thing left, where no ques. are asked, no explanations expected
- Menahem's final act of defiance against goyim parallels his defiance against Jews

Technique

- impressionism used most untraditionally, to disclose hidden reality, not nature or feelings
- main sensuous entity is voice - always described as musical, almost physical being
- technique used to indicate metaphysical themes