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Rediscovering Haskalah Poetry

THE TOPIC OF THIS ESSAY calls for some apology. For most readers, Hebrew narrative poetry of the nineteenth century must seem rather remote and unattractive. The reputation of Haskalah literature in general has fallen on hard times, subject to the charge of being lacking in intellectual and aesthetic worth. Its poetry, with its high, ornate and imprecise diction, its impersonal, abstract and didactic themes and its ω tendency to acrimonious satire, is regarded as essentially nonpoetic. I have nevertheless chosen to discuss this poetry, or rather one of its central genres, because it occupies my thoughts much at the present. For some years now, I have been carefully rereading Haskalah literature, and the more I read it, the less I tend to regard it as barren of intellectual and artistic interest. There is much dead wood, of course, as I suspect much of the literature produced in our own time will seem to future readers; but there is also much that calls for rediscovery and reevaluation. Without grasping the meaning and implications of this literature, moreover, not much can be known about the historical significance of modern Hebrew literature as a whole; it is, after all, Haskalah literature which separates our modern, secular literary culture from that of the tradition, and it is through an understanding of the Haskalah's dialectic of ideology and art that we can better understand our own position vis-à-vis the tradition. A rereading of the narrative poetry of the Haskalah might help in clarifying this position.

I begin by dividing the mass of narrative poems written throughout the Haskalah period into two quite separate, though interrelated, stages. The two differ from each other in genre, form, and ideology as well as in the time and place in which the poems were written. The first stage comprises mainly lengthy epics or pseudo-epics written in western or central Europe from the 1790s and throughout the first three or four decades of the nineteenth century. The second contains much shorter and more intense and dramatic poems which belong more or less to the genre of the *poema*. These poems were written in Lithuania and the Ukraine in the 1850s to 1870s.

The epics of the earlier part of the century are barely readable today. The model for them was set in the last decade of the eighteenth century by the educator-poet N. H. Wessely (Vayzl). In his Shirei tiferet ("Songs of Splendor") Wessely introduced a formula which was then copied by dozens of followers and which can be reduced to the following points:²

a) The epic poem tells the life story of a hallowed biblical figure—Moses; Abraham or David—a national and religious leader, who can also be depicted as a moral paragon.

b) The poet repeats the facts as they are told in the Bible with no recourse to postbiblical narrative additions. Under no circumstances is he allowed to embellish his story with imaginary developments. His task is to render the true, objective facts (i.e., those told in the Bible) in a new poetic manner.

c) The dearth of new narrative material in the poem is compensated for by a generous dose of discursive commentary and moralistic deliberation, through which the biblical story is abstracted and developed into a system of moral concepts.

d) The diction used in the poem is high but not flowery. The poet's manner should be majestic, serious, sedate. His language should not be heightened into an individual idiom. He should refrain from difficult figurative expressions.

e) The poet is encouraged to express his own emotional reaction to the story in lyrical passages, but these should be carefully separated from the narrative-discursive body of the poem. Usually the lyrical passages, differentiated from the others by their stanzaic structure, form separate poems which are set as introductions at the openings of the various books or cantos of the epic.

To us, this formula seems as intended to ensure boredom and monotony. The strict loyalty to the biblical account makes the narrative flat and redundant. The poet fails to communicate anything we do not already know. There is even no attempt to relate the known facts to each other in a new and surprising way. His commentary—whether rendered as the narrator's thoughts or as those of the protagonist—does not allow for much delving into the human depth of the story, since it aims at abstraction and conceptualization rather than at an analysis of the behavior of a specific person under specific circumstances. What the poet is really interested in is not an explanation of

why David or Moses acted in a certain way but in the abstract formulation of a moral psychological, or theological category, the love of God, for example, or human fallibility, envy, charity, etc. The sedate and wordy diction contributes its share to the deadly impact of most of these poems, and the strict separation of the lyrical from the narrative and discursive elements guarantees the abstract and hyperbolic nature of the first as well as the dryness of the latter.

The interesting question is how this kind of poetry could dominate Hebrew literature for almost fifty years. (We know that contemporary readers found it fascinating, studied and emulated its style, and thirstily absorbed its wisdom and morality.3) An analysis of the poetic treatment of the well-known biblical facts will show something of why this poetry could satisfy a reading public which had hardly stepped beyond the boundaries of the traditional biblical exegesis.

Almost any passage chosen at random from Wessely's Shirei tiferet, or from Nir David ("The Line of David") written by his main follower, Shalom Hacohen, yields, upon analysis, the same triad of elements: narrative, discourse and figuration. I use the term figuration here in the specific sense Erich Auerbach gave it in his analysis of the Figura, 4 i.e. the precedent or analogue which accompanies the main story in the epic and underlines its universal significance. Such are the references to Creek or Roman mythology in renaissance and neoclassical literature, Por the references in the Hebrew Bible that supposedly forshadow the appearance of Jesus in Christian writings. In each passage in Shirei tiferet, then, we find the basic narrative facts plus abstract discourse plus a catalogue of figurative precedents and analogues. Thus, for instance, when we read how Moses, leaving Pharaoh's palace for the first time, kills an Egyptian whom he saw torturing one of his Hebrew brethren, we are presented not only with the bare narrative facts but also with their abstract analysis.5 Both the facts and their analysis are figuratively presented. Moses' rage and courage are compared to those of Abraham when he set out to fight the five kings of the north. They are compared to those of Jonathan at Michmash, where he managed to overcome single-handed a whole garrison of Philistines, and to those of young David the shepherd, who could fight and kill a marauding lion with his bare hands. The last comparison is particularly dwelt upon because the brutal Egyptian is compared to a hunting beast, a nonperson whose killing cannot in any way undermine the moral integrity of Moses.

The discourse elements separate into two intertwined threads. The poet offers an analysis of the human (i.e., the ethical) significance of any given situation or action, just as at the same time he discovers in it a divine purpose, part of an all-encompassing superhuman plan. The poet strives both for a moral and for a theological placing or definition of the

narrated incident. When these two moral and theological components of the poem's idea are added to the figurative catalogue, we have before us the poem's intellectual structure. The Wessely-type epic vascilates between the human and the divine, the psychological and the theological; it finds its resting point in a concept of history which is both human and divine. If we go back to the scene of Moses killing the Egyptian, we see how on the one hand, the poet grapples with the ethical and psychological significance of such violence committed by a wholly moral human being. On the other hand, he reverts to an idea of an eternal, predestined divine plan which is being unknowingly served by this violence. (The murder sends Moses to the desert as a refugee. There he will encounter God and be prepared for his mission.) For both aspects of his commentary he needs the legitimation of precedent and analogue. Thus, he compares Moses to Abraham, Jonathan and David, identifying his act of violence as a pattern recurring throughout the continuum of a sacred history. It is only with this concept of a sacred history that the opposition between the human and the divine can be mediated, for history, for the poet, is both a sequence of human inci-

dents and a pattern informed by a divine purpose.

What Wessely and his followers offered in their long, pedestrian pseudo-epics was not so much a story poetically rendered as a new biblical midrash, in which human experience was analyzed and conceptualized and then related to a divine intention and reconciled with it. The reconciliation is effected through figurative presentation of a sacred history, a medium which partakes both of the human and the divine. This perfect balance is at the root of the epic's static nature, and is to a very large extent responsible for its nondramatic and monotonous impact. With every incident analogous to others and predestined from the start, how can the story surprise and thrill us? At the same time, how can it fail to please a reader who is trained to regard harmony between God and man as the supreme good? It is the balancing of the human and the divine through history which made the didactic epic the major, indeed the inevitable poetic form of the so-called "new" Hebrew literature as it emerged from a traditional literature of homiletics, exegesis and midrash. On the one hand, the epic introduced a slightly Europeanized reading public to neoclassical European literature by emphasizing the universal moral significance of the human experience. On the other hand, like most of its readers, the epic was still deeply rooted in the theology of the tradition. While, for example, abstaining from any midrashic addition to the story of the life of Moses, Wessely argued the moral issues that this story presents following the midrashic-exegetical tradition.6 His catalogues of precedents and analogues not only served as Hebrew equivalents of the mythological references in the European epic but also continued the practice of the traditional piyyut with its tendency to the cataloguing of incidents according to precedent and similarities.

Throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century the didactic epic petered out. By the 1840s it had more than exhausted whatever energy it had had. Some of Wessely's followers tried to refresh it by emphasizing the human element of the story. Characteristically they chose as their protagonists such less-than-ideal biblical figures as Samson.7 However, a genre that required a flattening of the human drama of trial and error could not long flourish within a culture that was constantly becoming more secularized and humanistic. A new poetic formula was called for, and there were signs that such a formula was forthcoming. For instance, already in the 1820s an unknown poet, Shmuel Mulder, published in Amsterdam a narrative poem which, while following to some extent the Wessely formula also completely twisted it. It narrates the guarrel of the great Tana Ray Meir with his famous wife, the intellectual Bruria.8 Not only did Mulder innovate by using postbiblical materials as the basis for his poem, but he also focused his plot on an aspect of human life which the earlier poets hardly touched, i.e., the battle of the sexes. Meir and Bruria quarrel over the proposition nashim da'atan kalah—"women are frivolous by nature." The catalogue of precedents and analogues is not used here as a means of placing the story within a historical and mythological framework, but rather as weapon by the contending parties. He quotes examples of feminine frailty from the story of Paradise on; she reinterprets the examples and evokes examples of women's dignity, good sense and credibility. The conflict leads to a highly unusual climax: Bruria succumbs to illicit love with another man, one of her husband's prize students, who has been urged by his teacher to court his wife and so prove his point.

The poet ends his narrative with conventional praises of God, which, however, do not conceal his perplexity. What can be the divine meaning of the human sexual conflict and how can it be that even the greatest students of the Torah, men and women of the highest learning and morality, fall into rage, envy and lust? Mulder can be said to have produced the first Hebrew narrative poem of the new kind, which is usually called the poema. A poema is a relatively short, concentrated and subjective epic, often with many lyrical digressions, which describe the human predicament by emphasizing its psychological and social rather than its theological significance. Mulder, however, was a mere precursor. The sweeping change came about twenty-five years after the publication of his poem when the dying young poet Micah Joseph Lebensohn published a little collection of historical and biblical poems under the title Shirei bat-Tsiyon ("Songs of the Daughter of Zion").9

The appearance of this collection in 1851, coupled with the publication of the first Hebrew novel two years later (Abraham Mapu's Ahavat Tsiyon [The Love of Zion]), mark the great shift in the development of Hebrew belles-lettres in the nineteenth century. Now that the didactic epic has completely faded out of the literary scene, two new epic forms emerged and occupied its very center: the novel and the so called poema. Micah Joseph Lebensohn was the son of the prominent poet Abraham Baer Lebensohn, whose odes and philosophical lyrics present the last important examples of early Haskalah abstract moralistic poetry. Micah Joseph had almost no use for the Wessely tradition to which his father still adhered; his literary interests pointed to new directions. The conflict between the sexual urge and a sense of impending death was the theme the young consumptive poet sought to express. Love and decay were his obsessions, and he wished to deal with them in poetry not only as abstract categories, the way his father did (although he did that too), but also as real and specific conditions.

As a distanced medium for the expression of the erotic and the macabre, Lebensohn began by translating Virgil (through F. Schiller's creative German adaptation), picking the canto in which Aeneas unfolds the betragal story of Troy's fall with its epic tableaux of conflagration and sudden death. When chided and urged by Samuel David Luzzatto, the great Hebrew scholar, to search for epic topics in his own Jewish tradition, he wrote six short narrative poems on biblical and historical figures. The first two, Shlomo and Kohelet, which form together one structure, juxtapose the eroticism of the young king with the obsession of the old one with physical decay and decomposition. The title of two other poems, Nikmat Shimshon ("Samson's Revenge") and Yael veSisra ("Yael and Sisera"), make the preoccupation with death clear enough. The last two poems in Lebensohn's collection portray death on the verge of fulfillment: Moses watching the land of Canaan from the top of the mountain, then dving without setting foot in the Promised Land, and Judah Halevi, killed by an Arab horseman at the moment of realization of his life's dream of praying at the holy places of Jerusalem.

In the treatment of biblical materials there can be no greater contrast than between Lebensohn and the earlier Haskalah epic poets. While they meticulously rehearse the entire life story of their protagonists, Lebensohn chooses only single moments, usually the moment before death or a moment of an acute crisis. Earlier occurrences are evoked through flashbacks. Instead of a mechanical retelling of biblical facts there is an imaginative realization of biblical characters as they contemplate their own past at moments of crisis. The hero's biography is internalized and made part of his consciousness; the poem becomes shorter and more compact, since it need register only those heightened moments of a past life that bear on the present. The selection of the



heroes, moreover, is not moralistic. Lebensohn makes an intriguing comparison, for instance, between the Canaanite officer Sisera and the poet Judah Halevi: both are murdered in their sleep and both see visions forshadowing their death. Judah Halevi, as a poet representing Lebensohn himself, is particularly exposed to visions of death and mutilation.

In Lebensohn's poems the theological concerns of an earlier era have been replaced by the existential ones. The divine guidance of human affairs is rarely evoked. Death is meaningful within the framework of the human condition rather than a theological scheme, less a punishment than man's alloted fate. There is one poem, "Yael and Sisera," one of Lebensohn's most innovative, where the morality of murder is discussed. The concept of divine purpose is evoked there only by a reference to the Song of Deborah, for as a prophetess, Deborah's glorification of Sisera's undoing indicates a theological justification of the murder. However, these remnants of the old formula do not carry much weight in the poem. Yael's internal debate on whether she should kill Sisera in his sleep functions as an indication of internal conflict of an erotic nature rather than as an opportunity for moralistic abstraction. The sleeping Sisera looms in Yael's thoughts as a frightening enemy and as an attractive male. In his dream Sisera envisions the two corresponding faces of femininity: Deborah—the killing, triumphant fury and Yael—the loving, feminine helpmate, offering food and shelter, and by implication also sexual gratification. Thus both characters play in a drama which, on its face, is political and moral, but which at its root is symbolically sexual.

Lebensohn tore the biblical figures out of the web of sacred history. ¹⁰ He had no use for figuration and precedent, and he discarded epic objectivity. Events are mirrored in the mind of excited characters, not as divinely intended parts of a history. Time is experiential rather than historical and theological. The use of the biblical story in Hebrew poetry was thus radically changed. With Lebensohn the Bible no longer serves as a text for a moralistic midrash. The Bible is transformed into essentially modern poetry, which through elliptical and highly dramatized narrative, attempts the portrayal of internal upheaval and psychic experience.

Lebensohn was a pioneer; in his work Haskalah poetry came as close as it could to the modern Hebrew poetry initiated forty years later by Bialik and Tchernichowsky. The latter poet in particular was indebted to Lebensohn. Less than a year after the publication of Shirei bat-Tsiyon, however, the poet died at the age of twenty-three. The task of developing the Hebrew poema was left to its second founding father, Lebensohn's younger friend, Judah Leib Gordon, who contributed even

more to the establishing of this genre as the major narrative form in Hebrew poetry.

Unlike Lebensohn, Gordon was not by nature a modernist. He was a conservative radical a man deeply rooted in the past and bound by its NB traditions, and yet pushed by a radical tendency to break away from them. He admired Lebensohn's poems but he did not directly emulate them. Rather than taking up where his innovative friend had left off, he went back to the Wessely tradition, picked the most predictable of biblical protagonists, King David, and set about writing an epic "life" which would supposedly complement or compete with the earlier David epic by Shalom Hacohen. However, from the start the task proved impossible. A new retelling of David's story was beyond the patience of the young poet, and the original plan had to be fragmented into shorter projects in which particular aspects of the David saga could be engaged.11 The better known of these is the mini-epic Ahavat David uMikhal ("The Love of David and Michal") in twelve cantos. Though this is the least interesting of Gordon's major narrative poems, it possesses great historical interest. Gordon awkwardly complied here with some of the rules of the Wessely epic while at the same time undermining them. He was led to such measures by the dilemma he faced. The subject matter of his plot did not easily yield to the moralistic abstracted treatment which the Wessely formula prescribed. The intricate love story of David and the daughter of King Saul called for the insight of the novelist rather than the abstractions of the moralist. It begins with the story of a youthful love confounded by political circumstance and ends with a bitterly realistic rendering of the lovers' reunification after years of enforced separation, at which point they experience tension and hatred rather than renewed bliss. Though there cannot be a topic more fit for psychological inquiry, Gordon approached it with the Wesselian concepts of divine intention, precedent, and analogue. He even went so far as to state in the introduction that these concepts, particularly divine purpose in history, are the aesthetic raison d'être of the epic genre. What the epic does, he argues, is retell history in a way that underscores the manifestations of divine purpose. This is the source of poetic interest. "When we see the cause before the effect," Gordon goes on, "we cannot appreciate its meaning, since we do not know what is yet to come, and our heart is not caught by a sudden flame of excitement. But when we see first the result, which to us must be a riddle, suddenly solved by getting at its cause, how we do wonder at the wisdom of its creator, the one who was its first cause. How admiringly we realize that no one of God's deeds, no matter how insignificant, is without purpose; there is no one threat that is not enmeshed and woven into this huge web."12 Similar observations abound in the poem, which again and again quotes precedents and points to the work-

ever calons

ings of divine will in history. Yet it is also abundantly clear that the framework does not fit the human contents of the story and the logic of their drama. "The Love of David and Michal" remains a hybrid, a characteristic product of cultural transition, in which two literary systems seek expression, each interfering with the other.

Throughout the 1850s and early 1860s Gordon continued to experiment with biblical and historical poetic narratives. He shortened the poems, made them more dramatic, and focused them on the theme of love. Asenat bat Potifera ("Asnath, Potiphar's Daughter"), is an example of the poems from this period. Reinforced by the flowering of the novel, the topic of love took off as the major concern not only for Gordon, but also for such other writers of narrative poems as Solomon Mandelkern (better known as the author of a concordance to the Bible) or Abraham Goldfaden (better known as the founder of the Yiddish theater). Both wrote interesting poems on the affair of David and Bathsheba,13 dilating, unsurprisingly, on the topic of lust and its moral implications. Mandelkern stayed close to the older style, i.e., he presented David's sexual urge as part of God's plan (it was triggered not only by his carnal appetite but also by the need to ensure the continuation of his line through Solomon), while Goldfaden followed the new tendency to emphasize the human element.

In the second half of the 1860s Gordon discovered his real epic theme, and it had little to do with love and its vicissitudes. The theme is hurban (national catastrophe, the fall of the people). The subject is first developed in a work which is probably the best Hebrew narrative poem of the century: Bein shinei arayot ("Between [the] Lion's Teeth"). The poem shows how it was necessary for Gordon to evoke a new technique and a new narrative style to deal with the new thematics. The poem tells the story of the rebel Simeon bar Giora and his wife Martha, against the background of the destruction of the Second Temple and the crushing by the Romans of Jewish political statehood. Starting towards the end of the siege of Jerusalem, the poem follows a narrative line somewhat reminiscent of the Hector-Andromache episode in the Iliad. Simeon is separated from his wife when he is taken captive after the fall of Jerusalem. He sees her next in the Coloseum in Rome, where he is made to fight lions as a gladiator. Martha is a slave of one of the Roman ladies who are so inured to the sight of a naked man torn to pieces by starved beasts. Simeon perishes between the lion's teeth and Martha expires with him.

The story, however, is not told directly. Only snatches of the narrative are given by the poet, and these are rendered in short concise sequences, separated from each other by addresses on topics that do not

seem to form an integral part of his narrative. An example is a diatribe against the Pharisees and Tannaim, who supposedly did not prepare the Jewish people for life in the political world and thus indirectly brought about its downfall; there are also apostrophies to the seeing eye and listening ear of God, questioning whether the eye sees the misery of the Jewish people and the ear listens to their lamentations. The narrative proper seems to be hidden behind a smoke screen until we reach the scene of the arena which occupies almost half of the poem. Here, perfect clarity reigns. Every movement of the beast and every nuance of expression on the face of Simeon and Martha is rendered in an effective descriptive language, more supple and direct than that of any Haskalah poet before Gordon. It is not difficult to understand why this has to be so. Like Lebensohn, Gordon uses the last moment before death as the focus of the poem, yet it is neither the personal flashback nor the rendering of experience per se that interests Gordon. What he seeks is the suprapersonal significance of the moment, and he finds it not in Simeon's feelings but in the dramatized fact of his death between the lion's teeth. The talmudic gloss on the biblical verse "From Bashan will I bring [them] back" (Ps. 68:23) assures us that God would retrieve his people even from the depths of the sea, from the lion's teeth.14 Gordon alludes to this gloss in his title only to explode the expectations it raises. In his last attempt to overcome the lion he cries: "Where is the God of Samson?"15 evoking the precedent of Samson's vanquishing of the lion and his removal of the honey from the carcass. Such precedent would be quoted by Wessely and his followers as a matter of course whenever their protagonist confronted a ferocious animal or foe. Gordon makes the allusion so he can crush us with the realization that optimistic precedents are meaningless. Samson's God is no longer on his side; He has joined the uncircumcised Philistines, his enemies. Sacred history is an illusion and Simeon's fall has no divine significance. The point is, of course, that what happened in the arena also happened in history. The fall of the Jewish state is not more meaningful or acceptable than the feeding of a human being to a hungry animal in front of a titillated and brutalized audience. History is a cheap spectacle with no purpose and meaning. It is absurd. God's all encompassing plan is mockery.

In Bein shinei arayot Gordon parted from the Wessely tradition in the way a conservative revolutionary often parts from his own past: rather than letting it drop out of his life, he attacks it and clings to it in order to destroy it. Lebensohn simply jettisoned his precursors' obsession with divine purpose in human life. Gordon became obsessed with the idea of human life deprived of divine intervention and replaced it with a concept of desecrated history. While Lebensohn's poetry may be more "modern," it was Gordon's poetry that revealed the cultural dialectics of

the new Hebrew literature of the nineteenth century, its vacillation between traditional formulae and modern humanistic emphasis.

Gordon's style followed directly from his obsession with the meaninglessness of history. If history is not informed by a unifying purpose its telling cannot be narrated by a false sequential linearity. The poem should progress in fits and starts and leave room for any kind of digression, be it a lyrical interjection or a bitterly sarcastic aside. It cannot be committed to a unified plot or to a close and continuous observation of the protagonist. It should be concentrated and dramatic but not in the way Lebensohn's poems were. Lebensohn used historical figures to project a sense of a personal desolation, while Gordon uses them as metonymic expressions of the historical and national desolation.

After Bein shinei ara'yot, Gordon never strayed far from the theme of hurban. He must be considered the first major modern poet who made destruction the theme central to his entire poetic achievement, the way Bialik and Uri Zevi Greenberg later did. In Bimtsulot yam ("In the Depth of the Sea") he complemented the story of Jewish heroism with a story of Jewish martyrdom. Here kiddush hashem, the martyr's suicide, is presented as an act of faith devoid of meaning because there is no divine presence to accept the heroic gesture and respond to it. Here too Gordon subtly evokes precedent in order to subvert it. He does it by the clever use of his linguistic resources. As the two heroines of the poem drown themselves in the sea, the poet comments: ra'ah hayam vayanos, Omemav hitpaltsu ("The sea saw it and fled, the water was shattered"),16 The verse immediately calls to mind the verses of the psalmist who glorifies God's miracles, among them the miracle at the sea, when Israel went out of Egypt (Ps. 114:3). But the precedent of the crossing of the Red Sea is indirectly referred to only to be anulled, since this time the sea fled and the water was shattered not to let the women escape but rather in horrified reaction to their death. The sanctified women do not escape death like the ancient Hebrews but rather suffer perdition like the Egyptians in Moses' song. They tsalalu ka'oferet bimtsolot hamayim ("sank like lead in the depth of the water"; cf. Exod. 15:10). The bodies of the dead women rest "at the bottom of the mountains." We remember how the prophet Jonah, when thrown into the sea, sank "to the bottom of the mountains" (Jon. 2:7). But Jonah was retrieved. Gordon's use of language is pivotally located between a rejection of the Wessely-type epic and the anticipation of Bialik's style in Metei-midbar and Megilat ha'esh ("The Dead of the Desert" and "The Scroll of Fire").

Gordon went on to write narrative poems dealing with contemporary affairs. The poems were—and still are—understood as social and cultural criticism in the narrow sense, as satirical onslaughts on the

contemporary rabbinical establishment. They contain much of this, to be sure. But the antirabbinic satire does not constitute their core. In these poems, too, Gordon is obsessed with the idea of destruction and a meaningless and desecrated history. Destruction is now exemplified by limited, domestic instances concerning the undoing of individuals and families, but the message is the same. The new strategy underscores the absurdity of human existence by developing absurd plots which hinge on the silliest kind of first cause, something utterly insignificant such as a kotso shel yod, the letter Yod missing from a name in a divorce certificate, or ashaka derispak, an axis of a cart wheel, because of which the town of Beitar fell to the Romans (cf. Gittin 57a).

The insignificance of the cause is used in the poet's warfare with rabbis and communal leaders because it emphasizes their rigidity and stupidity. However this use does not exhaust its meaning. The fact that human life can be destroyed for such silly reasons has wider and more universal bearing. One of Gordon's main poems with contemporary background Shenei Yosef ben Shimon ("The Two Josephs Son of Simeon"), which ends with the devastation of its young maskilic hero and his family, is plotted in such a way that the disaster can by no means be explained as a consequence of the cultural warfare between proponents of Haskalah and Orthodoxy. It is not for his maskilic aspirations that Joseph is punished; he goes under merely as a result of a mistaken identification. When he left his hometown for the western university where he studied medicine, his identity, i.e., his name and passport number, was sold by a corrupt communal functionary to a criminal, and now, as Joseph returns an accredited physician, he is simply mistaken for his namesake. Here too precedent is cited. The sacrificing of Joseph resembles Isaac's Akedah. But again, this time it is an akedah with no delivering angel, with no ram, no God. This is why Gordon starts the poem with what seems an irrelevant ode written in the Wessely manner. Like Wessely, Gordon heaps praises on a transcendent presence who holds the keys of life and death. The poet is careful not to mention specifically the divine name, so he can drag his ode through thirteen stanzas up to its last verse, where he reveals the name, not the Name but the name of the corrupt functionary, who unintentionally sent Joseph to prison for life. At this point we reread the ode as a brilliant travesty, a travesty far more trenchant than a criticism of communal corruption. In a world devoid of divine presence, it says, every powerful villain assumes the role of God.17 Shenei Yosef ben Shimon is thus the direct and final answer to Shirei tiferet as well as a parody on it. For this reason it must rest on a narrative as absurd and silly as that of Shirei tiferet was august and "significant." That was Gordon's way of closing the circle of the narrative poem of the Haskalah.

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In his last poema, Tsidkiyahu bevet hapekudot ("Zedekiah in Prison") written in the form of a dramatic monologue, Gordon went beyond this circle and initiated the modern completely subjective and lyrical poema. Back in the biblical milieu he chose the least heroic of characters, that of the last king of Judea who lost his kingdom, his sons, his eyesight and his freedom. In his bitterness the king contemplates his life and refuses to accept any explanation of the atrocities he suffered. Least of all can he accept the explanation offered by the prophet Jeremiah, i.e., that he suffers for failing to heed God's warnings as pronounced by himself. Neither he nor the Jewish kingdom was destroyed because of this failure. Rather their destruction was caused by the physical superiority of the Babylonians. No divine plan, only the moral chaos of human existence, was revealed here. Thus it is not only sacred history which does not really exist. History itself is a delusion. Only the pain, the bitterness, the haunting memory, the deadliness of despair are real. With Tsidkiyahu bevet hapekudot Hebrew narrative poetry entered a new phase in which narration itself becomes problematic. The narratable facts themselves become questionable now and the line separating them from the emotional reactions they trigger has been erased. Here the epic, the lyrical and the dramatic modes of presentation spill into each other. Thus the chasm between traditional liturgy and modern poetry has been bridged. On its way from the pivyutim to Bialik and Tchernichowsky Hebrew poetry had to go along the path of the narrative poem of the Haskalah-from beginning to end, from Wessely to Gordon.

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NOTES

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1. N. H. Wessely's epic was published in six volumes. The first five appeared between 1789 and 1802. The last, unfinished volume appeared posthumously in 1829. Long before the completion of its publication the poem was widely imitated by Hebrew poets living in Prussia, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Netherlands and later in Poland and the Ukraine. For a selective list of these imitations, see F. Lachover, Toldot hasifrut ha'ivrit hahadashah [The History of Modern Hebrew Literature] (6th ed. Tel Aviv, 1949), vol. I, p. 146.

2. This "formula" does not include Wessely's metric and other prosodic rules which he expounded in his introduction to Shirei tiferet and practiced throughout the poem. These became the prosodic norm of Hebrew poetry for almost a century. For the best analysis of

Shirei tiferet, see Ch. N. Shapira, Toldot hasifrut ha'ivrit hahadashah (Kovno-Tel Aviv, 1940), vol. I, pp. 213-46.

3. This is also reflected in nineteenth-century Hebrew fiction. In his novel 'Ayit Isavu'a ("The Hypocrite"), for instance, Abraham Mapu has Zerah, the son and heir of the anti-maskilic villain, convert to the Haskalah, become an aspiring Hebrew poet and fall in love with Elisheva, the beautiful maskilic heroine. Wessely's Shirei tiferet is the book which the young couple secretly read and greatly admire. See part three, chap. 7 of 'Ayit Isavua' in Kol kitvei Avraham Mapu (Tel Aviv, 1939), p. 340.

4. See "Figura" in E. Auerbach, Scenes from the Drama of European Literature (New York,

1959), pp. 11-76.

5. See Shirei tiferet (Przemysl, 1870), Canto III, pp. 28-35.

6. Wessely, for instance, contends that the Egyptian miscreant killed by Moses was not only a criminal deserving death, but also, if not eliminated, he would become the father to a whole line of criminals. Moses as prophet and clairvoyant knew this. Thus, by killing the Egyptian he saved future generations from the danger of the Egyptian's potential offspring (Canto III, p. 32). This is derived from the midrashic reading of Exod. 2:12: "[Moses] turned this way and that and, seeing no one about (ki eyn ish), he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand." The midrash reads eyn ish as "non-man," i.e. that the Egyptian, as a criminal deserving death, was already morally nonexistent; or alternately, that there was "no other man" who could wreak God's vengeance on him; or still another interpretation, that he was a "non-man" in the sense that nothing good would ever come of him and of his offspring "to the end of time" (Exod. Rabba I:33). Wessely drew on the first and last gloss when he wrote:

כִּי אַל חָפֵץ הַמִּיתוֹ הֶכִינוֹ לָטֶבֶח כִּי עוֹד יַרְבֶּה פָּשַע יוֹצֵר לְבּוֹ יוֹדֵעַ כִּי עַד דּוֹר דּוֹר עוֹשֵי טוֹב מְמֵעֵיו לֹא יֵצְאוּ וּכְלֹא אָדָם נָחִשָּב לוֹ כַּתִהוּ וּכָאָפֶּס.

- 7. Cf. Ziskind Rashkov Halevi, Hayyei Shimshon [Samson's Life] (Breslau, 1824).
- 8. Cf. Bruria bat rav Hanina ben Tradion in S. Mulder's Peri to'elet [The Fruit of Profit] (Amsterdam, 1825).

9. Micah Joseph Lebensohn, Shirei bat-Tsiyon (Vilna, 1851).

- 10. It should be remembered that Lebensohn spent two formative years (1849-50) in Berlin where he attended Schelling's lectures at the University and came to know the founders of the Wissenschaft des Judentums movement who were then developing their developmental approach to Jewish history in general and to sacred Jewish texts in particular.
- 11. See the two unfinished cantos of Gordon's epic Milhamot David bapelishtim ("David's Wars Against the Philistines") in Kol shirei Y. L. Gordon, 6 vols. (Tel Aviv, 1929-35), 6:1-43, and Gordon's own note, ibid., p. 43.

12. Ibid., 3:5.

13. See Shlomo Mandelkern, Bat-sheva o shigayon leDavid [Bathseba or a Hymn to David] (Vilna, 1866) and Bat-sheva in Avraham Goldfaden, Tsitsim ufrahim [Blossoms and Flowers] (Zhitomir, 1865), pp. 27-33.

14. See Gittin 57b.

- 15. Kol shirei Y. L. Gordon, 3:147-48.
- 16. Ibid., p. 159.
- 17. Ibid., 4:57-60.

ing Precedent Seriously: On Halakhah as a Rhetorical Practice," in Walter Jacob and Moshe Zemer, eds., *Re-Examining Reform Halakhah* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), pp. 1–70 (http://huc.edu/faculty/faculty/washofsky/takingprecedentseriously.pdf); and "Against Method: Liberal Halakhah Between Theory and Practice," in Walter Jacob, ed., *Beyond the Letter of the Law* (Pittsburgh: Rodef Shalom Press, 2004), pp. 17–77 (http://huc.edu/faculty/faculty/washofsky/againstmethod.pdf).

- 74. Cohen, op.cit., p. 11 (on the need for an "independent examination" of the claims of tradition), and p. 15 (on the value of stepping "outside normative halakhic discourse").
- 75. Reform Responsa, p. 22.

"Kotso shel Yud" ("The Tip of the Yud")

Stanley Nash

The Hebrew epic poem "Kotso shel Yud," "The Tip of the Yud," written by Yehudah Leib Gordon (1830-1892) in 1875, is the best-known work of the Haskalah, the Hebrew Enlightenment period, and it is a principal, hitherto untranslated, document for Jewish "feminist" research. The poem is a powerful indictment—a satire and, hence, by definition, an exaggerated and one-sided indictment-of the status of women within Judaism. Gordon began working on this poem at least as early as 1870, according to his correspondence with the highly educated Miriam Markel Mosessohn and her husband Anshel Markel.² Miriam Markel, a writer and translator, was remarkable for her command of Hebrew during an era when Jewish women, if they were educated, were more frequently fluent in Yiddish or Russian. It was in 1868, during the height of the nascent modern Hebraist struggle to bring rabbinically dominated Judaism into consonance with the needs of modern Jewish life (milhemet hadat ve-ha-ḥayyim), that Miriam Markel sent Gordon a portion of her rendering into Hebrew of a book in German about Jewish history. Gordon was so impressed by Markel that he decided to dedicate "Kotso shel Yud" to her. In that same period Gordon wrote journalistic pieces, such as his "Binahle-To'ei Ru'ah," "Enlightenment for the Intellectually Misguided," in Ha-Melits, 1871, where he penned such lines as:

Is it really such a good thing...that Jewish girls should grow up without any training or education—they who are going to be the mothers of children and homemakers; and how will they rear their children when they themselves received no rearing in their youth?"

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REB MOYSHE. (Until now, has been sitting contemplatively. Now he approaches Reb Dovid and says very calmly.) Nu, my dear Dovid, you've put everything right, now make an end of me and punish me like I deserve. Do what you want with me, have me taken away too...

STRANGER. (Cutting him off.) Come, I'll take you myself! (Embraces and kisses Reb Moyshe.) Come, come, Moyshe! Come into the house with me. There you'll be proud and happy, my dear brother-in-law!

Reb Moyshe. (Embraces the Stranger, sobs very loudly, and kisses him. He tries to speak several times, gesturing that he is unable to say anything.)

STRANGER. (Wiping his eyes and kissing Reb Moyshe.) I understand you, my dear brother! Just come, come! Come, children, come—with God's help, everything will turn out right.

Reb Yoykhenen. (Shouting.) Shout, children: mazl tov!

POLICEMEN. (Shouting.) Mazl tov! Mazl tov!

YERAKHMIEL. M-m-m-mazl tov! (All go in pairs into Reb Shmelke's house.)

The curtain falls.

A final word

If all of my words—
The ones you just heard—
Were not any good, were so very poor,
Then swear to me this: you'll read them no more.

But if anyone in so reading, Thought to *her* my words were leading, Then she should read it no more, And I will not cry, that's for sure.

End of the entire play.



by Avrom Goldfaden

י.ל. גו**ר**דון

בון שני אָריות

מְחוּץ יְשׁוּד אוֹיַב וּתְשַׁבֶּל חָרֶב,
יַהָרם חִוֹמוֹת וְחַל וִיכְּרְכֵּך קִיר.
רָעָב וְעֵנְף וּמְרָנִים מָקְרָב –
הַעוֹד לְכָם תִּלְוָה לְצִּיל הָעִירוּ
אַמְצוּ כֹחַ וּשְׁאַרִית חַמוֹת חִנְרוּ,
בִּי אוֹי אוֹי לְכָם, אוֹי לִירוּשְׁלִים,
אָם נָפֹל תִּפֹל בִּידִי הָרוֹמִים.

שַׁתָּתְּדּ יִשְּׂרָאֵל כִּי לֹא לִמְּדּוּדְּ כֹּחְ וֹמְרִי־נָפָשׁ מָה־יוֹעִילוּדְּ אָם אֵין תַּחְבָּלוֹת שָׁר, אָם אֵין מִשְׁמָה כִּמָה מַאוֹת שָׁנִים מוֹרִים אִשְׁרוּדְּ, כּינָני כָתִּי־מִרְלָשׁ – וּמָה הוֹרוּדְּיּ, כֹּי הוֹרוּדְּ לִשְׁמוֹר רִיִחָ, לְחָרוֹשׁ אָכָן, לַחֲשׁוֹף מֵיִם בַּכִּבְרָה, לְדוּשׁ תָּבָן,

הורוף הָהּ לְהָלוֹךְ נָנֶר הַחַיִּים,
הַפָּער פִיּרִים וְעֵלִי שִׁיחַ מִלְּאוּף
יִּכְכָּן נְם לְחָרִּים וְעָלִי שִׁיחַ מִלְּאוּף
יִּכְכָּן נְם לְחָרִּים וְלְרַכֵּר בַּחַלוֹמוֹת;
יִּכְלֵן לְחָלוֹם וּלְרַכֵּר בַּחַלוֹמוֹת;
יִּכְלֵן לְחָלוֹם וּלְרַכֵּר בַּחַלוֹמוֹת;
יִּכְלֵן לְחָלוֹם וּלְרַכֵּר בַּחַלוֹמוֹת;
יִּכְלָן לְחָלוֹם וּלְרַכֵּר בַּחַלוֹמוֹת;
יִּכְלָּת מוּפְרִים וְעֵלִי שִׁיחַ מְלְּאוֹף.

ין הורוף לְעָלִים עֵין מָן הַתְּבוּנְהּ - סִעִין כָּל מועיל, מִשְּוָב בִּיסֵי קָרְץ -ליצור עָסָל עֵל חֹק, שָׁוָא עַל אַסוּנָה ילהָקשׁים לכָּף סָחַיֵּי אָרָץ:

אָדְּ לֹא הורוּדְּ הָרְשָׁת וּמְחָשֶׁכָת. הַמְּמָלָא אָרְצָדְּ הִינִים וּמְנִים הַמְּלָא אַרְצָדְ הִינִים וּמְנִים בּמְצוֹלָה אַרְצָדְ הִינִים וּמְנִים בּמְצוֹלָה אֵין מֵים הַפְּלַאָה דְנִים.

בּיצִליִת בָּןצּוּרְיוֹן נוֹעֵרוּ וָבָאוּ –
הַאֵל אָרְכֵי הַפְּלוּהָה שְׁמוּ עֵינְםוּ
גִּיִם עָרָב בַּיָּד הַלְכוֹת כְּבָעוּ:
גִּיִן קוֹרִין... אֵין פּוּלִין... אֵין שׁוֹתִין יֵינְםי...
נְּיַנִרוֹת אָחַרוֹת אֵין בָּם תּוֹעֶלֶת
לֹא יָסְדוּ לְנְעֵרִיךְ בַּיִּת הַבְּנִסָת
לֹא יָסְדוּ לְנְעֵרִיךְ בַּיִּת בִּבְּנִסָת
לֹא יָסְדוּ לְנְעֵרִיךְ בַּיִּת הַבְּנִסָת

לא גדלו שבי צבא תפשי מלחמה.

לא הפריחו כך פל מעשה מחשבת בנבורת פניף לוכשי קנאה ונקמה

ימכונות וכלי הפרכ לי הכיני

אולי על אויכיף גבורת אתה

ומפלתף לא גדלה מחשבת מפות

עַתָּה יִנְבָּר אוֹיֵכ יַעֵל חוֹמְתָּה.

זּכְּלָר בָּוֹרִיף נְנְפּוּ נְסְהָפּי:

זֹכְלֶר בָּוֹרִיף נְנְפּוּ נְסְהָיה בְּתָּה
זַחְלְצָה. נְלְחָמָה עֵר בֹא כְצְנִיוּ

זָרָב לְארֹנְי וּלְבִית מִקְדְּשֵׁנוּוּ

זִּבְי אוֹי לְנִי אוֹי, אוֹי לִירוּשְׁלִיִם.

אָם נְפּל הָפּל בִּידִי הְרוֹמְיִם!

אָם נְפּל הָפּל בִּידִי הְרוֹמְיִם!

שלום לה פרתה תפתי עד נצחו הָנְגִי שָׁב לְקָרָב כִּי נְרְפָא הַפָּצְע. שם טיטום יהותת. ירבה שד ורצח: הָבִי לִי נְשְׁקִי, אַל הַבְבָּי. מָה־בָּצָעוּ

ב אַרָביני וּכְעָדי הַחְפַּלְלי. אָד אַל נָא תַּטָרִי, לְכְבּוֹת חַדְלִי.

לַךְ, שָׁמְעוֹן דּוֹדִי, לַךְ וּנְהַג חַילְדְּוּ יָבֶר רָנָע מִפָּוּ - מַהַרָה וָלַכְה. אַינִי אָרָק טוֹלְרְתַני עָלְיף:

- ו אַל הַרְאַג לִיו מָה רָאִיתָ עַל בָּכָהז אָבִי נָם אַתַּי פּיּקְעִים רָאִיתִיּי בָּל בִּעוּתֵי מָוַת לִרְאוֹת נִפִּיתִיוּ היום יפנה. ינטו צללי ערב – שִׁמְעָה שָׁאַנַת הַצָּר. כָּל לַב מְחֻרְדָת:
 - נו אָאַוּרָדּ נְשְׁכְדָּה הַא לְדְּ הַחָרָב, הניב לאדני ולאניק טולניתו – דְבָּרָה וּכְמוֹ אַשׁ נָהָפְּכוּ פָּנֶיהָ וּמְטַר נָשָׁם פָּרַק מִמְּקוֹר צֵינִיהָ.

וּרְגָעים מִסְפָּר. אִישׁ אָחִיוּ חִבַּקוּ. 20 אִמְצוּ אָל לִבָּם וּכְכָל עוֹ נְשֵׁקוּ: - שלום רב לך, פרתה חפדת עינים: ישׁלום לְדָּ, שִׁמְעוֹן, עַד בִּלְהִי שָׁטְיםוּ וּבְלַב כָּרוּעַ חִישׁ נַחַכְּ הַנְּעַר וּלְחַיִּים וּלְטָנָת יָרַד הַשְּׁעֵר.

צו עון ראָהוּ הָרָאִית אַלָּה הַרְּסְעוֹתוּ הַתְשִׁימִין בָּנֹאד אוֹ לַשְּׁוָא וַרְמוּז וּמָה אַחַרִית שׁוֹפְּכָיהָן? הַיְרְחָמוּז הַיִּמְלְמוּ מְמָּוָת. מִשְׁבִי, מְתְּלְאוֹתוּ הַנָשׁ לָהָם הִּלְנָה. אַחָּרִית נְשַּׁבָר

30 לראות איש אָחִיו לִפְנִי רְדְהָם לֶבֶרוּ

בְהַפָּבָת זָרִים: כְשׁוּאוֹת וַחֻלְלִים. המרות עשו ואש ודם בפים.

שָאָנַת הַמִּנְצָחַ. צְוְהַת אָסְלְלִים. עים וחרבות - הואת ירושלים:

- אַיָםוּ נְבּוֹרִי, אַיָה הַיּכְלִי, 35 אַיַךְ, תַּשָּׁתִי תּוֹמָכָת נוֹרְלִיז רק לַהָבִי אַשׁ אָחֵוָה קָרֶת יְפִיחוּ – ורתקות ידי לנקום לא יניחוז
 - הַרְעָם. אַל. כִּנְלְנֵל וּרְעַץ קְטְדָּ. ים הַמְשַׁר עָלֵיםוֹ פַּחִים בּלְחוּבָהְוּ ער סָתַי הַּרְאַפַּלוּ אַרְצְדְּ יָשׁפּוּ וּכְרַם בָּנִיהָ אַפָּרָה יִרֹפּוּ.

ישַרתה. הָה שָרתה שַה־נוֹרַלַךְ אָתּוּ הַנְשְׁבַּית כְּמוֹנִי אוֹ, מוֹב מִנְּה, מָחָנִי אוכל בַּקְשַׁךְּ, לא אוּכָל אָפֹּטְה – נא אוּכָל אָפֹּטְה שוכי בָּאוְקִים יִסְהָבוּנִי רוֹ מָה.

> עם עצים וָרָב מִרְנִיו הָאָרָק. רדה בשלשת חלבן היבשת. יְהֹג יָרִיעַ. כִּי תַּחְתָּיוֹ הַכְנִישָּ

א מם קפון ודל וכון לקרק. יוִשָּׁכ אָרָץ מִנְלְדְ חָלְכַּוֹרוִם חֲמָשֶׁנַ

> אַלְפִים וּרְכָבוֹת בַּקְּרֶב נְפָלוּ, על עצים הוּקעוּ, דְרָב אְבָּלוּ: אַלְפִים וּרְבָבוֹת בַשְׁבִי יִגְאוּ.

סי בּשׁוֹלִים וּרחבות בּאאן ימברו: אַלְפִים וּרְבְבוֹת בַּבּוֹר הָחְבָּאוּ וּלְבֶרוֹת לְפְרִיצִי חַיוֹת כְּנֶרוֹ. –

ובין השבויות פחל ירושלים הוְרָדָה רוֹּמָה נָם מְרָתָה הָעַדִינְה.

נו וּלְאָמָה קנהָה בַּעַבוּר נַעַלִים סמרונה אחת ושקה אנרפינה: וכון האפורים הלקוחם לפנת יושַב נם שִׁמְעוֹן עָציר פור צַלְמָוָת.

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קול על שַׁבְעַת הַשְּׁפְיִם _ רְנָת הָרוֹמְיִם!

מְהֹיְחוֹנ הָהָמוֹן, מְהֹנָה יְרִיעֵז הָאָתָא לֶלְנָד. סְפּוֹרְנֹל הַנִּעזּ כֹּלְהַ הַּמְּעֵנִּ לְבְנִי הָאָרָם. 'כֹּא כַּוְרַבְי חַיִּלוֹ עֵל נָפִּי לְרָת הָיֹא יִשְׂרִדִי חַילוֹ עֵל נָפִּי לְרָת הִיא יִשְׂרִדִי חַילוֹ עֵל נָפִּי לְרָת יכֹּ נִלְחִם נְלְחַם כִּיְהוּדִים וּלְכָרָם. יכִּ נִלְחִם נְלְחַם כִּיְהוּדִים וּלְכָרָם. יכִי נִלְחִם נְלְחָם כִּיְהוּדִים וּלְכָרָם. נַיַּעָש לוֹ שַּׁלְמָת אַרְנָּטְן מִדְּמָם.

אַרָּרִיז יִסְשׁךְּ בָּאוַכִּים חַיל הַשְּׁבִי,
וּלְפָנִיז יִשְׁאוּ עֵל בָּרָףְ עִירִים
וּלְפָנִיז יִשְׁאוּ עֵל בָּרָףְ עִירִים
וּכְלֵי הַכְּרָשׁ חָסְהַת עִיר הַצְּבִי:
מַהַר בַּת צִיוֹן לַפִּימֹלְיוֹם הַנְּבְעָתָה,
מַהִיכַל אָרֹנְי לְּדְבִיר יוֹבִים הַעָּלְתָה.

והָמוֹן עָם כָּהָמוֹן מִי מִבֶּר נָהָמוּ, אָל הַזִּירָה הַנְּרוֹלָה יַחַר וֹרְמּיּ, וּכְבָּר הָאָצִילִים לִפְּעִיהָם מְהַרוּ כָּלוֹי הַוּיְרָה וּכְכָל הוֹד פַאַרוּ, כִּי שָׁם הַכִּין הַּעָעוֹנּ לִכְנִי הָאָרְם תַּעְעוֹנ אַכִּוְרִי, שְׁעֲשׁוּעַ רָצָח וְדָם: לַפְּנִי חַוְתוֹ-מָרָף יִהְעֹם וִיִּרְשָׁשׁוּ, לִפְנִי חַוְתוֹ-מָרָף יִהְעֹם וִיִּרְשָׁשׁוּ.

נם הַמְּמְרוֹנות הַשְּאָנּנות מָאָמְרֹנִיהָן נְרוּנות הַמָּאָנָה לְרָרָת שְׁעֵר. כּי נִפְּשוֹתִיהָן הָעָנְנות לְשִׁמוּע אָנְקָת הָלֶל. כְּוֹל הַיְתוּ־יְעֵר. לְרְאוֹת דָּם נוֹוַל מְמִכּוֹר לַכ כְּרִיּעָ. לְרְאוֹת דָּם נוֹוַל מְמִכּוֹר לַכ כְּרִיּעָ.

35 מַּסְבִיב לְזִּרָה חוֹמָה וּנְדְרָת.

הוא הַהִּיאַמְרוֹן. כְּנֵין רֵב הִפְּאָרָת.

כְּמָאוֹת וּמִישְׁבוֹת. הָאוֹת וּלְשָׁבוֹת

פונות אָל הַמִּינִנְּל בְּשֶׁלשׁ מַעֻרְכוֹת.

פונות אָל הַמִּינִנְּל בְשֶׁלשׁ מַעֻרְכוֹת.

אָל פּושָׁב הַבִּיר בָּחָצֵר הַתִּיכוּנָה יוּשָׁבָת אַנִרפּינָה הַפַּמְרוּנְה יִּלְהַל הָאָסְהוֹת נִצְבוֹת אַהְרִיהָ, בָּם אָמָה אַחַת מִשְׁבִי יְרִישְׁלִיִם. צֹּי מַה־נִּמְרִץ חָבְלָה לְרְאוּת הָעִינִים! אַךְּ מִי יְשׁוּם לַב. מִי יַדְמֹל עְלִיהָּ?

נפתחה הזירה אל מילן מנגר ילתוך המצגל יגא עלם חמר עד לשתותיו חשוף, ערם מבנר. יכודו הרב פיות ארבה נמר: עוד פצעי ניו לא ורו גרפאו. עוד עקבות הבבלים על ידיו נודעו.

מַהדּלֶּהְ, הָעַבְרִית, מָה חָוְרֵּהְּ פְּנֶּהְ, מַה־יֹאחָוַבְּ הַשְּׁבְץ, לְמֵיּ עֵינְיְבְּ, יבּאִם כָּבְה, שִׁמְשׁן, אָשוּב אָרִאְדְּוּז אַלִי, אַל רַחוּם, הוּשָׁע־נָא, הוּשְׁע־נָא, אַלי, אַל רַחוּם, הוּשָׁע־נָא, הוּשְׁע־נָא,

און שומעת: הָשְּטְעַהְ הַּוֹנֶעְשָׁה בָּלָאוּ או אָם בָּעָנְן לְךְּ כִּבוֹת לָנָצָה או אָם בָּעָנְן לְךְּ כִּבוֹת לָנָצָה ואָרָק עַוּכָּה בִּידַי אָנְשֵׁי רָצָחּ

מל לובלנו בפופר ניסמר נמטח יולט אנה להי מלי האנים אי זכני יוליום בינא לא ניאכיקיני לשכת אינין אנה להי לא ניאכיקיני לשכת אינין אנה לא ניאכיקיני לשכת יוליום בינא לא ניאכיקיני לשכת יוליום בינא לא ניאכיקיני יוליום בינא לא ניאכים יולים בינא לא ניאכים יולים בינא לא ניאכים יוליום בינא לא בינא לא בינא לא ניאכים יוליום בינא לא בינא לא ניאכים יולים בינא לא היאכים יולים בינא לא בינא

יכושר בּאָרוּ יִּמְתַלְּשׁוֹתִיוּ בּיוּת הָּקְלִּיטוֹת. יכושר בָּאָרוּ יִמְתַלְּשׁוֹתִיוּ בּיוֹת הַקְלִּיטוֹת. יכחרי ממי חתם ולמוי בייברים

יבחרי פתן תחת נבתיו העקחת עינים רוחצות ברם יושכות למו־אַרב.

רגע עטר השורף התכונן בשרף (בטנסה אם סאכל תאוה הוא טורף

יניפּרפּוּ עינו לא ינְרַע. לא יָרָף. אָחָר נְשָׁא רַנְלִיו נַיַּלְךְּ הָלִדְּ וְרוּשׁ אָרָץ וְצָעֵר בּוְּעֵם. הַבִּּרָף הַפִּעְנָּל פַּעָם אָחַר פָּנָעם. הַבִּּרָף תַּפִּענָּל פַּעָם אָחַר פָּנָעם.

לְתוּר עֶרְוָתָה וּמָקוֹם יַשׁ בָּה פָּרָק. לְתוּר עֶרְוָתָה וּמָקוֹם יַשׁ בָּה פָּרָק.

וּכְתֹטֶר מָקְשָׁה יַחָוּץכּ בַּתְּנֶדְּ הַמָּט לִהָרָג. הַנְּכוֹן לִמֶּכָח. יִבְּתִטֶּר מִקִשָּׁה יִחִוּצִּכ בַּתְּנֶדְּ

וכנְצְכָה פַחוֹתָם אָל לְכּוֹ יְאַמְצְנָה.
בִּי הִיא כְל תִּלְנְתוֹ וּשְׁאַרִית חּוֹחֶלֶת – אִם יַשׁ עַל פִּי אַריַה תִּלְנְה עָדְנָה.
נידִי מָתְנְיוֹ שֹׁרְנוּ וּשְׁרִירִיוֹ צְבוּ.
עינִיוֹ הַלְּטוּשׁוֹת בִּמְאוֹרוֹתִיהָן נִצְבוּ

לַהַצִּים הַשְּׁטנִים כּוֹנְט עֵל יָהֶר.
 הַּנְלְקוֹת אַחְרֵי אָכֶן הַשּׁוֹאְכָת.
 הַנְלְשְׁךְ אַחְרֵי אָכָן הַשּׁוֹאְכָת.
 הַנְלְשָׁךְ אַחָרַי אָכָן הַשּׁוֹאְכָת.
 אַךְ שָׁכָּט בִּיצְרָיו. אַין חִיל יְפַחַר:

אָת בּשׁ נְעָר הָאָר לְעֵין אָת הַמְּנָת.
יִּסְלֹא קּוֹסְתוֹ הַתְּקוֹסֵם. וַיָּרָם
יִּסְלֹא קּוֹסְתוֹ הַתְּקוֹסֵם. וַיָּרָם
פִּּתִאם נְעַר הָאָרִי בַּהַמוֹן קוֹל רָעַם
יִּסְלֹא קּוֹסְתוֹ הַתְּקוֹסֵם. וַיָּרָם
אָת בִּשְׁנָת הַאָּרָוֹ

אף שם מסרבי כי פושה בונים. ושבא ביניב באשת מאלמוטיו: וודלר את מורפו אל ארכות בפטיי הודער בפו עליו שלח הרפרי יינים בפו עליו שלח הרפרי יינים פון אליו שלח הרפרי

יספקן הָרָב נְתָר הָאָרִי אָחור, יכפּרְקָרָתוּ לֹא סְחִקּ הַרָּהַבּ יכפּרְקָרָתוּ לֹא סְחִקּ הַרָּהַבּ יכפּרְקָרָתוּ לֹא סְחִקּ הַרָּהַבּ יפִפּרְקָרָתוּ לֹא

יי מְמָחַץ מָבָּתוּ פָּרַץ וַרְוּיף דָם שְׁחוּר יִּבְקוֹל נַרָשׁוּ נִשְׁמִע כָּהַד קוֹל נִכְאִים: אַךְּ בָּצְבוּר שִׁנִים שְׁלֹשֶׁה רְנְעִים הַבְּלִינ עֵל כָּאָבוּ נִיָּאֲלַףְ כֹּחָדוּ נַיָשֶׁב נַיַּרָלְדְּ אַמִים עַל הַמַבָּרוּ.

זו אָז לְפָּל לַב שִׁמְעוֹן, רוּחַ כּוֹ לֹא לְמָת. בַּמְפֶּרָה לְחַק הַנְּרוּ נִגְּב וּכְיָדוֹ אַזְ לֻל בִּלְתִּי אָם הַנִּצְב. אַיךְ וַרָדְ פָּרִיק חַיוֹתוּ גַּם כֹחַ יָדִיו לְמָהוּ

בּמָבַקּשׁ אָוְרָה הַעִּיף מִפְּכִיכּוֹ הָאָין -ייס אָוְנֵים חַרְשׁוֹת, לְבּוֹת אָבָן מִפְּבִיכִּוּה, מַאַין יָבא אָוֹרָה, הֹשִׁי בִרְוָל אָלִיף. מַאַין יָבא אָוַרָה, הֹנִי אֹבָר, מַאָּין

אַך מִי הַנְּשְׁלְפָּתְיּ אָת מִי עֵינוּ פּוּנְשְׁתִיּ הַאָם מְּלְסָם שָׁוְא הִוּא. לָהַט הַּרְמִית עֵינְיםי זוּ שָׁם נִצָּבָת מֶרְתָּה עַכְרוּת לוּכְשָׁתוּ הַהְפּוֹרְי אָרָץ. רוּפִפּוּ עַמוּדִי שְׁמִיםיוּ הַפּּרְאָה הַוָּה אִפֵּץ לְבּוֹ וַיְעוֹרְדַהוּ וּלְמָפַץ וּכְלִי מִלְחָמָה שִׁבָּל וַיִּעוֹרְדַהוּ

> מִי תַבָּן רוּחַ אֵנושׁ. בָּחַן לַב נְבָרְיִּ מַדּוּחַי הַתְּקְיָה עוד לֹא יַעִוֹבוּהוּי בָּדִיחִי הַתְּקְיָה עוד לֹא יַעִוֹבוּהוּי בּם אֹבֶד וָה עוד כְּוָה. נָשָׂא הִנְּפָשׁ. בִּי יְעוֹ עֵל מוֹרְפוֹ לַחָפְשִׁי יִשְּׁלְחוּהוּ. אִז יוצִיא נְם אָהִיּבְתוּ מַעַבְּדִית לַחְפָשׁ.

גי אַלהַי שִׁמְשׁוֹןנִי – לְרָא וַיִּדְלֹּג שָּתַע,
 אַחְרֵי צַעֲרוֹ בַתְּחַלְה אָחֹדְנִית כְּפְשִׁע.
 לְאֵחוֹ בִּמְתַלְעוֹת הַכְּפִיר וּלְשִׁפְּעַהוּ שְׁסָע...
 נְבּוֹר אֹבַד. הַעוֹד לֹא הִתְבּוֹנַנְהָ,
 אַלהָיךְ אַלהַי שִׁמְשׁוֹן אַיָּהוּי

- שלהָיף אַלהַי שִׁמְשׁוּן אַל אַלִּים-כָּר מַעָם נְחָלָתוּ וּמְנָּבּוֹרֵיהוּ נְיְהִי עם אוֹיִבִיהָם הַפָּלשְׁתִּים הָעָרַלִּים. וֹבְמוּ לֹא חָנּן עִמְּךּ כַּן לֹא חְנִנְהָ. הָאַל הַנִּעָם אֲשֶׁר הַכְּנִיר עם בְּחִירוּ בִּידִי עִי אֵיתְן לֹא יַדְעוּ לֹא יָבִירוּ, אֲשֶׁר נְתַן מִקְרְשׁוּ לִשְׁרָפָּת שְׁאָיָה עַל יַד לִפִּד אַשׁ מְשִׁלְךְּ כָּלִי צְּדִיְה. הוא הַפֿיל צוּר חַרְבִּךְּ מִיְדְךְ עָתָה וּלֹאַבֶּל לַחַיָּה הָרָעָה נְתָּתָּ.
- לוְנָח הַכְּפִיר אַלְיוֹ שֵׁנִית בַּחָמָת וְעִם –
 עוד הַתְחַנַּק הָאְשְלֶל עֵל עִשְׁרוּ הַפְּעָם.
 אַךְ בִּוֹנְכוֹ כָּאָרוֹ חִישׁ אַרְצָה הַבְּהוּ.
 פַרְכוֹתִיו הַנּוֹרָאוֹת חַלָּע כְּלְכַבָּהוּ.

יין וּבְטָנוֹ רְמַשׁ אֵד סַאָז יִגְאָ. נִיעַלֶּע דְּטוֹ נִיְשְׁרַק אַצְטְזוֹ. נִיסָהָב אָת פִּנְרוֹ מִדְטְזוֹ.

בְּל הָעָם בָּצָלִיצוּתוּ קוּל רְנָה הַשְּׁמִיעִ – אַךְ מָה נָאָלָת מְנָת מן הַנָּצִיעֵוּ –

- ונת אָסָה עַבְריָה מָחָה. נּוֹעַתוּ מָה־יָהוּ עַל מַה־יָּהוּ אַין נָפָשׁ יוֹדַעַתוּ מָה־יָּהוּ אַין נָפָשׁ יוֹדַעַתוּ אָף אַין אִישׁ שָׁם עַל לַב לַהְּמוּל עָלִיהָ. הָהוּ בִּין שׁנִּי אָרִיוֹת אָת דּוֹדָה רָאָתָה וֹתִּצְנָח אָרְצָה. לֶרְסָה בְּרְעָה בַּחָבֶלִיהָ- וֹתִּצְנָח אָרְצָה. לֶרְסָה בְּרְעָה בַּחָבֶלִיהָ.
- הנה תַּלְנָתָרְה שַּׁמְעוֹן, הַנָּה הַיא בָאָה הַנָּה מָרָתָה תַּמָּתִרְּה לַחִפָּשׁ וַצְאָהוּ

1865

בין שני אריות (עם קיג-קיז)

אין קורין לאור הנר בשבת, שמא ישכח ויטה את הנר: אין פולין לאור הנר מאותו טעם. אין שותין יינם של נכרים. גזירה שמא נסכו לאלהותם ("יין נסך") וכר.

אל ההראל - אל בית המקדש. לפי יחוקאל (מ"ג, ט"ו) הוא המובח. ח.נ. ביאליק קרא הראל להר האלוהים. הוא הר סיני (על ראש הראל).

נכתב בשנות הששים (בשירי יהודה", וילנה תרכ"ח 1868) כשהתחילה תקופת התיקונים הגדולים של אלכסנדר השני שבישרו חידושה של רוסיה הן מבחינה כלכלית־תעשייתית והן מבחינה חברותית. (ש)

יהותת – יתנפל, ישתער, וראה תהילים סב, ד'. דרך שער תלפיות – הוא שער סיטוס ברומי עד היום. טיבר – הנהר העובר ברומי.

הזירה הגדולה – הוא הקירקוס מקסימוס" שהכיל. לפי מופרי הדור בימי אבגוסטוס קיסר. כששים אלף איש.

אדילים — שהיו מפקחים על מוסדות הציבור.

בתמר מקשת — ככלונס של דקל שמעמידים בשדה קשואים. יחליל.

צרקיהו בבית הפקדת

פי על פלך בָּבָל לפרוק נפּיתיז אָם לא לכבוד עפי ולְחָפְשׁוּ חָרַדְתִּיּ. 30 כָּאָשָׁר נָם אָז עַל הַשְּׂרִים שָּקְרְתִּי פי איש את עַכְדּוֹ לַחֹפָשׁ יוציאוּ לְבְלִי עֶבֶר־אִישׁ בִּיהוּדִי אָחִיהוּז יּבְאָרָם אָם שֶׁנִיתִי הַלְעוֹן וַחָשֶׁבֹיּ לְמָה אַפוֹא. אַל וֹעַם. יְרְדְּ עָלִי תִשָּׁב 35 וֹכָאוֹיַב פִתְנַקִם בָּאַף רְדַפְּהָנִי ובידי מבקשי נפשי הקנרתנייו אָנִי. בָּרָאוֹתִי כִּי הָעִיר נִבְּקְעָה ושבי כבל ישכו בשער התוף. אָמַרְתִּי: עַתָּה אָמִים עַלַיהָם הָרָעָה 40 וּבָאִישׁ אָחָר בְּלָם אוֹרִידַם לַמְּבָח. אָז לִילָה בַּמְּגָרָה בַּעָבִי רָאַרָּסָה יצאתי עם כָּל אַנְשֵׁי הַמְּלְחָמָה וְאֹפֶר: אָל עַרְכוֹת הַיַּרְדֵּן אַרְחִיקה וּשְׁאַרִית יְהוּדָה אַלֵי שָׁם אַוְעִיכְה אַתְנָפַּל עַל הַבָּשְׂרִים מַאֲחַדִּיהָם... 45 אַך אַתָּה צָבִי סְדָּח הַקְרֵיתָ לפְנֵיתָם וּלְתָּמֶם שַת רָדְפוּ לְצוֹד הַצְּבִי ראוט יוצאים וַישְׁבוּט שָׁבִי. יטָה אַפוֹא פִשְׁעַר שרום, נִנְדַּדְּ 50 בּי נחָתָה בּי יּבְבָל בַּיתִי יָדְהְיּ אָם רַשַּׁעִתִּי וּבְעֵינֶיהְ הָרַע עָשִׂיתִי, מתנבת ידה אני לו כליתי: אַך אַלָּה הַצאן כָה עָשׁוּ. כָה חָטָאוּוּ אַל כְנוֹא וְנַכְם. אֱלהֵי יִרְמְיָהוּי

עיר וערירי אָסִיר בּרְוֹל וְענִי – הַנִשׁ עוֹד בָּאָרָק אִישׁ אָסְלָל בָּמנִיז בַּתִּנֶיה הַפֶּלְךְ בִּירוּשְׁלִים על אַדְבָת נַכָר בַּבּוֹר וּנְחָשְׁתַּיִם, 5 כְנוּר בִּכְלוֹב בָחַיָה. בִּחָאוֹ מִכְמָרוּ לְפָה עָלָה עָלִי הַנוֹרֶל הַפָּר ביםי צוּקה אַלָּה לִמְלֹדְ בָּאָרָקוּ ושרוע באָנו וָה הַבֶּרְקוּ מַדּוּעַ יְהוּדָה נִפָּחַת נִכְחָדָת יו משורה משעה בארק פולדתי ַ מָרוּעַיִּוי... מַרוּעַ הַּרְשׁוֹצִק עָשָׁת. שׁן תַּחַת הַפָּּקְבָת הַנּוֹקְשְׁתוּ הָק־עוֹלָם הוא: הַכֹּחַ משׁל בְּנוּוּ פַמִּישׁ בָּל הָאָרָץ נָם הַסְטְנּ. 15 אַך שָׁוָא אַפּוא יאבְרוּ כִּי יַשׁ אֱלֹהַ שָׁדִי, תַּקִּיף סְכֹּל, שופַש נְבַהַ: אַיַה מִשְׁפְּשוֹי לְמָה לֹא יַעְשְׂנוּ עַהָה בְּבַלֵּע רָשָׁע צָדִיק מִשְּנוּיִ או אולַי עשָה בִּי מִשְׁפְט הַפָּעַם 10 ובורו ששך הוא ספה הועם?י אַך כָה אָנן פָעַלְתִיז כָה־פְשַׁעְתִיז יוען לפני ורשיהו לא נכנעתיווי. לפני איש רף הַלַּב בַּצֵל נָפָשׁ נְבְנָעת אָשֶׁר יָעַק לָט בּשָׁת. עַבְדוּת. מִשְׁטָעת. 25 וַאָנִי מַאָנְתִּי עָצָתוּ לְשְׁמוֹעָ. בי אטרתי ברול ברול ירע –

הָאָם מִשְּׁרִירוּת לֵב אָת וֹאת עָשִׁיתִי

בלם יהיו כופרים ובני הנכיאים. חָרישָם יָעַוְכוּ עֹכְדֵי הָאֻדְּסָה, דְּנָלֶם נַאֲוֹנָם אַנְשֵׁי הַמְּלְחְמָה, חָרָשׁ וּפְכְנַר פון הַחַגְיוֹת יַצָאוּ פף ובאיש אָחָד יַאְסְפּוּ אָל נְיוֹת בְּרְטָה, יַלְבְּשׁוּ אַדרות שַער וְיִתְנְבַאוּ. (אָן יִשְׁבָּת בָארָץ נְרְוָן יִבְּקָבָת. בַל בָּלַי יוצר שָׁרף יִשְׂרִפוּ בִישְׁכָת. וְבַתְּתוּ אָת לְעֵם, לְשִוֹמְרוֹת מַוְשַׁרוֹת. וססו בַרַרם ישורג לְנְבָלִים וְבִנוֹרות וּלְדְבְרֵי הֻכְפִים דָּרְבֹנוֹת וּפְבִפְרוֹת: הַנָּבַרִים יִהְפַּשְׁטוּ סָנְנִים וּקְשְׁתוֹת וְצָפוּ מְנָלות בָּלָם וּבְמָתְנֵיהָם קְסָתות. בִּיוֹם הַהוּא הְהַבְּשׁוּ אָת יְהוּדְהַ בַּנַרוֹת 105 וְלֹא תִמְצְאוּ אָכָּר. אִישׁ חַיּי. רַב פְּעָלִיםוּ בַעַלַי־דַּפְּלָאכָה יִהְיוֹ נִבְוִים וּשְׁפָּלִים: בִּמְקוֹם מַנְהִינ עַדָר. מַצִּיב הַדְּרְבָן, יָהָיָה נָבִיא אוֹ כֹהַן מָעַלָה לָרֶבָּן: אִישׁ וָאִישׁ יאמָר: לֹא אַחַרשׁ. לֹא אָרושׁ. סוו כִּי בָּן מִמְלָכָת כֹּהַנִים אָנִי וְעֹי קְרוֹשׁ. וּבְבַן לֹא יִשְׁמַע קוֹל עושי בִמְּלָאבָה. בִּי קול אֹמְרִים הודוּ, הַלַּלְ וּבְרָכָה, וּבְּלְאָה הָאָרֶק לַהֲקוֹת נְבִיאִים פשטים ערפים הוים ומביעים. בוו רוְהַפַּי קָרִים. רעו רוּחַ וּנְשִׂיאִים. הַנְהָנָה בּוֹי בָּוָה תַּחַת שְׁמִיםַ? פִּי וָהָיָה - הַנָעָפֹר יוֹם אוֹ יוֹפְיָם? מִי יָנִיר נִירוּ. מִי יוֹצִיא לוֹ לְחָם וּבְיוֹם צָר וּמְצוּקָה מִי לוֹ וַלְּחָם? 120 נוי בָּוָה לֹא יִצְלַח לַצֵשׁוֹת בֶּמְשָׁלָה. חָרב וָחַרַב וַיהִי לִּמְעִי מַפְּלָה... לא אַרַע בַּבָּה מִשְׁנֵי אַלָּה בְּחַרְהָ, אַהָה הָאַל עַת עַם זוּ לָדְ יָצְרְהָּ, אם יצרתו לנוי קרוש מחויק בּפָלְדְּ-125 לְמָה צָוּיחָ לְשׁוּם מֶלְיוּ מְלְדְּוּ הַאַין הַי בַּכּהָנים סוֹבְבֵי הַנְּרָנוֹה

לאַשוף הַתְרוּטוֹת וּלְקָבְצָה מַתְּנוֹתוּ

אַני אַם הָטָאתי עַבַרְתִּי אִבְּרָתָּךְ – בָנִי לָמָה הוּמָתוּ אֲשָׁר לא בִתוּרָתְהוּ: בני היקרים המקלאים בפוו... הַה לְבֵּי לְבִי. הָה מִכְאוֹבִי מָה עִוּוּ הַנִשׁ עוד נָבָר לא־יִצְלָח בְּמֹנִיז סט לו יִמָח הַיוֹם הַהוֹא מְוּכְרוֹנִי. לו עם מת ראשי אָתְקְנוּ יְחַרוּ הוי צָלָם בַּלָהוֹת. הוי חוון פְחַד. במותי במותרון עוד עתה אראנו. אָרָאָנוּ בְּלִי עֵינָים. בְּרוּחִי אֲשׁוּרָנוּ.. הוי חָרְשִׁי פִשְׁחִית. אַנְשֵׁי רָם וְרַצָּח: טָרָם הַפָּאֹרוֹת לִי כָּבוּ לְנְצָח, פָרָם אוֹר עֵינִי כִּשָּנִי לְקְחוּ – עולְלֵי מִפְּחֵי אָל עֵינִי טְבָחוּי... יען לא נכנעתי לפני ירטיהויוי. סר וקה קבקש וה הבהן מענתותו ילְבַלֵּי בְּיוֹם הַשָּׁבָּת מַשָּׁא יִשְּׂאוּי. הַעַת לְנוּ אָו לַחַנִּים וּלְשַׁבְּתוֹתַיִּ צר סְבִיב הָאָרֶק. עָרֵי הַשְּׂדָה שָׁאוּ. עד שָערי עיר הַפְּלוּכָה הַפּלְלוֹת בָאוּ. - הַשַּׁמְלָכָה הַנוּש. יַהָרְסוּן הַשְּׁתוֹת. וְהוּא עוֹמֶד יוֹם יוֹם בְּשִׁעֵר בְנִי הָעָם. עופר וְקוֹרֵא בְּאָוְנֵי הַבָּאִים שָׁם לְבְלִי בִּיוֹם הַשְּׁבָת בִשְּׁא יִשְׁאוּ. ער כִּי הַתָּל הָעָם כּוֹ לַאמֹר: נְבִיא. ומא ובלות בהבע וכואוו פס וֹאָנן אָת דּבָרִיו בִּמֹאונִים שָׁקַלְתִּי. נִם אָת פִּי שְׁרָיָה וּצְפַנְיָה שָׁאַלְתּי, אַר נִם הַם כָּשוני פַשָּׁר לא יָדָעי: איבה נצלט יבשה טשעט אַיכָה יִישְׁכָה הָעִיר הַהִיא לְעוֹלְכּי 55 לו ביום הַשָּבָת מָשָא לא נְשָאני? עור ואת. כְּרִית חֲרֶשָׁה כָּרָא לִיהּיְרָה: בל עם הארץ מקמנם עד נרולם ילארו דכני ספר תוניה ותעונה.

סף כל הָעָם - מָן הַיוֹנְבִים עַר הַנְשׁיאִים

הַם 'אכוּ הַהְרַשָּם, יַחְפְצוּ הַעָנוּת,
הַפָּה יְשִׁיםוּ כְּלִיל עֵל מִוּבְּחָוּה,
הַפָּה יִשִּׁימוּ כְּלִיל עֵל מִוּבְּחָוּה,
יַבְּפָה יִשְׁיִמוּ כְּלִיל עֵל מִוּבְּחָוּה,
הַבְּוָה יִהְיָה מָלֶךְ תִּבְּחָרָהוּ
יִבְּנָה יִהְיָה מָלֶךְ תִּבְּחָרָהוּ
אִישׁ עֵנוֹת כְּל כָּן־זְבִיא נִפְּשֵׁרוּ
אִישׁ עֵנוֹת כָּל כָּן־זְבִיא נִפְשַׁרוּ
יִבְּמָה בּוּל עַץ עֵל יַחְפּאַ יַשֵּרוּ

בן מִיוֹם הֵיוֹת הָעָם הַוָּה וְהָלְאָה הִמִּד בִּקְשׁוּ הַחוֹים הַנְּבָּאִים לְּהִיוֹת הַמְּלְכִים תַּחְתִּיהָם נִכְנָעִים. לֹמְלְךְּ הָרִאשׁוֹן הָרֹאָה כָּן־אָלְכָּוְה. בִּי הָיָה בָּן־קִישׁ אִישׁ תַּיִּל רְב־בֹּחַ מַאַן הִבְּנָת. לֹא אָבָה הִשְׁחָ. מַאַן הִבְּנָת. לֹא אָבָה הִשְּׁחָ. נִיכְקְשׁ הַחֹוָה תֹּאָנָה וַיִּמְצָא

זין לְהַשְׁמָּיל אָת כְּבוֹדוֹ וּלְתַתּוֹ לְשִׁמְצָה.
 הַיְּמִים יְמֵי מִלְחָמָה. הַפְּלְשְׁתִּים כָּאוּ
 נִיּפְשְׁמוּ בָּאָרָץ. הְעַבְרִים יְצָאוּ
 נַיַּחְטּ נְּכְּחָם. אַךְּ לֹא לָאִםר הַמֵּלְחְמָה
 עַר בּוֹא הָרֹאָה לִוְבֹחַ בַּבְּמָה.

ינים נוש וידיהם הוחל ער בואי אליך – בן אָפָרהָ, שְׁפוּאַל, אַלָּה מִלֶּהְ: הָרָאָה אֵינָטּ וּפְּלְשְׁתִּים נִלְּחָמִים, הָעָם נִנָּשׁ וּפְלְשְׁתִים נִלְּחָמִים, הָעָם נִנָּשׁ וִידִיהָם תִּרְפִּינָה,

יכבר נפצו רַבִּים הַנָּה וְהַנָּה. אָז הָתְאַפַּק בָּּן־קִישׁ נַיַּעֵל הָעֹלָה – הוי חַפָּאת קָסָם מָרִי, הוי אַשְׁסָה נְרוּלְהוּ פַּתְאֹם צָץ הַחֹזָה. פָּרַח הָאָרוֹן – וֹבִאַשׁ קֹנְאָה קְשָׁה וֹבְעָבָרת זְרוֹן וֹבָאַשׁ קֹנְאָה קְשָׁה וֹבְעָבָרת זְרוֹן

נִ סְבָּלְ תִּי לֹא תְּקְּהְ מִצְוֹת אֵלְהָדְּהִי וּכְאָוֹנִי כָל הָעָם הָשׁסֶר עָלְיוּ: בּי לֹא שָׁסֶרְהָ כִּאָוֹנִי שְׁרִי חָיָלְיוּ

סי הִסְבֶּץ דְּבֶר עָחָק כָּוָה לְשְׁסוֹעַזּ
 וֹהָאְשַׁם – אָם לֹא הוֹא הַחֹוָה:

 וֹמְי הָאְשַׁם – אָם לֹא הוֹא הַחֹוָה:
 הַּיְ הָאְשַׁם – אָם לֹא הוֹא הַחֹוָה:
 הַיֹּ הָאְשָׁם – אָם לֹא הוֹא הַחֹוָה.
 הְּיֹ לֹא כָא לְפוֹעֵד שְׁכְעֵת הַיְּטְלְמִים.
 וְעוֹדְנוּי מְחָעוֹלֵל וְתוֹלָה אַשְׁלְמִים.
 וְעוֹדְנוּי מְחָעוֹלֵל וְתוֹלָה אַשְׁרְמִיְבְּי,
 בְּרֹאשׁ הַפְּלָּן וְמִשׁ בְּמָּא חוֹכְתוֹ.
 אָם מְּלָלוֹ וְפֹּשׁ בְּמָא מוֹכ בַּבֹּר שֶׁבֶּת אָז מְשֶׁבְת תַּלֹלְנוֹ וְפֹשׁ בְּמָא מוֹכ בַּבֹּר שֶׁבֶּת.

 זְיֹם וְּמָלְוֹ וְפֹשׁ בְּמָא מוֹכ בַּבֹּר שֶׁבֶּת.
 זְיִם וְּמָלְנוֹ וְמַשְׁלָת תֻּלֵּלְבוֹת חָצָר־הַשְּׁלְבוֹת חָצָר־הַשְּׁבָּת.

כָּכָה כָּל חוָה כָּל נָבִיא. אִישׁ בְּשַׁעְתּוּ. יָנָע לְהַפּוֹת אָת מָלְכּוּ אָל מִשְׁמְעִתּוּ! אַת מָצָא אָת שָׁאוּל מָצָא נָם אוֹתִי מָאַת הַחוָה הַוָּה הָעַנְתֹתִי.

אָר פּלָר האש וְלְצִין בּּלְנִי אָפְּני יפּט. וּפְרָי יִפְיני יפּט.

הוי ראָה אָנֹכִי כִּאַהְרֵית הַיְּמִים דְּבָרֵי כָּןְהַלְּקְיָהוּ בִּיהוּדָה לְמִים: הַבָּרִית תָּקוּם. הַמָּמְשֶׁלָה נָהַרְסָת,

- 185 ומקום שַׁכָּט משָׁלִים תִּירַשׁ הַכָּסָת: כָּל הָעָם לְשִּׁדִּים יְדְעֵי דָת וְסַפָּר. אַדְּ דַּכִּים וּנְמָקִים בְּעָפָר וָאַפָּר, ראָה אָנִי... הָהּ. לְשָּׁה בִּנְלֹך עֵינָי לֹא חָשְׁבוּ נַּם עֵינֵי רוּחִי, מַעֵּינָי.
 - ולא אָבְדוּ כַּיוֹם הַהוּא עֻשְׁחְּטֹתֵי וֹבְחַיִּכְוֹ לֹא כְלוּ יוֹמֶצִי־כִּלְיוֹתֵיזּ הוֹדִי יִכְבוֹדִי, אוֹר עֵינִי אָסַפְתָּ לְשָׁה גַּם דַּעְתִּי בְּאַפְּהְ לֹא מְרַפְּתָּ, כִּי עַתְּה שְׁלַוְתִּי מַעֲמַל עַצְּבָת,
- יף מִיכֹר רָאשׁנוֹת מַחְשׁב כָּל מַחְשְּׁבָת... קוֹל עֵל כָּפּוֹת הַמִּוְשֵּׁל: יָפָל הַבְּרִיחַ:

הַדְּלָת תִּפֹב. רזה צח יְפִיה: כִּצֵּל על פָּנִי יַחָלֹף. הַכִּי הִנִּיע

יום מוכ לי. יום הְפְּשִׁיז אָהָא מוּשִׁיאַ לקרוּא לי דְּרוֹר וּפְּקְח־קוֹחַ הַשְּׁטִעֵז הָה סְשְׁאָת שְׁוְאוּ אֵת בָּבּר שְׁמוּ אוֹתִי הָגָּד לִי בִּי פֹה אַשְׁכ אֵד יוֹם מוֹתִיוּ עָבָד בַּית־הַמֹּהַר יִבָּח מִיר הָרָחַץ, יָבִיא לִי לחִמִי הַצָּר. מִימִי מֵי לְחַץ, הוי, רָשְׁע אָריץ, לשָׁוָא הַאָּרְדְּ נְפְּשִׁי.

הַעור יִפְּהָה לַבְּהָּ לַבַ הָאַרְנָבָת. לְּשָׁוּא תָּבַל לְוֹבְחָהְ וְהוּא טְבּרַרוּחֵזּ לְשָׁה לָא תַתַּר לְוֹבְחָה וְהוּא טְבּרַרוּחֵזּ לְשָׁה לֹא תַתַּר לְוֹבְחָה וְהוּא טְבּרַרוּחֵזּ בְּעוֹר יִפְתַּר לְבָּהְ, לַשְׁוֹא תַּאַרוְךְ נָפְשִׁיּ

210 מִבְּנִי נָבָר – אֵל אַפְּאַפְּיוֹ צֵּלְטְנְתּזּ אַךְּ לְשָׁה לִי חֹפָשׁ, לְשָׁה לִי חַיִּיםזּוּ מָה־לִּי פֹה. מִי לִי פֹה הַחַת שְׁמִיִםזּ הודי סָר. הַמְּאֹרוֹת לִי קְדָרוּ, עוֹלְלִי מִפְחִי אֵל יְדִי חַרֵב הַנָּרוּ:

אין ישע גם לאַל בְּמְרוֹמֵי שְׁמְיוּוּ לְאִישׁ בָּמִנִי נְמָּל לִפְנִי לְמְיז 215 אַרירי אָנִיוּ נְּבֶּר לֹאִיצְלָח בְּיָמֶיוּוּ

רק אָהַת עוד הִיא לְה נָפּשִׁי הַבְּסְף: כִּי וָחוֹשׁ הַיּוֹם כּוֹ רוֹהִי הַאָּסְף.

תַּעל לְהּ מָעֵלָה אוֹ כִּי תַרֵד מְטָה – אַדְרֵי כָּל אַלְה אָחַת הִיא לִי עֶתְה:
אוֹלִי בָּמְוֹת עֵינִי הַפְּקַחְנָה
וִילְדִי הָאוֹבְדִים אָשׁוֹב אַבִּימָה,
נְלֹא – אָשְׁכָּב וַחֲמַת רוּחִי אַשְׁקִּימְה
נְלֹא – אָשְׁכָּב וַחֲמַת רוּחִי אַשְׁקִימָה

ניסן – אכ, תרלים. כְּמְצוֹרָת לִיסָא יִסְרְתִּיהָ וֹבָפּוֹרָשׁ הַצְּבְתִּי רְלַתְּיהָ.

צדקיהו ככית הפקורות (עמי ציה-קיא)

במצודת לימא יסדתיה וכפודש הצבתי דלתיה –
ראשית השיר נכתב במצודת ליטא (ליטובסקי זאמוק) שם נאסרו
יל"ג ואשתו בשבת הגדול תרל"ט (1879) במחלקת פושעי המדינה
כחשודים בתנועה המהפכנית, לארבעים יום. משם הובלו לעיר פודוז
(פודש) שבפלך אולנצק ושוחררו לאחר מאה יום. לדעתו של הפרום"
קלויזנר (הסטוריה של הספרות העברית החדשה, ד' 437—439) נכתב
השיר בפטרבורג בשנת תר"ם, לאחר שובו מהגולה אולם חתם ,ובפודש
הצבתי דלתיה" – לעשית זכר לצרה עליו (ש).

צבי מודח הקרית לפניהם — על הכתוב בירמיהו ליט ד—ה: ויהי כאשר ראם צדקיהו וכל אגשי המלחמה ויברחו ויצאו לילה מן העיר דרך גן המלך... וירדפו אחריהם וישיגו את צדקיהו בערבות יריחו... מביא רשיי אגדה: מערה היתה לו מביתו עד ערבות יריחו ויצא לילך דרך המערה. וימן הקב"ה צבי לפני הכשדים ורצו אחריו לתפשו והוא רץ עד פתח המערה וראו את צדקיהו יוצא משם.

בני למה הומתו אשר לא כתורתך – בניגוד לדברי התורה .לא יומתו אבות על בנים" (דברים כר, טו).

לכלי כיום השכת משא ישאו – ראה ירסיהו יז, כיז. ברית חדשה ברא ליהודה – ראה ירסיהו לא. ליא. שרף ישרפו בשכת – בשלהבת.

בשיר זה ממשיך יל"ג מלחמתו ברבנים ובתורה שהם הטיפו לעם — תורה בלי דרך־ארץ. שאיפתו היא הפרודוקטיביוציה של המוני בית ישראל שהיתה אז שאיפת חונים רחבים של הציבור היהודי ברוסיה. יש לציין שבאותה שנה. תר"ם. נוסדה בפשרבורג. עיר מושבו של המשורר, החברה להפצת מלאכה ועבודת האדמה בין היהודים ברוסיה. למלאות כ"ה שנה למלכות אלכסנדר השני. היא החברה "אורס", הקיימת עד היום (ש). (76)

״מִי אַהְּ, עֲלוּבַת הַנֶּפָשׁ, וּמָה חַיִּהְיּ
״מִי אַרְּהִים אִם אֲנָשִׁים הָיוּ בְעוֹכְרֵיִהְ
הָאֵלְהִים אִם אֲנָשִׁים הָיוּ בְעוֹכְרֵיִהְ
-לא, אַרְשֵׁי חָסֶד, לָאֵל מֵעָנֶל חָלִילָה: הַן כִּשְׁרנוֹת טבִים חַנֵּנִי צוּרִי שַׁדָּי, הַן כִּשְׁרנוֹת טבִים חַנֵּנִי צוּרִי שַׁדָּי, בְּם הַהַּצְלָחָה לִי פַּעַם פָּנִים הִצְּהִילָה, בְּמְעַט הָיִיתִי בְּּכָל טוֹב אֲנִי וִילָדִי אַךְ קוֹצוֹ שֶׁל יוּד הוּא הַרָנָנִי.

"Who are you, oh pathetic soul, what is the nature of your life? Your face bears witness that you were not created for this lot: Was it God or human beings who have led to your downfall That you've reached this sorry state, so broken and downcast?" No — kind people, perish the thought that God could be complicit: After all, my Almighty Creator endowed me with fine talents, Fortune once shined her face upon me, I had practically reached the point of having it all,

I and my children —
But it was the tiny tip of a yud that brought me to ruin.

Book Reviews

Studies in the Meaning of Judaism by Eugene B. Borowitz, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 473 pp.

Gene Borowitz has been my best friend for sixty years, so I am not well positioned to treat his new and powerful book with objectivity. But he can be very critical of all of us in his usual self-deprecating way, including here a strong refutation of the neo-Kantianism of Steven Schwarzschild, the rationalist member of our old triumvirate, whom we have mourned for more than ten years. Borowitz, to be sure, is critical of classical Reform Judaism with its naïve and premature messianism. But he equally unmasks the pretensions of Orthodoxy and the paralyzed ambivalence of Conservative Judaism. He is no less hard on himself, though, it seems to me, with far less reason. Still, he employs a sanguine tone that clashes with my own bad conscience about liberal Judaism. No one has worked longer or harder than Borowitz has. He patiently mastered Hebrew, modern and ancient. He learned modern philosophy from its most difficult texts. He studied Jewish classics every day of every year. He thinks hard and writes carefully. He is a wonderful teacher and writer, and a wonderful friend.

This volume, only the second in this Jewish Publication Society series of studies devoted to a Reform Jewish scholar (most of the rest are dedicated to members of the Conservative wing, with which the Jewish Publication Society has an almost incestuous connection), is the very first by a self-acknowledged Jewish theologian. The book proceeds chronologically, not topically as in the other studies. That is all to the good, since it results in a kind of intellectual autobiography while showing clearly the evolution of our single most important American Jewish theologian, one of the few important Americans of any faith to produce a body of work like this. I hazard that Eugene Borowitz will be recognized by historians as the Reinhold Niebuhr of the Jews; no one else has been so massively important in so many ambitious ways.

The seed of all his later accomplishments is already present in his earliest attempts as a young student, hardly in his twenties. Sensing that the humanist or universalist moment in liberal Judaism had exhausted itself, he understood that a new kind of thinking, one deeply influenced by the German religious renaissance of the early

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FOR WHOM DO I TOIL?

Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry

Michael Stanislawski

New York Oxford
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St. Petersburg: Culture and Politics 1872–1877

One of the many myths that cloud the perception of Jewish civilization in Eastern Europe is the notion that barely any Jews legally resided in the grand capital of the Russian Empire before the fall of the tsars. It is not only that the history of the Jewish_community of St. Petersburg remains to be written—that is true of all the major Jewish centers in Russia and Poland; but the story of the intriguing Jewish community that lived and thrived in the shadow of the Winter Palace can serve as a uniquely tantalizing metaphor for the radical transformations that overwhelmed Russian Jewry in the nineteenth century.

Here was a city that had an enormous impact on Jewish history but which, unlike Vilna or Warsaw, had no Jewish presence before the nineteenth century and, in sharp contrast to Odessa, developed its character entirely independent of Jews or their culture. For the first century and a half of its existence, from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the late 1850s, St. Petersburg was all but closed to Jews. Then slowly, suspiciously, uncertainly, first a tiny number of Jews were received into its midst, and then more and more until, at the end of the Old Regime, St. Petersburg Jewry was one of the largest and most important in the empire.

This growth was almost completely regulated and determined from the palace—much like the development of the city as a whole. For unlike any of the other great capitals of Europe, St. Petersburg was founded as an act of will by a single monarch, Peter the Great, and assumed the character of its creator: rigorously rational, secular, tilted patently to the West, away from Moscow, the Church, the supposed Russian soul. St. Petersburg acquired its classic shape and style in the late eighteenth century, the age of Enlightenment, of unbridled optimism in the possibilities of progress and the uncharted vistas of mankind. Its deliberate and self-conscious modernism, its grandiose, almost absurdly broad boulevards and luxuriant architecture, its elaborate canals obscuring murky swamps, its eerie light that casts a golden glow on pastel palaces—all these would lead Dostoyevski to call St. Petersburg "the most abstract and premeditated city in the world." Here, everyone was uprooted and lived side by side, cut off from homes, roots, contexts: nobles

and prostitutes, wealthy parvenus and beggars, students and stockbrokers, and most of all, tens of thousands of that most modern of all creatures, bureaucrats.

How foreign this picture is to the prevalent image of East European Jewish lift characterized by "shtetl" existence, in which the rhythms of the Jewish calendar were preserved as naturally as the changing of the seasons. However, from the 1820s to the 1930s, the small market town gradually ceased to define the locus of Jewish life in Eastern Europe, as Jews moved from villages and small towns to bigger towns and even larger cities, and finally to a handful of metropolises. The migration led vast numbers of Jews away from the time-honored centers of Jewis settlement in Lithuania, Belorussia, and the western Ukraine to new areas in the east, south, and north of the Russian Empire, where Jewish life invariably took of a substantially new cast.

The cause of this internal migration—like that of the great emigration over seas—can be pinpointed rather easily: not, as popular imagination has it, in violence and attack, but rather in the startling biological explosion of East Europea Jews in the nineteenth century. For the Jews of Russia and Poland were among the most explosive populations in this time, spurting from approximately 1.6 million in 1820 to over 4 million sixty years later. Feeding the enormous number of new mouths was bound to be a formidable problem for the Jews of Eastern Europe, ever disregarding their dismal political status; faced with substantial legal, social, an economic restrictions, the dilemma soon came to be virtually insuperable. The best strategy to cope with this dilemma was one shared with dozens of other over populated groups in Europe—migration to areas where opportunity was suppose to abound. That meant, for one subset of Russian Jews, to seek their fortunes acrost the seas; the great emigration of East European Jews to America began, in fact in not in public memory, in the 1870s, when some thirty thousand Jews left Russifor the land of the free and the home of the brave.

But for the majority of Russian Jews this solution was too radical; indeed, ever in later years the fact is that most Russian Jews opted not to leave Russia ever when they could. Far less disruptive, more popular, and longer lived was anothe sort of migration—to the cities of Russia proper.

The attractiveness of large cities to immigrants from the provinces is, of course a classic phenomenon of all European societies in the nineteenth century, cutting across all lines of culture, language, class, and religion; more suprisingly, perhaps the metropolis's drawing power occurred as much in times of prosperity as in periods of recession. Sharing in this experience, the Jewish centers of the Russian Empire grew steadily through the century: Grodno's Jewish community trebled Vilna's increased in size 10 times, and Minsk's 16 times; in cities with less of a Jewish past, such as Ekaterinoslav and Kiev, the increase was 215 and 245 times respectively; and in the open port city of Odessa, the terminus of the substantial southeastern stream of Jewish migrants, the number of Jews increased in size 620 times over the course of the nineteenth century.

But one of the most dramatic changes of all occurred in the capital of the empire. Here, as in Moscow and other cities outside the Pale of Settlement, Jews were not permitted to reside at all until the late 1850s and early 1860s, with very few exceptions. Thus, in 1802, almost a century after St. Petersburg was founded its official register included the names of only 10 Jews legally resident in the city

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tinctive cast. In the first place, the Jews of St. Petersburg never congregated in any quarter or section of town, and hence there never was anything akin to a Jewish neighborhood. Jews lived in all parts of the capital and were not confined or concentrated in any particular area. Even their communal institutions were not centered on any one locale but were scattered throughout the several islands that made up the city. This unusual pattern of residential and institutional integration was doubtless a function of the strange, random mix of populations characteristic of St. Petersburg as a whole.

But the demographic integration of the Jews of St. Petersburg hinted at a far deeper and more complex kind of integration, a psychological and ideological sense of belonging, unrequited by formal emancipation. The Jews of St. Petersburg believed themselves to be at one and the same time loyal subjects of the emperor and dedicated Jews, exemplars of a Russian-Jewish symbiosis that would one day devolve upon the entire Jewish population of the empire.

To broadcast this cultural ideal, the leaders of St. Petersburg Jewry, headed as always by the Gunzburgs, founded in December 1863 the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia. In the first years of its existence. the society had modest success in spreading modern educational and cultural ideals to the Pale, publishing textbooks and curricula for use in the government-sponsored Jewish schools, and locating and subsidizing bright young students who needed financial help on their road from heder and yeshivah to gymnasium, university, and service to their people. But the bankers and industrialists and railroad magnates who funded the society could hardly take time from their more pressing commitments to run educational and cultural programs with any degree of efficiency, and they were hardly able to keep in touch with the intellectual and literary tempests of the Pale. As a result, the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment was a listless, virtually dormant organization, unable to carry out the imperatives of its generous sponsors. At the same time, the leading Jews of the capital, and particularly the elder Baron Gunzburg, realized that the growing Jewish community could no longer be managed as a private domain and required some coherent administrative hand to run the daily affairs of the philanthropic agencies, the synagogue, and the cemetery in a manner suitable to the style of the capital. The current unpaid and unofficial secretary of the community refused to take on the new job and salary, and was hired instead as a manager in a business concern run by one of his patrons.8

In the autumn of 1871, therefore, the baron and the other half dozen patrons of Jewish St. Petersburg decided to search for a suitable person to fill both of their organizational lacunae: a joint position as secretary of the St. Petersburg Jewish community and secretary of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia. On October 24, 1871, they offered the post to none other than Judah Leib Gordon.

Gordon was by now frantically determined to quit Tel'shi for a larger, more enlightened town. For a short while, he was tempted by the possibility of a post in Odessa, but that was blocked by the always fractious inner politics of that tempestuous Jewish community. It is difficult to imagine what Judah Leib Gordon's subsequent life and career would have been like had he in fact moved to Odessa, so out of consonance was he with the spirit of that town and its Jewish ethos.

St. Petersburg, on the other hand, was breathtakingly suitable to Gordon's self-image, ambitions, and cultural politics. Was this not precisely the place where the charged imperatives of "Awake, My People!" had most graphically been brought to life? Was not the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment exactly the sort of vehicle Gordon dreamed of to lead the charge of Jewish modernism in Russia? Here, at last, Gordon would have the chance to live not only in a big city but in the most European and cosmopolitan enclave in all Russia. If any more incentive were needed, in St. Petersburg there lived the one family member to whom Gordon was closest, his brother Abraham, a respected and successful attorney with powerful connections in the government.

True to his character, however, Judah Leib Gordon did not rush to accept the offer from St. Petersburg before carefully negotiating its terms and considering the potential effects on his family. The discussions with the St. Petersburg magnates went on for several months, during which Gordon was never quite sure whether they would end in success. Finally, a trial contract was agreed upon. He would take up the job for three months, at a modest salary below his real income in Tel'shi. If both sides were satisfied with the results, a new contract would be negotiated, with more generous terms.

Depositing his family in Riga for the duration of the trial period, Gordon arrived in St. Petersburg in June 1872. His frame of mind upon leaving the provinces, he hoped for good, was hinted at as usual in a Hebrew poem deposited in his drawer. "On My Departure from Tel'shi" took up the other side of the coin of "For Whom Do I Toil?," lamenting not the abandonment of Hebrew for the fleshpots of assimilation on the part of the young, but the frustration of the self-sacrificing modernist who dedicated his life to the improvement of the traditional Jews of small-town Lithuania. Playing on the coincidence of his seven-year tenure in Tel'shi with the biblical parameters for the liberation of slaves, the poet mourned the seemingly fruitless efforts he had expended in Tel'shi: grooming and educating recalcitrant children, cultivating in them notions of civility and self-awareness, helping to feed the starving, and resisting obscurantist oppressors. All his efforts, however, yielded not gratitude and praise but denunciation and venom. But, the poet concludes, his work was not in vain:

Six years, then, I served my brethren, Now I leave penniless, but not without gain, I did not waste my strength on nothingness, For I shall reap my reward from the generations to come.¹⁰

If "On My Departure from Tel'shi" revealed Gordon's private emotions upon his move to St. Petersburg, his ideological stance and public aspirations were most explicitly summarized in a long survey of contemporary Hebrew literature published in a new Russian-language journal called *Evreiskaia biblioteka* [Jewish Library] before he left Tel'shi. In this article, Gordon analyzed in great detail a large number of important Hebrew books that had recently appeared in Russia and abroad, singling out for special praise Zecharias Frankel's *Introduction to the Jerusalem Talmud* as the model of sensitive historical research, and for searing criticism Eliezer Zweifel's *Peace on Israel*, which attempted to portray Hasidism from

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cisely in the interest of such a Russification, which we believe in ardently, and of the creation of such a culture, for which we have worked so hard, we must denounce the views of our extremists in regard to the Hebrew language and Hebrew literature as rash and erroneous.¹⁶

The value of Hebrew, he pointed out, was best articulated in an article he had written a decade earlier in the journal Sion, but to no avail. The utility and importance of Hebrew may be argued from an ideal or abstract point of view, regarding the vital force preserved in the Hebrew language for those who master it. It may be argued that Hebrew is the only link that unites contemporary Jews to their long history and to Jews in all parts of the world. But the most fundamental argument in favor of Hebrew is on the practical or material level. First, it will take at least two generations, and possible a century, before the Russification of the Jews is complete; and until then the only means to enlightenment for Russian Jews will remain Hebrew. But even after that long process of acculturation is realized—"in that blessed time, when we will speak and think in Russian, even then knowledge of the Hebrew language will not lose its practical importance, as the key to the treasurehouse of Jewish wisdom and culture."17 Jews active in all endeavors, in all the professions, as well as in literature and scholarship, must retain a keen and intimate knowledge of Hebrew. This is not a call for making Hebrew into a spoken tongue, counseled the most important Hebrew poet of the day:

In the first place, that pious hope in the resurrection of the Hebrew language can for the most part only be heard out of the mouths of the most fervent dreamers; secondly, the expression "to raise the Hebrew tongue" means, in that figurative Oriental language, only to assist in the proper teaching of the language and the development of Hebrew literature, . . . the preservation of the Hebrew language in the school and in literature. ¹⁸

Opposition to that noble and essential task, Gordon repeated, was shared by the two extremes of Russian Jews, the Orthodox and the nihilists; the moderate progressive forces must join together to lead the way to a revitalized Judaism and Jewish culture, historically sound and sensitive to the demands of the time and the spirit of the future.

It is with this commitment that Judah Leib Gordon thrust himself with all his energy into his two new jobs in the capital. Within a very short time he proved his mettle to the leaders of St. Petersburg Jewry, and particularly to the Barons Gunzburg, who took a quick liking to Gordon and served as his benefactors and protectors for years to come. He soon became indispensable to both the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment and the Jewish community of the capital, and his temporary contract was replaced with a permanent agreement promising him the substantial sum of eighteen hundred rubles per annum.¹⁹

One of Gordon's first duties as secretary of the Jewish community of St. Petersburg was the orchestration of the reception tendered by the Jews of the capital to Sir Moses Montefiore, upon the English dignitary's visit to St. Petersburg and audience with the tsar in July 1872. Several Jewish communities in Russia had asked Montefiore to visit Russia to mark the two hundredth birthday of Peter the Great, and Sir Moses agreed to do so, despite his advanced age. Gordon was thrilled to

a sympathetic but still enlightened point of view. But it was in his prefatory observations about the nature of Jewish life and culture that Gordon set forth the principles that would guide his work in the Russian capital.

He began with a rather innocuous citation from Leopold Zunz: "The Jewish people may in truth be called the people of the book." Gordon enthusiastically seconded this cliche, noting that "the Jewish people has twice lost its territory, its political independence, but it did not cease to exist; but take away its books, and it will disappear."12 For Gordon, Jewish history is synonymous with the history of its literature. That literature can be divided into three periods: the biblical age, in which Jewish creativity encompassed all areas of human knowledge; the medieval or Talmudic age, during which external oppression led to internal stultification and the neglect of worldly wisdom;13 and the modern era, beginning with Moses Mendelssohn, in which the Jewish creative genius was once more exposed to universal culture and civilization. Naturally, the medium of this exposure was the German tongue, which the Jews learned assiduously and completely, while not abandoning their Hebraic literary and spiritual heritage. This marvelous combination led German Jewry to remarkable heights of wisdom and knowledge, but the creative genius of German-Jewish culture was compromised by its progressive abandoment of the Hebrew language and Hebrew literature. This unfortunate development resulted in massive ignorance among German Jews, and more: it led to the decline of German-Jewish scholarship and German-Jewish religious life, phenomena noted and bemoaned by the best leaders of German Jewry itself. The torch was passed, therefore, to Russian Jewry, where knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish culture is still intense, but where the further development of a modern Jewish culture, a modern Jewish science, a modern Jewish literature is seriously threatened by several obstacles. The most substantial battle is the "cruelest and most tiresome, the battle with fanaticism."14 Repeating here his call for a thoroughgoing religious reform of the Jews, he argued once more-but for the first time in the Russian language-that the Russian rabbis' obscurantist antimodern extremism might prove more destructive than their German counterparts' reformist extremism. The mighty potential for a creative synthesis between Jewish culture and modernity is threatened by the rabbis, but it has a good chance to succeed if the modernists do not despair too soon and if the whole venture is not subverted by the absence of well-run cultural institutions in Russian Jewry.

Equally destructive, Gordon continued, was the recent tendency on the part of the enlightened youth of Russian Jewry to relegate the Hebrew language and Hebrew literature to the trash bin of history, the decision of Russian-Jewish students to divorce themselves from the classics of the Jewish tradition in the belief that "Moses, David, and Isaiah must yield to Homer, Sophocles, and Virgil." There are even new-style rabbis and teachers in Russia, Gordon lamented, who know no Hebrew and are ignorant of Jewish literature. Touching upon the subject matter of "For Whom Do I Toil?" but avoiding its self-righteous tones, Gordon fleshed out his linguistic ideology:

We hope that we will not be accused of [abandoning] hope in a rapid and complete Russification of our co-religionists, or in not understanding the importance of the creation of a Jewish culture in our native tongue [na otechestvennom inzvke] Pre-

have a private audience with the famous Jewish nobleman, to whom he delivered a new poem and copies of all his books. He was more than gratified to hear Montefiore praise the advance of the Jews of Russia since his first visit there in 1846, and to single out for special attention the cultivated state of the Jews of the capital who "dress like any gentlemen in England, France, or Germany; their schools are well attended, and they are foremost in every honorable enterprise destined to promote the prosperity of their community, and the country at large." ²⁰

But the thrust of Gordon's job had nothing to do with greeting foreign dignitaries. For the most part, his work for the community centered around planning for and negotiating a restructuring of the basic institutions of Jewish life in the capital—a new synagogue, cemetery, burial society, rules of procedure. Most of Gordon's time, however, was devoted to his duties at the society, which consisted in large measure in the allocation of the roughly thirteen thousand rubles budgeted annually by the society for grants to Jewish authors, students, and educational institutions throughout the Pale. Gordon's responsibility was single-handedly to wade through the hundreds of applications, manuscripts, and petitions that reached his office every year and to decide which merited a subsidy in the furtherance of "Enlightenment" among the Jews of Russia. From the published minutes of the society, it is clear that he was formally allowed to make decisions in the name of the society without consulting with his superiors, although, to be sure, his actions were subject to the approval of the governors of the society.²¹

Two of Gordon's pet projects, which stemmed directly from his personal ideological preoccupations, occasioned some opposition and even public controversy. The first was his backing of a recommendation that the society aid Jewish female medical students in the Russian capital. In 1872, the St. Petersburg College of Physicians and Surgeons began to offer special "Women's Medical Courses," attracting 4 Jewish women the first year and larger numbers in every successive term. By the end of the decade, 169 Jewish women had been graduated from these courses, over a fifth of the total number of alumnae. Many of these women could not afford to pay their own tuition, and application was made to the society for assistance. While at first the governors of the society were reluctant to support this endeavor, under pressure from Gordon and others they relented, and the society contributed generously to funds established to help women medical students regardless of their religious affiliation.²²

Gordon's second, and even more controversial, move was to convince the society to subsidize Russian Jews studying for the rabbinate at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau. The director of that seminary, Zecharias Frankel, had written to St. Petersburg complaining that only a few Russian students attended his academy and expressing his desire that more be enabled to do so. Gordon enthusiastically took up this cause, as it accorded perfectly with his own religious and cultural predilections, as discussed above. Moreover, there were persistent rumors that the Russian authorities were considering closing down the government-sponsored rabbinical seminaries in Vilna and Zhitomir, and Gordon argued that the society should step into the breach and actively promote and subsidize the training of Russian rabbis in the Breslau seminary. That, he argued, would not only enable the major Jewish communities of the empire to employ at their heads truly well-educated rabbis as opposed to the generally unsatisfactory products of Vilna and Zhi-

tomir, but would also be an enormous boost to Jewish Wissenschaft in Russia. Local Judaic scholarship, he patiently explained to his board members, was demonstrably weak but absolutely vital to the benefit of the Jewish community as a whole. True knowledge about the history, literature, and faith of the Jews would undoubtedly rebound to their political benefit, as had happened in the West.²³

This open insistence that the solution to the spiritual and cultural plight of Russian Jews be found in the Breslau version of "Positive Historical Judaism" was strongly opposed by several members of the society who believed that it would be wrong to train Russian rabbis in the German language and the "German spirit." (Included among the opposition to Gordon was none other than Dr. Leon Pinsker of Odessa, who would later challenge Gordon for being too dedicated to Russian culture and liberal politics.) Gordon, as usual, had his way, and the society went on annually to award grants to at least one Russian student studying at the Breslau seminary.

This move soon led to a minor public scandal. The formerly liberal, but now increasingly conservative, Russian newspaper Golos published a scathing editorial denouncing the society for supporting Russian students at German schools: Were not German institutions of higher learning the breeding ground for most of the revolutionaries who were causing so much damage to Russia? Why should the society, whose primary purpose ostensibly was to spread knowledge of the Russian language to the Jews, support students outside Russia? In addition, fulminated. A. A. Kraevskii, the editor of Golos and an honorary member of the society, why was the society, supposedly dedicated to Russifying the Jews, publishing works in the Hebrew language? Clearly, something was rotten in the administrative cadres of the society.²⁴

Gordon attempted to answer these charges in a long letter to Golos itself, but the newspaper refused to print his rebuttal. Incensed, he considered suing Kraevskii on the grounds of slander, but was convinced that it was better to answer the attack in print. In a short response in the St. Petersburg Stock Market News, and then at greater length in Evreiskaia biblioteka, Gordon took on Kraevskii's charges. following a tack analogous to that he had taken in answering Jacob Brafman's similar accusations several years earlier. The editor of Golos, Gordon alleged, had for some mysterious reason abandoned the ideas of equity and justice that he previously had espoused, and was now thrown into an irrational frenzy every time the word "Jew" appeared in print. This animosity resulted in gross perversions of the truth and confusion of principles-most important, in a distortion of the goals of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment. Golos and others had supposed that the Russification of the Jews and their enlightenment were synonymous, but that was not the case. On the contrary, a clear distinction had to be drawn between the two processes. No one is opposed to the Jews' adoption of the Russian tongue in the fullest and most complete manner; indeed, that process has begun to such an extent that it is today virtually impossible to find a Russian-Jewish youth who has not started to study the vernacular. But what is crucial to understand is that linguistic acculturation is not coterminous with the inner transformation of the Jews, their abandoment of degrading superstitions and outdated mores that cannot be synthesized with modernity. There are many Jews, Gordon confessed, who speak perfect Russian but maintain all the habits, observances, and beliefs of tra-

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ditional Judaism; what therefore must be done is to ensure not ony that the Jews speak, read, and think in Russian, but also that their inner life is modernized in the process. In sum, the guiding principle of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia, revealed its secretary, is: "Enlightenment leads the Jews directly to the Russian language, but Russification alone does not guarantee their enlightenment." For this reason, stipends to Russian Jews studying in Breslau or in other foreign academies are more than justified, for they are wise investments in the future of Russian Jewry as a thriving, creative enterprise. For the same reason, works in Hebrew that promote the goals of the society are salutary and indispensible.

This altercation between Gordon and Golos was a fascinating adumbration of two processes that would emerge with full force a short time later. The proponents of Jewish Enlightenment in Russia would have to come to terms not only with the segment of the Russified Jewish population disinterested in matters Jewish or in Hebrew culture, but also with the emergence of a possibly more substantial number of Jews who had realized the advantages of learning the Russian language but had not internalized the cultural dictates or reformatory goals of the Haskalah. Gordon and his colleagues were slowly awakening to the complex reality that the objects of their educational and cultural mission could be receptive to external modifications of their speech and dress while retaining many, if not most, of the religious, social, and psychological attributes of traditional Judaism. At the very least, it was becoming even clearer to Judah Leib Gordon that the inner reform of the Jews could not be separated from, and indeed had to precede, their external amelioration.

On another front, Gordon and his patrons in the St. Petersburg Jewish plutocracy had to come to grips with the embryonic appearance of a new phenomenon that would threaten their campaign for the extension of Jewish political rights in Russia. The accusations made by the editor of Golos, a former supporter of Jewish legal advance, were grounded in and symptomatic of two parallel lines of anti-Jewish invective that were only beginning to be heard in the 1870s but would gain tragic momentum in the next decades. On the one hand, the Jews were charged with fomenting and leading the revolutionary movement, based in student organizations at Western universities, that aimed at destroying the Russian state in the name of nihilism and cultural radicalism. At the same time, the Jews were condemned for insisting upon their own cultural separatism, despite their ostensible Russification. In other words, Kraevskii and many other former supporters of the Jews were beginning to argue that the original liberal goal of integrating the Jews into the Russian polity had been subverted by the Jews themselves, thus demonstrating the error of the naive original integrationist intention.

In 1873, these dual threats to the cultural and emancipatory politics of the Haskalah were not yet joined in a coherent ideological or political platform or ratified by significant external events. Judah Leib Gordon and his co-believers, therefore, could still rest assured that they were on the path to a successful revivification of the Jews and Jewish culture in Russia, with the active support of the Russian government and enlightened public opinion. To validate this belief Gordon, for one, had only to look to three significant events in his own life. First, in October 1873 the government awarded him the title of "Honorary Citizen," the highest legal status accessible to a non-noble in tsarist Russia, affording him the right of permanent

residence in the capital and throughout the empire and significant financial benefits as well.26 In other words, by the standards of the Russian autocracy, Judah Leib Gordon was now effectively an emancipated citizen of the Russian state, and he had attained this emancipation by dint not of wealth or formal academic degrees but of his cultural service to the Jews and the Crown. He was now de jure as well as de facto "a man in the streets and a Jew at home" in the sense that he envisioned the goal for all of Russian Jews. Second, Gordon personally witnessed the defeat of the forces of reaction in the Russian realm. His old enemy, Jacob Brafman, now a government censor of Hebrew books, attempted to outlaw the publication of Gordon's short stories, claiming that they were defamatory to Christianity, but was overruled by one of the most prominent Orientalists in Russia, Professor K. A. Kasovich of the University of St. Petersburg. Kasovich, a renowned expert on Sanskrit and Hebrew, had personally reviewed Gordon's work and deemed it praiseworthy and worthy of publication. Moreover, he had translated one of the stories into Russian and arranged to meet Gordon in person. Finally, equally gratifying to Gordon was the fact that The End of Happiness Is Sadness sold out almost its entire run of twenty-five hundred copies as soon as it hit the stands, and a second printing of "Two Nights and a Day at an Inn" was issued in Warsaw in an even larger edition.27

For the first time in his life, Gordon was now earning substantial royalties from his writings, which combined with his respectable salary to afford him a style of living consistent with his new-found legal status and social prominence. He was now veritably a St. Petersburg gentleman, meeting with important personages in the Russian administration, debating with editors of prominent Russian publications, and corresponding with foreign dignitaries such as Adolphe Crémieux.²⁸ His work for the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment and the community was time-consuming and often rife with frustration, but on the whole he was thoroughly pleased with himself and his life in St. Petersburg.

This self-satisfaction, not surprisingly, was not terribly stimulating to his poetic muse. In his spare moments he would return sporadically to the long poem he had started in Tel'shi on the plight of the Jewish woman, but free time was at a minimum and was soon taken over by two large translation projects that demanded a good deal of attention. First, the society decided to undertake the first Russian translation of the Pentateuch specifically addressed to Jews and conforming with Jewish exegetical traditions. Even in the Russia of Alexander II, translating the Bible into the vernacular was a very sensitive matter, and Gordon, charged with supervision of the venture, had to proceed with great caution and tact. He also undertook to translate the Book of Exodus himself, and to edit the other four books as well. The resulting Russian-Hebrew bilingual edition passed the censor's approval in late 1874 and was published in Vilna in early 1875; its preface, written by Gordon, declared that it was meant to respond to the spreading use of the Russian language in "home, school and synagogual services" and strictly followed traditional Jewish interpretations of the Scriptures.²⁹ This important landmark in the advance of a Jewish culture in the Russian language was very well received by its intended audience, selling four thousand copies in its first year.30

While Gordon was absorbed in the Bible project, he was also entrusted by the society with the supervision of another massive translation venture—that of a col-

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lection of excerpts from the Talmud and other Rabbinic sources meant to serve as an introduction to the ethical and religious teachings of Judaism. The original idea for the collection had been put forward by Professor Daniel Chwolson a decade earlier, and the material had been selected by two conservative Vilna maskilim, Sh. Y. Fin and H. L. Katzenellenbogen. Now the texts, which ran to three large tomes, had to be translated into Russian—a formidable challenge that entangled Gordon in a myriad of personal, ideological, and financial complications he did not relish. More satisfying was the scholarly work he undertook on the project, the compilation of annotations and bibliographical guides to modern Rabbinic scholarship.

This Rabbinic compendium was meant, from the start, for two different audiences. It was quite blatantly an attempt to counter the negative image of the Talmud and Rabbinic Judaism purveyed to Russian public opinion by Brafman and others; at the same time, the volume was meant to be used as a basic textbook in Judaism for Jews who had no access to the Hebrew and Aramaic original texts, and in courses in Jewish religion at Russian-language Jewish schools. After negotiations and much divisiveness among the collaborators in the project, the first volume of The Worldview of the Talmudists [Mirovozzrenie talmudistov] appeared in St. Petersburg in 1874, followed by volumes two and three in 1876.³¹

The publication of this work involved Gordon in yet another taxing public battle with Jacob Brafman. Since moving to St. Petersburg Gordon had had several unpleasant encounters with the author of The Book of the Kahal. The most recent had occurred in February 1874. In his capacity as secretary to the Jewish community, Gordon had compiled a special prayer service for the dedication of the new Jewish cemetery in the capital. Brafman, as censor of Hebrew books, refused to allow the service to be printed, since it contained a memorial prayer for the souls of non-Jews that he deemed hypocritical. Gordon met with Brafman to appeal this decision, and was successful, but he was shocked at the offer the censor advanced: if the Barons Gunzburg were disposed to be generous to him, he would use all his connections in the government and the press to advance the idea that the only solution to the plight of the Jews in Russia was their immediate dispersal throughout the entire empire-in other words, the abolition of the Pale of Settlement; if rebuffed by the barons, he would continue and intensify his attacks against the Jews. Gordon advised Brafman that the Gunzburgs would never agree to this sort of blackmail, but agreed to relay the offer to them. As he had predicted, nothing ever came of the matter.32

However, when the last volumes of *The Worldview of the Talmudists* appeared in print, Brafman lashed out in a long, negative review in *Golos*, entitled "The Jewish Jesuits." The compilation put out by the "Brotherhood for the Spread of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia," as he called the society in consonance with his general charge that Jewish fraternal and communal organizations were conspiring to take over the world, deliberately misrepresents its purposes as well as the authorities it cites and the general tenor of Judaism. Masquerading as a textbook aimed at Jews, it is in fact meant to fool naive Christians into believing that Jewish teachings are the opposite of what they truly are. Thus, rather than promoting tolerance among faiths and loyalty to Gentile authorities, as the volumes under review maintain, Judaism actually mandates hatred and exploitation of the non-Jew, avoidance of secular courts, and a separatist political stance based on the

hope of the restoration of a Jewish kingdom in Palestine. This goal is financed and orchestrated by the worldwide Jewish conspiracy, of which every Jewish community and organization is a part. The only difference between the traditional Jews and the modernists is the means by which they hope to achieve their final victory over the nations of the earth: the Talmudists await miraculous intervention on the part of the Almighty in the person of the Messiah, while the so-called enlighteners argue that the return to Zion and the subjugation of the Gentiles must come about by natural means, and especially through education. The best proof of the latter stance, Brafman maintained, was an article written by none other than the secretary of the notorious Brotherhood of Enlightenment himself, Mr. Gordon. In the Viennese journal Ha-Shahar, Brafman revealed to his readers, Gordon had published a manifesto that called on Russian Jews to train themselves as soldiers, engineers, physicians, and the like, to prepare themselves for the ultimate battle with the Gentiles and the restitution of Jewish political independence in Palestine. Obviously, Brafman continued, the very words uttered on this subject by the secretary of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment prove that "whatever gloss a Jew puts on [the messianic] doctrine, he can in no way ever consider himself a permanent citizen of the country in which he lives, but merely an exile awaiting the blast of the trumpet heralding liberation from that yoke and the renewal of the Jewish monarchy."33

This basic alienation from the Russian government and the Russian people is disguised by the utterly dishonest *The Worldview of the Talmudists*, and by the brotherhood, which paid for its compilation as well as the distribution of secretive books and brochures in Hebrew dedicated to its disloyal purposes. All this demonstrates once more that the goal of integrating the Jews into Russian society is merely a dangerous and duplicitous charade, an effort on the part of Russian Jewry, armed with enormous financial resources, to weaken and ultimately to destroy Russia, as the avant-garde of a worldwide movement whose basic credo is "one for all and all for one." ³⁴

Gordon and the society could not let this attack pass in silence. Two months after its appearance, Gordon responded on the pages of Golos with a lengthy article originally entitled "Literary Buffoonery," but changed to "The Worldview of the Talmudists" at the insistence of the editor.35 Gordon's retort was very similar to his first polemic with Brafman almost a decade earlier. Everyone is familiar with Brafman's animosity to the Jews and his consistent and seemingly deliberate misrepresentation of Judaic teachings and texts. No amount of public display of his massive errors and lies seems to dissuade Mr. Brafman from continuing to repeat his phony claims and to cite his mistranslated texts. The work that elicited his calumnies this time is a truly innocent work, a straightforward attempt to present in the Russian tongue a succinct handbook to the ethical and moral teachings of Jewish sages through the ages. Such a work in the Russian language is aimed primarily at the growing population of "moderate-conservative" Russian Jews who "seek their salvation in a prudent combination of the national-Jewish with the universal."36 They want to raise their children both in the Russian language and in the Jewish faith and national heritage, and recognize that works such as The Worldview of the Talmudists are necessary and useful. In addition, it might very well be that some traditional rabbis are beginning to recognize the utility of introducing the

Russian language into their classrooms, and they, too, will find the ethics textbook and the Pentateuch translation sponsored by the society helpful tools in the dissemination of Russian literacy among their charges. In addition, many non-Jews will learn a good deal about their Jewish neighbors from this work, and it is recommended to them as well. Clearly, enemies of the Jews such as Brafman oppose all these goals and seek to discredit the veracity and honesty of the compendium. In so doing, as usual he merely demonstrates his astonishing ignorance of the Hebrew language and the Talmud and his inability even to copy texts without grievous mistakes and outrageous miscitations. There is no denying the fact that the Talmud and Rabbinic literature contain much material that cannot be accepted as valid in the modern world, or that some of the medieval Jewish philosophers cited in the collection may have expressed some sentiments foreign to nineteenth-century notions of religious pluralism. But the goal of The Worldview of the Talmudists and the other publications of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment is precisely to instruct the Jews in differentiating between the relevant and irrelevant aspects of their spiritual legacy, to direct them to the treasure houses of true religious wisdom contained in the Talmud, the Midrash, and later Rabbinic literature. Any fair-minded and enlightened reader will learn from this work and others like it that those aspects of traditional Judaism that are offensive to humanitarian sensibilities and unacceptable in the modern world were in all cases simply the result of the persecutions to which the Jews were subjected through the millennia. To restore Judaism and the Jews to their rich and noble heritage is possible in the modern world, even if Brafman and his ilk oppose this very effort, for a reformed and purified Judaism is more destructive of their pefarious intentions than is traditional Judaism as practiced in the Pale. Therefore, scoundrels like Brafman must attack works such as The Worldview of the Talmudists and distort the words of the great teachers of the Jewish people through the ages.

Touching on the personal affront contained in Brafman's piece, Gordon proposed that while ancient authors cannot rise to their own defense against their vicious manipulation, living authors can do so, even though it is distasteful even to appear to grant credence to lies by responding to them with a statement of one's own belief. Thus, Gordon confessed, he is compelled to refute Brafman's ingenious attempts to fool his readers into thinking that everywhere Jews are huddling together planning an imminent advance on the Holy Land and a coronation of a Davidic successor on his throne, that even in St. Petersburg there exists an organization dedicated to assisting Jews in preparation for their political restoration. In support of this preposterous fantasy, Brafman cites a purported epistle to the Jews written by the secretary of the society. The words that Brafman reproduces from the pages of *Ha-Shahar* were indeed penned by their author, Gordon explained, but they must be understood in their proper context, as a snippet from a long monograph attacking the rabbis and calling for religious reform in Russian Jewry.

The article cited by Brasman, therefore, was in no way a manifesto to the Jews actually to plan an active return to the Holy Land, but was a polemical device aimed at resulting the superannuated messianic belief of the traditional rabbis:

The existence among the Jews of an article of faith in the coming of the Messiah, deemed by Brafman for greater effect as a political doctrine, is hardly news to anyone,

and can scarcely be claimed as a discovery by him. Who does not know that the Jews still await their redemption? But how do right-thinking Jews regard that belief? Do they hope for their redemption by means of the universal recognition of their human rights, or do they really portray the messianic era in the forms alleged by Mr. Brafman? An answer to this question is superfluous.³⁷

Even Brafman knows that the Reform Jews in Germany have dispensed with the messianic faith; but even in its traditional form, the Jewish belief in the restitution of the Jerusalem monarchy can frighten only sick imaginations or serve as the subject of cunning rogues; people with healthy minds or serious dispositions look at this matter differently. When, for example, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Polish patriots began to be hounded by the police for singing their national hymns and prayers, they protested that the Jews were allowed to bemoan the destruction of Jerusalem and to pray every day for its reconstruction; they were advised that when they would find themselves in the same situation as the Jews, they too would be permitted such prayers and sentiments.

Thus, Gordon concluded,

We do not regard Mr. Brafman as naive enough to believe in a danger facing the Ottoman Empire on the part of the Jews. Meanwhile, his alarmist article is written in such a serious tone that it cannot be taken seriously and cannot alarm any right-thinking person.³⁸

Debates over such matters are merely diversionary tactics employed by Brafman to lead his readers astray, to confuse their understanding of the situation of Russian Jews and to confound the workings of the society and all intelligent men and women who realize that only through education and enlightenment can the Jews be redeemed.

This response scarcely convinced Brafman, who dashed off to Golos vet another scabrous attack on Gordon, the society, and the whole notion of enlightening the benighted Jews. 39 More important than the immediate effect of this debate, however, is its further revelation of Judah Leib Gordon's views on a subject that in the mid-1870s, was at best marginal to the overall concerns of the Jewish intelligentsia in Russia, but would soon overwhelm all other issues. As Gordon explained, in no way had he seriously advocated that the time had come for the Jews of Russia to partake in or lead their ultimate redemption in Palestine. Quite to the contrary, he insisted that it was utterly impossible for the Jews to be liberated in any sense of the word until they had reformed themselves in line with the dictates of the Haskalah. Only after the Jews were transformed, only after the Jews of Russia had been elevated to the level of the German Jews, without replicating their unfortunate errors, could the liberation of the Jews ensue. That liberation was synonymous with the nations of the earth granting the Jews all their human rights, including the right to return to Zion, for that return, according to Gordon, was a necessary part of the eventual redemption of the Jews, which would result not from miraculous intervention on the part of God but from the actions of the Jews themselves. Until such time, however, the notion that a return to Palestine was imminent was simply silly, and the idea that the Ottoman Empire need fear the Society for the Promotion of

The public pronouncement on the question of the return of the Jews to Zion reinforced sentiments that Gordon had expressed only a few months earlier in a private letter to a friend. Hearing that the Anglo-Jewish community was organizing support for Jewish colonization in Palestine as a way to honor Sir Moses Montefiore, Gordon confessed that in his fondest fantasies he had always dreamed of the Land of Israel and the return of the Jews to their homeland, and thus was excited by the news hailing from London, which undoubtedly would elicit the ire of the Orthodox. The establishment of Jewish colonies in Palestine was not only a fitting tribute to Montefiore but also was an important stepping-stone to the ultimate redemption of the Jewish people as a whole. If his dream could be realized before his death, he would become another man: he would doff his European cloak and drape himself in a haircoat and wander over the hills and dales of Judea proclaiming the advent of redemption. In reality, however, he doubted that this could ever come to pass, given the fact that the Jewish community of Palestine was nothing more than a nest of useless parasites, the arch-personifications of the evils of traditional Judaism. The efforts of the modern colonists, therefore, were laudable in theory but compromised in practice:

To reach this end, however, we must start from a different source, we must purify the Land and exile from its midst all the Jews currently living there, so that not a trace of them remains; we must sweep out with a new broom all the vile spiderwebs that these myriapods have spun, and bring a fresh spirit to the Land, whose air now reeks with the stench of the study-houses, their filth and ignorance. If all this is not done, all our labors will be in vain and our efforts will yield nought.⁴⁰

In its original rhetorical context, this call for the expulsion of the traditional Jewish population of Palestine—what came to be known as the Old Yishuv—as a prerequisite to any new Jewish settlement may well have sounded less vitriolic than it does today. But time and time again, in private and in public, Gordon would repeat his basic contention that any colonization by Jews of the Land of Israel that is not preceded by a thoroughgoing religious reform was doomed to fail (just as any Russification of the Jews not preceded by internal reform was insufficient and dangerous). As the agitation over emigration to Zion became more and more pressing in the coming years, both the "Palestinophiles" and their opponents tried to enlist Gordon in their causes, but to no avail. Even half a century after his death, an unsuccessful attempt was made to attribute to him an anonymous German pamphlet, published in 1877, calling for a Jewish state in Palestine under British aggis a position that in no way he could have endorsed.⁴¹ Convinced as he was in the absolute truth of his basic proposition, Gordon would never stray from the belief that the enlightenment of the Jews must precede their physical, political, or even psychological liberation. This conviction would set Gordon in direct opposition to some of his closest friends and would occasion enormous controversy in Russian-Jewish public life. But Gordon would not be moved.

The battle with Brafman took a much less onerous psychic toll on Gordon than the inner Jewish fights that would presently ensue, but in its aftermath Gordon still felt rather debilitated, both physically and emotionally. Especially egregious wa the fact that the fracas had come at a time when he was overworked with his lates duty for the Jewish community of St. Petersburg—working up statutes by which the communal agencies could be run along efficient, modern lines. By the summe of 1876 Gordon was utterly exhausted, and his doctors advised him to take th most common remedy of the age, a cure at one of the German spas. Gordon had never stepped foot on foreign soil before and enthusiastically accepted his physicians' recommendation, setting forth for the famous baths at Marienbad. On th way, he spent three days in Berlin, a visit he described with great panache som vears later in a marvelous memoir entitled "One Hour of Pleasure." In this piece he recalled only half-sarcastically that he was not very impressed with the norma tourist attractions of the Prussian capital: the emperor's residence paled in com parison with the Winter Palace; the government buildings fell far short of the gran deur and sweep of their counterparts along the Neva. But what most interested th visitor from the north was not these sites but the landmarks of the birthplace o modern Judaism. He wanted to extract from the Berlin Jewish community lesson that could help his work at home. He therefore called on the headquarters of Jewisl Berlin, visited the various synagogues and temples representing the new-fangle versions of Judaism he had only read about beforehand, and tracked down the tomb of his hero, Moses Mendlessohn, in the Berlin Jewish cemetery. These visit merely depressed him, however, and provided him with no model easily exportable to the Russian capital. On the one hand, he was much impressed with the way it which the Jewish community of Berlin was run, but realized that its elaborate and well-oiled machine was predicated on the compulsory tax that the government per mitted the Jewish community to impose on its members. The Russian authorities to be sure, would never adopt such a system. On the other hand, he was frankli put off by the temple services he sampled, as indicative of an enfeebled Judaisn striving desperately for some coherence, but in a way thankfully not transportable to Russia.

Only in one Berlin locale did Gordon eventually find the satisfaction that h sought, in the home of the greatest living Jewish scholar, the founder of the Wis senschaft des Judentums, (Leopold Zunz) Not that the encounter with Zunoccurred without initial difficulties. As Gordon humorously described the event one Saturday afternoon he decided to call upon the famous scholar and located hi home. At the front door he was greeted by a rather somber and intimidating woman (who turned out to be Zunz's niece) who would not allow the stranger inside the house. Gordon all but barged through the door and found himself face to face with a wizened old man. Realizing that he could just as easily be mistaken for a thief Gordon calmed down and asked in polite tones if Dr. Zunz was at home. To hi surprise, the tiny ancient introduced himself as Leopold Zunz and asked who, pray tell, was the visitor? Gordon replied that he was a Hebrew writer from the East here to pay his respects to the great scholar; now that he had laid eyes on the objec of his search, he could leave in peace. Zunz invited him to sit down and asked hi name. After being informed that his Russian guest was Judah Leib Gordon, the old man rubbed his forehead, as if trying to summon up lost memories. "Yes, yes, know the name." Zunz replied. "You are a writer; give me a moment to recollec what you have written." Gordon helped his host out with the titles of his books

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but thought to himself that had he been a medieval Hebrew poet, Zunz undoubtedly would have known all of his poems by heart; since he was a modern, though, the world's greatest expert on Hebrew poetry could not remember one of his lines.⁴³

This is the basis for what has become undoubtedly the best-known anecdote about Judah Leib Gordon, the only story about him to be enshrined in the pantheon of Jewish humor. The point of the oft-retold story—which often ends with Zunz asking the Hebrew poet, "When did you live?"—is ostensibly to demonstrate the radically divergent paths of Jewish history on either side of the Oder River: on the one hand, the East European Jew, nationalist, Hebraist, vital, if a bit uncouth and more than a little brash; on the other hand, the all-too-sober, indeed virtually desiccated German-Jewish professor, pedantic, unimaginative, antiquarian. The only problem with this reading of the meeting between Gordon and Zunz is that it is subverted by Gordon himself in the rest of the story, which is never cited. After Gordon started to list his books for Zunz, the old scholar interrupted him:

Of course, of course, I remember now; thank you for helping to prod my memory. Here is proof that I know exactly who you are and what you have written: you are the one who took issue not long ago with Moritz Sch[teinschneider] for making use of your work without your permission. And you regularly submit reports to the Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums, do you not?⁴⁴

Gordon was more than pleased that Zunz now recalled exactly who he was, but was made uncomforable by the older man's obvious embarrassment at his temporary inability to place his guest's name. After this shaky beginning, however, the rest of the afternoon went very smoothly, with Gordon meeting the famous Professor Lazarus of Berlin University and his wife and having an entertaining and gratifying discussion of several matters, including the rude behavior of East European Jewish migrants to Berlin. Gordon half-seriously tried to defend the behavior of the refugees from the East, claiming that he, too, had behaved roughly when coming to Zunz's door. Indeed, in response to this behavior the old professor had looked fearfully at the visitor's hands, as if expecting to see a weapon in them. To the shared laughter of the assembled company, Gordon learned what actually had happened: Zunz and his niece Bertha were simply afraid that here was yet another young writer trying to peddle his wares, and that is why they checked to see if he came with empty hands.

In the end, the true lesson that Gordon extracted from his afternoon with Zunz was very far from the moral of the famous anecdote—that German Jewry was irrelevant and inappropriate as a model for Russian Jewry. Rather, as Gordon himself reflected in yet another part of the story never cited:

My intention is not to criticize [the accomplishments of the German Reformers] but only to say that they do not provide me with the complete satisfaction that I seek.... In Russia our reformers must model ourselves on our German predecessors, but not follow them blindly, for their reforms are themselves in need of reform.⁴⁵

With this conclusion firmly fixed in his mind, Gordon continued on to Marienbad, where he spent the rest of the summer. Here, away from the burdens of the society, the St. Petersburg community, and his family, he not only regained his

strength but returned with a clear mind to the major poetic project he had begin Tel'shi and had pursued with more vigor in the last several months. For the re of the summer in Marienbad, he worked doggedly to complete what he—and ho of later readers—would come to regard as his best poem, the mock epic "T Tip of the Yud" [Kozo shel yud].46

The opening lines of this passionate threnody on the plight of the Jewi woman sung out its stark but bold moral:

Jewish woman, who knows your life? You come in the darkness and never see the light, Your woes and your joys, your hopes and desires, Are born within you and die unfulfilled; Daughters of other peoples and tribes Enjoy some pleasure and comfort in this life But the fate of the Jewess is eternal servitude.⁴⁷

The next ten stanzas expand on the depth of this degradation in lines clear an precise and melodiously scanned, despite their bitter thrust. Though graced wit intelligence and taste, the Jewish woman is deliberately kept from learning, the rat bis ruling that "teaching a girl Torah is like teaching her folly," that her voice an hair incite lechery, that she must be restrained like an enemy at bay. She is not taught Hebrew, but that is all to the good, for the doors of the synagogue are locke in her face and inside, every day, the prayer "Blessed be the Lord who has not mad a woman" is intoned. She is held to be no better than a slave, an instrument for birthing and milking. No sooner does she come of age than she is sold to the higher bidder, enchained to a man not worthy of her or capable of sustaining her or eve himself. When he fails, as he must, he simply abandons her to rot, as he abscond in search of another senseless dream.

This brazen beginning was deliberately poised to shock the reader and focus hi attention. As usual, to twist his knife deeper into the wound, Gordon invoked an inverted sacred biblical images. For example, to make his point that women ar married off without consideration of their feelings and that true love itself is con demned by the culture, he cited the famous biblical phrase "Should our sister b treated like a whore?"—the words used by the sons of Jacob to justify their slaugh ter of the rapists of their sister Dinah.⁴⁸

The prolegomenon concluded, the sad but simple story unfolds. Bat-shu'a is a wise and virtuous Jewish beauty engaged at the age of fifteen to Hillel, an unkemp Talmud whiz sent off to the Volozhin yeshivah. Two years later they marry, to the envy of the town's maidens but to the bride's secret despair. As the groom's foo smashes the glass in remembrance of the razing of the Temple, the narrator, prive to the new bride's woes, interjects: "For thousands of years we recall the destruction of a city/ But to the destruction of the people we harden our hearts." The couple immediately have children, but when Hillel's subsidy from his father-in-law runs out, he is incapable of supporting his family, being entirely ignorant of anything but the sacred folios. He decides to seek his fortune abroad, where gold is said to pave the streets. Left with no support, Bat-shu'a sells off her jewels and opens a small store in order to feed her children. From dawn to dusk, year in, year out, she toils to earn her keep, since Hillel is heard from no more. Mocked as a presumetive

'agunah—a grass widow who can marry no more—she cries herself to sleep every night. But her tears will soon be stilled, the narrator assures her and his readers, for

The cries of the destitute are not whistles in the breeze, There is an all-hearing ear and imminent salvation. If men of evil heart, folly and deceit Fill the earth with perversity and pain, God's eye shields His creatures and His mercy His works, He will bring justice and charity to the oppressed. Be strong, then, Bat-shu'a, have hope, pure soul, For the Lord has preceded your affliction with its cure. 50

The sensitive reader of Gordon's previous epics might well have marked these words as ominous, for other heroines of his verse—Martha in "Between the Lions' Teeth" and Penina of "In the Depths of the Sea"—had invoked the same belief in an "all-hearing ear" to tragic results.

The deus ex machina soon arrives on the scene, in the person of Fabi, an enlightened Jew working as a supervisor on the railway lines now penetrating the Pale (and, not incidentally, causing Bat-shu'a's father, a keeper of a post-station, to lose his income and die in poverty). Fabi, the perfect symbol of the modern age, discovers Bat-shu'a's plight and secretly falls in love with her. Apprised that Hillel may be living in Liverpool, he contacts a friend in that city who tracks down the recalcitrant husband and extracts from him a promise that he will send his wife a proper bill of divorce in exchange for a substantial payoff. Without letting on to Bat-shu'a that her liberty is in the offing, Fabi dispatches the requisite fee to Liverpool, and Hillel keeps his word, sending his wife a divorce decree before setting off on an ocean voyage to America. Back home, Fabi exuberantly reveals his scheme and his emotions to his beloved, who responds in kind, falling into his arms.

As the entranced lovers await the arrival of the messenger from Liverpool, they read of the sinking of the ship bearing Hillel; saddened, they nonetheless keep on dreaming of their new life in St. Petersburg, amid luxury and comfort. Finally, the writ of divorce arrives at the rabbi's house, and all rejoice to hear that soon Batshu'a will be free. But that was not to be, for now the narrator recants his previous words of pious hope:

What is man's hope, to what avail
If he is assailed by the floods of evil? . . .
Though God's eye and His mercy shield his creations
And this earth was formed with wisdom and charity,
Alas, evil men full of folly and deceit
Overwhelm His mercy and fill His world with pain.
O, woe to you, Bat-shu'a, you soul so pure,
The doctors of iniquity have preceded the cure with an affliction.⁵¹

The tragic, if avertible and nonsensical, denouement crashes forth. When the local rabbi examines the bill of divorce, he discovers that Hillel's name is spelled without the letter yud. His assistants assure him that this is the correct rendering

of the name, but he insists that a grievous error has been made and that the wind divorce is therefore null and void. Since Hillel is dead and cannot correct the scribal error, his wife can never marry another man. Bat-shu'a hears of her fate ar faints dead away. For months she lies sick, and her business disintegrates. Whe she recovers, she cannot carry on her trade. Fabi, ever the noble gentleman, offe to support her even though they can never marry, but she refuses, claiming the God obviously willed this to be, and she cannot accept charity from a stranger. The narrator turns to God and complains: You know the suffering of all your creature why do you keep silent and hide your face? In Your name, the priests of folly lighting that consume innocent souls; in Your name, they destroy lives because of "tip of the yud!" ⁵²

Rebuffed and alone, Fabi goes off, never to be heard from again, and Bat-shu is soon forgotten. When the train line is completed, amid the crowd of poor Jewis women hawking food to the travelers can be found a bent old hag, grey before he time, clutching two young children to her breast. This, of course, is poor Bat-shu who refuses to blame her God for her misfortune—it is the "tip of a yud" that felle her.

Published in Vienna only a few months after it was completed, "The Tip of th Yud" elicited storms of controversy and of praise from the moment of its appearance. For the next century, virtually without cease, critics of countless points of view have debated and analyzed this poem, with much of the fuss centering of questions of accuracy. Did Jewish law indeed require the voiding of the divorce Was the rabbi a believable figure? Was his supposed model, Zekhariah Joseph Ster of Shavli, such an obscurantist or, in fact, a more lenient jurist? Could such a thin ever have happened? Would a married Jewish woman kiss her suitor before he divorce? In sum, in both his accusations and his characterizations, was Judah Lei Gordon being fair and accurate?⁵³

Only a very small number of critics have pointed out the irrelevance of thes questions to Gordon's purposes in writing "The Tip of the Yud." The poem was satire, not a legal brief. As befits the satirist, Gordon quite consciously exaggerated both the positive and the negative characters in his tale and took substantial lib erties with the "truth," as his critics would later reconstruct it. Whether or not the rabbi ought in real life to have nullified the divorce clearly had no bearing on Gordon's depiction of the climactic event, which in its very language was meant to lampoon reality, not to replicate it. Thus, in a caustic but highly amusing rhymec couplet, Gordon described the outrageous rabbi holding fast to his position like ar 'ez shosul—the Psalmist's "tree planted besides streams of water," the simile to the godly man—crying out, "Ha-get posul" ("the divorce is invalid!"). As the poet well knew, no reader of this coupler imbued with a sense of humor could restrain a smile at such a rhyming apposition, and therefore the point would be made regardless of the reader's ideological stance.

In "The Tip of the Yud" Gordon strove not to depict a typical, or even likely, scene in Russian-Jewish life, but to satirize the treatment of women in traditional Jewish society in order to kill three birds with one stone: to write a great poem, to demonstrate once more what he took to be the ignorance and obscurantism of the Russian rabbis, and, for the first time in verse, to argue for the emancipation of the Jewish woman. The latter cause was dear to his heart, as had been apparent for

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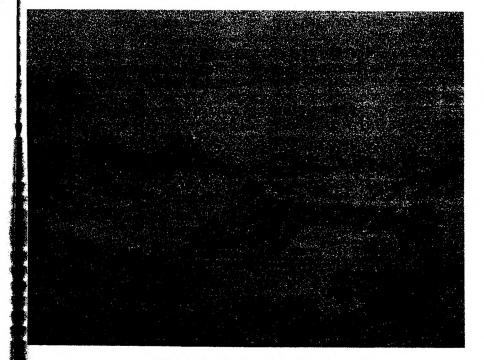
	Chronology of Abramovitsh's Life		
1836	Born in Kapolia (Kopyl), Minsk Province (date un-	1868	Published Fathers and Children (Ha-`avot ve-ha- hanim) in Hebrew.
	certain).	1869	Published The Tax (Di takse) and Fishke the Lame
1850–52	Studied in yeshivot in Timkovitz (Timkovichi), Slutsk, and Vilna (Vilnius).		(Fishke der krumer); moved from Berditchev to Zhitomir, where he studied at the Rabbinical
ca. 1853	Lived with his mother and stepfather in Melnik (Mielnik); traveled with Avreml Khromoy (the		Institute but was refused ordination because of a radical sermon he delivered.
	Lame) through Volin (Volhynia) and Podolia to	1872	Edited the third volume of the Book of Natural
	Komenitz (Kamenets-Podolsk); became acquainted	10/2	History in Hebrew translation.
	with Avraham-Ber Gottlober, whose daughters	1873	Published The Nag (or The Mare; Di klyatshe) in
	taught him Russian and German.	107.5	Yiddish.
ca. 1854-55	Married and divorced his first wife.	1878	Published Travels of Benjamin the Third (Kitser
1856	Passed examinations to become a teacher in		masoes Binyomin hashlishi).
	Komenitz.	1879	Published the expanded second edition of The Little Man
1857	First published in Hebrew: "A Letter on Education" ("Mikhtav 'al dvar ha-chinukh").	1881	Moved to Odessa, where he became Director of the Jewish school (Talmud Torah), a position he
1858	Moved to Berditchev (Berdichev) and married his second wife, Pessie Levin.		retained until the end of his life (except 1906–8); pogroms after the assassination of Alexander II
1860	Published a collection of essays in Hebrew, The		shook his confidence in reform.
	Judgment of Peace (or The Judgment of Shalom, Mishpat shalom).	ca. 1882	Suffered from a long period of depression and literary inactivity. His daughter Rashel died at the
1862	Published his first Hebrew story, Learn to Do Well (Limdu heitev), and edited the first volume of his Hebrew edition of the Book of Natural History		age of 19; his son Meir (Mikhail), a Russian- language poet, was exiled for political activities and later converted to Christianity.
	(Sefer toldot ha-teva'), based on a German work by Harald Othmar Lenz.	1884	Published <i>The Tax</i> (1869) in Russian translation; celebrated his first 25 years of literary activity;
1864-65	Serialized his first Yiddish novel, The Little Man (Dos kleyne mentshele), in Kol mevasser, the Yid-		honored in a biographical essay by L. Binshtok ir the Russian-Jewish journal <i>Voskbod</i> .
	dish supplement to Alexander Tsederboym's Hebrew newspaper Ha-melitz.	1885	Travels of Benjamin the Third (1878) published in Polish translation.
1865	Published The Magic Ring (Dos vintshfingerl).	1886	The Nag (1873) published in Polish translation and
1866	Published his second collection of Hebrew essays,		then suppressed by the censors.
	The Well of Judgment ('Ein mishpat), and edited the second volume of the Book of Natural History in Hebrew translation.	1886–87	Returned to writing Hebrew fiction with "In the Secret Place of Thunder" ("Be-seter ra'am"; title from Psalms 81:8).
1867	Published an expanded Russian version of his Hebrew work Learn to Do Well as Fathers and	1888	Published expanded Yiddish versions of Fishke the Lame and The Magic Ring.
	Children, alluding to Turgenev's 1862 work bearing the same name.	1889	Published the expanded Yiddish version of <i>The Nag</i> and printed an autobiographical essay in Hebrew

some time. Both in Shavli and in Tel'shi he had founded schools for Jewish girls and worked strenuously for their success; in order to secure a governess for his own daughters, to ensure their proper education, he combed through Russia and expended substantial sums; at the society he argued for support of female students. To the Hebrew poetess Miriam Markel-Mazessohn (to whom he would dedicate "The Tip of the Yud") he revealed his firm belief that the essential equality of men and women is obvious and clear-cut: "in the human body there is a difference in gender, but men and women share the same spirit."56 Soon thereafter, he gleefully welcomed the news that the U.S. Congress had declared that the difference between the sexes did not affect the brain or intelligence—hadn't he himself written the same?⁵⁷ Interestingly, to the poetess, Gordon confessed that he did not really believe in the claims he had made in the opening lines of "The Tip of the Yud." Truly insidious notions about women had never been accepted among the Jews, as opposed to other groups; Jewish women had never been treated as poorly as others, never placed in harems and isolated from the real world. But whatever his private, rational thoughts on the subject, Gordon believed that satire was the most effective medium for cultural or political change. Write serious articles and treatises that call for reforms in Jewish life, he wrote to one of his publishers, and you will be ignored. But

Proprie

how mighty is the power of satire, which causes those asleep to awake, the mute to speak out, and mountains to move.... Satirize your enemies, poke fun at them and their flesh, and they will suddenly arise and lunge at you em masse. I have seen this myself; I am speaking here from experience.⁵⁸

Judah Leib Gordon believed that "The Tip of the Yud" was his most successful poem, both in its aesthetic and linguistic accomplishments and in its ability to stir his opponents as well as his sympathizers to consider the plight of the Jewish woman. While the artistic merit of the poem can, of course, be disputed, there is no denying the fact that "The Tip of the Yud" did more than any other work of literature in any tongue to force the question of the treatment of women to the forefront of the debate over the transformation of Jewish society in the modern age.



Vilna in 1830. Lithograph by Karol Raczynski (Columbia University Library)

Serkele

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more incompetent than the next! Oh, oh, I feel faint! If I weren't so old and broken down. The whole damn day, the maid sits with that troublemaker, that disaster, her darling little Hinde, and helps her carry out her nasty little tricks! Oh, wait, you just wait until my Moyshe gets home, oh, oh, I feel faint!

Chaim. Most gracious madam, please! Don't get angry. Chava's done nothing, I assure you...

Serkele. (Interrupting, slyly.) Maybe the two of you are in cahoots! Who's the guilty one here, me? Oy, if I could live long enough to get rid of all of you, then maybe I wouldn't feel so faint.

Chaim. Just don't be angry with me, that's all, my gracious madam! From now on, I'm going to follow you in everything, even through fire, just don't get mad at me!

SERKELE. Oh, you've become so sly! You think I'm not going to be angry? How could someone not be angry? What sort of excuse do you think I'm going to give to my Moyshe, ha?

CHAIM. Ah, the master won't notice a thing. He comes in and out of here day in and day out with his head in the clouds, lost in thought.

Serkele. (Grilling him.) What are you saying? He's going around thinking? What does he have to think about? What? What's he thinking, huh?

CHAIM. Do I know what he thinks? What could it possibly have to do with me? I'm merely a humble servant. What do I care what the master thinks?

Serkele. Well, if you had dared to investigate what the master is thinking of, I would have sent you packing. And the way I found Chava behind the door a while ago—I wouldn't want to be in your place, that's for sure.

CHAIM. Ah, my dear madam! I'm telling you, Chava being behind the door—she must have been looking for me.

Serkele. And an idiot like you, you're such a find? Just pay attention—what was I going to tell you? Oy, oy, I feel faint—yes, look—I mentioned it myself—pop over to Redlekh's and tell him I would be ever so grateful if he were to call on me this evening in my bedchamber, because I am simply falling to pieces. I used to send for a different doctor, but he simply didn't understand my nature . . . oy, oy, I feel faint! But listen up, pay attention, make sure you don't let the walking disaster know—you know who I'm talking about, right?

CHAIM. Oy, oy, oy! If I could only guess! You must mean the master, certainly?

Serkele. Go on! You should be ashamed of yourself! (She says to herself quietly.) The fool has a bit of sense in him—that was pretty sly... (Louder, to Chaim.) Don't you know I mean Hinde? Always have to correct him, the idiot. Well, go on already, go—someone's coming!

good man, after all, a smart man, a fine man... If only someone said half as many nice things about me, Chava would be singing quite a different tune... What's in that head of hers, there's no figuring out, that's for sure . . . (Stands in front of the large mirror.) After all, I'm no little boy—there's already some gray in my beard. Well, and if I'm a little bit pockmarked, what of it? Hm? At night all cats are black . . . (Takes another look in the mirror.) I just wish I knew what sort of expression I could use that she'd really go for! Like this? Nah. Maybe this? Ah, feh! It makes me look all bitter and nasty. Oh ho! This? Doesn't do a thing for me. (Chava enters through the stageright door very quietly, watching Chaim make faces in the mirror. He does not turn around, but continues speaking to her image in the mirror.) Chava my dear! I'm burning up with love for you-why don't you love me back? Just take a look at me, I'm not hideous, that's for sure. You're just being stubborn. And look! (Jingles the coins in his hand.) I've got money, too! (Chava laughs loudly and runs off. Chaim runs after her reflection in the mirror, running into it and knocking himself backward onto the ground, breaking the mirror and scattering his coins.)

Scene 2

Serkele. Oy vey iz mirl What happened? What happened? Leave for one minute . . . (She clutches herself.) Oy! I don't even have the strength to scream this way. Have you gone mad? What have you done? My good mirror! May my very worst nightmares come true and happen to you, you thief! You fiend! A plague on you—oh, oh, I feel faint! The boy is going to be the death of me! The little brat spends all day and all night ogling himself. At least if he were good looking it wouldn't bother me so much, but such an eyesore? . . . Oh, wait, you just wait 'til my husband comes home, my Moyshe's going to give you what's coming to you! God knows that I don't have the strength, now that people like you have taken my health away. Oh, oh, I feel faint!

CHAIM. (Slowly begins to gather the coins and the shards of the mirror together and quietly says to himself): Just my luck that Mrs. High-and-Mighty here should come in right after this disaster. (More loudly, he whines.) Oh, my head! My aching head! I've practically killed myself!

Serkele. If only you had finished the job! What business did you have with the mirror anyway?

CHAIM. Oh! The mirror? That mirror? I just wanted to give it a little bit of the old spit and polish, that was all! And in my great hurry, I fell. . . . I almost killed myself!

Serkele. Were you too sick to call Chava for help? What else does she have to do with her time, that impertinent bitch? It's ridiculous! One

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Serkele

Scene 3

Reb Gavriel. Good morning, my dear Serke! How are things going with you? My word, you do look wonderful today, knock on wood. But what is this? Why aren't you wearing your kerchief today?

Serkele. (Gracefully.) Oh, I look so wonderful—go on, just go on! It's true, if I could just return to my old self, that would be something very different, but now—alas—where is the old Serkele I used to know? Ha, ha! The radiant Serkele that every man used to die for—no more. Oy, I feel faint! Ha, ha, ha, I remember how I put on my very first veil as if it were yesterday, and when I was led into the shul—what a tumult there was then! Young and old alike followed me with wide eyes—you should have heard, the richest men in town were saying to each other, "There goes that beautiful Serke, that beautiful Serke"—but how do I look now? The day grows cold, and I grow old...

REB GAVRIEL. Eh... what's the matter today, then? You should only be healthy! (*To himself.*) When is it ever anything else with her? (*Aloud, to Serkele.*) So why aren't you wearing your kerchief today?

Serkele. What, don't you know? Today marks four years, to the very day, that my golden, beautiful, one and only brother died abroad. Today—alas—is my dear Dovid's yortsayt³...

REB GAVRIEL. Well, does a weak and feeble person like yourself really need all this crying? You've shed enough tears over this news. What more do you want?

Serkele. Believe me, my dear Reb Gavriel, I have cried, wept, wailed; I thought that I would never be able to survive since this black, bitter, evil news had sapped the last bit of strength from these old bones—oy, I feel faint! It's no small thing ever to lose a brother, but what a brother! Such a pure soul! Such an educated man! Such a saint! (She wipes her eyes and cries some more.)

Reb Gavriel. Ah, Serkele! Feh, you should be ashamed of yourself. You're crying? What did you just say to me? A wise woman like you should cry? You should be ashamed of yourself... Nu, enough... stop it, I can't bear to see you crying.

Serkele. (Cries.) Oy, oy, I feel faint! If only he had left a son to say kaddish for him—at least that would have comforted me. My Moyshe, God protect him, says kaddish for him every year.

REB GAVRIEL. And won't Hinde turn out to be a decent person?

Serkele. Not even close. She's trouble, a disaster, and who knows what else—it's just a shame, a scandal. All she knows how to do is talk, talk, talk... Believe me, if he—may he intercede for us, God rest his soul—were to stand before us right this minute and look at the jewel of a daughter he left behind, he would, I swear, drop dead a second time from sorrow.

REB GAVRIEL. Well, that's news! She sounds truly awful. Together with Freyde-Alte, this must be too much trouble for you to handle...

Serkele. Excuse me one minute, what are you doing comparing that troublemaker, that nuisance, to my dear Alte? My goodness gracious! What a difference! On the other hand, do you think she hasn't cost me my health? Oy! What do you think saps my strength so? Take those new clothes of hers—she sewed a pair of pockets on them completely by herself! And her shirts, and her piece work? Did you see the Polish alphabet she needlepointed? And the way she talks? And her handwriting? And the way she reads—isn't she a treasure? French and German, smooth as silk!

REB GAVRIEL. How old is she? I mean, isn't it time to start looking for husbands?

Serkele. What, do you mean because she looks so grown up—there should be no evil eye? She isn't more than—than thirteen.

REB GAVRIEL. True. (Aside.) Not counting Sabbaths and holidays.

SERKELE. How old do you think I am, after all? People can say whatever they want, but I'm really no older than—than twenty-seven...

REB GAVRIEL. Also true. (Aside.) Give or take ten years.

Serkele. It's only my brother that has aged me. And that parasite, that Hinde, takes away my last bit of health, oh, oh, I feel faint! At my wedding, I was a beautiful maiden, a gorgeous sapling, I shined like the sun in July; no one would have believed that I was only thirteen years old.

Reb Gavriel. (Aside.) I don't believe it myself. (Aloud, to Serkele.) And you were married so young? I swear! Well, the daughter's reached the age when her mother got married...

SERKELE. Yes, no question, as long as we find the right person.

Reb Gavriel. What? Just make sure that you give her to a good merchant, someone who'll be able to support her. These days, no one's looking at family any more—when you're dealing with a father-in-law, you're stepping right into the lion's mouth.

^{3.} Traditional Jews commemorate the anniversary of the death of a parent, child, or sibling. The day is referred to as a "yortsayt" (literally, "year time"), and is generally marked by certain symbols of mourning, such as the lighting of memorial candles and the saying of kaddish (though in traditional Eastern European society, as Serkele suggests, only men said kaddish; if the deceased only had surviving female relatives, then a husband or male relative would say kaddish for them).

Serkele. What? Family? What does she need to worry about family for? Isn't my side of the family distinguished enough, after all? After all, the Rovshitzer Rabbi-heh? how about that?-a close relative, and the Preacher of Suaranyer, may he rest in peace, was related-a blood relation-to my uncle's mother-in-law, and the Chacham Zvi's mother-in-law's grandmother and her great-grandfather were on my mother's side . . . they were close relatives.

REB GAVRIEL. (Aside.) She's told me this a thousand times already. (Aloud, to Serkele.) All that aside, all I'm saying is that you should find someone who looks good. A good merchant.

CHAVA. (Enters stage right.) Madame! Come inside, the master has arrived. Serkele. Go, give him his sinful bit of coffee. He's just come from prayers, poor thing. Don't take this personally, Reb Gavriel, but I have to go in to my husband.

REB GAVRIEL. Not at all, go, go.

Serkele. Oy, oy, I feel faint! (Exits with Chava.)

Scene 4

REB GAVRIEL. (To himself.) Thank God I'm finally rid of her-she's already given me the whole family tree ten times, how the Preacher of Posner was related to her sister's kid, some Berdichev cantor. But that's how it goes: as long as you've got money, you're beautiful, smart, a saint, and take a few years off your age while you're at it. After all, what was Serke a few years ago, when she was still sitting in the middle of all that corn and meal? Who would have even given a moment's notice to Serke the meal dealer? Who would have thought? But now-she has money and who's her equal? That daughter of hers, the green-faced nuisance, from out of the blue has become the sum of all virtues. But what do I care? All that matters to me is that she's got money. I'm planning to get married myself, so I might as well bag her. Let her be green-all the easier to get money out of her. Sha! That's her now. (Adjusts his sidecurls and his collar in the mirror and takes off his fur hat.) Ah, the best of mornings, my dear Fräulein! How goes it with you?

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Speaks with a certain charm.) And a very good morning to you, Mr. Hendler, thank you kindly. Wie haben sie geshlafen diese nacht?4 REB GAVRIEL. What? Where else would I have slept? I slept at home last night, the way I always do.

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Laughs.) Ha ha ha, you see, my teacher told me that if someone asks, "Wie haben sie geshlafen?" you answer, "Well," and if someone asks, "Wo haben sie geshlafen?" you must answer, "At home."

REB GAVRIEL. Well, my dear young woman, what difference does it make whether you say "Vi" or "Vo"? I'm telling you that the teacher is a fool, an idiot, it's all the same thing whether you say "Vi" or "Vo" or "Vey"—as long as you sleep.

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Puts two chairs together and sits on one of them.) Please, take a seat. What did you dream about last night?

REB GAVRIEL. (Sits near her.) Look here, my dear young woman! The whole night long I dreamed only of you; it seemed to me that my wagons of merchandise had already arrived from Lipsk and I had received some beautiful material for a new dress for you.

FREYDE-ALTELE. Material for just one dress? I ask you, why just one? Is it possibly à la Valter Shcott?

Reb Gavriel. Yes, precisely: à la altered stock.⁵ Besides that, though, I've brought you a pair of bracelets, beautiful ones. But you've never accepted what I've brought you, what I've begged and pleaded you to. And I still don't know why.

FREYDE-ALTELE. I haven't accepted anything? From you? No, that can't be. You see, my dear Mr. Hendler, my teacher always says that I may accept anything from you in a dream—and he is absolutely right.

REB GAVRIEL. Is that so? (He takes the material and a pair of bracelets out of his pockets and gives them to Freyde-Altele.) Now we'll see if you're telling the truth!

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Quickly grabbing for the things.) Oh, they're beautiful! Thank you!

REB GAVRIEL. No, my dear young lady! There is no need to thank me for such poor trifles; I would give away to you every one of my possessions-and do you know why? Because I truly, deeply love you.

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Looks him right in the eye and smiles gracefully.) And does this truly come from the heart? You see, then, I can no longer disappoint you—(Gives her hand for him to kiss.)

REB GAVRIEL. (Grabs her by the hand and kisses her on the cheek.) My golden Altenyu! I do love you so.

^{4.} Freyde-Altele is asking "How did you sleep last night?"; Reb Gavriel misunderstands Wie ("how") for Wo ("where").

^{5.} Literally "à la alter shtok" ("like an old piece of material").

Scene 5

CHAVA. (Sees them kiss, then runs around. She says to herself.) I swear, that's a fine pair! (Aloud, to Freyde-Altele.) Freyde-Alt... (She stops herself and begins again.) Fraulein! Come inside, the teacher has arrived and is calling for you.

FREYDE-ALTELE. Who, Redlekh? That fool! Tell him to come tomorrow. I've waited a long time for him, now he can wait. (Chava begins to clean the room.) Well? Why aren't you going? You cow! I've never seen a bigger fool in all my life! You should be ashamed of yourself.

CHAVA. What have I done that the mistress should curse me this way? Why shouldn't I clean here?

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Angrily.) What a dumb animal! You see that I have a guest here, and yet you're standing around and cleaning! Whenever Hinde tells you to do something, you hop to it, but as for me, even if I tell her a thousand times what she should do, she doesn't follow me. (Takes Chava by the hand and throws her out.) Go, you ox!

REB GAVRIEL. Enough already, stop being so cross, my dear young lady! It can only embarrass you! Are you still angry?

FREYDE-ALTELE. Ah, no, no. Once she goes away, I calm down. One must always make sure that the servants treat one with the greatest respect.

REB GAVRIEL. Oy, my servant, my Yerakhmiel—he's such a silent young man, it's as if he doesn't even know how to talk—but he has such respect for me that it gives him fits.

FREYDE-ALTELE. If it were up to me, I'd only employ Christian servants—they know how to behave themselves, *nicht wahr*?⁶

Reb Gavriel. When will that ever come to pass, though? As a matter of fact, I spoke yesterday with Reb Yoykhenen the matchmaker. And he told me that he's going to speak with your father and mother today. Believe you me, my dear young lady, that as far as money is concerned, there's nothing to worry about! I just received a payment from the Suchard brothers in Trieste that I'm already getting a hundredweight of coffee and a hundredweight of sugar, besides what's coming back to me from the Vienna groceries and other products.

Scene 6

YERAKHMIEL. (Takes off his fur hat.) M-m-m-master! Go h-h-home already! (Freyde-Altele laughs heartily.)

REB GAVRIEL. See, as a result of his great respect for me he can hardly get the words out! (To Yerakhmiel.) What do you want?

YERAKHMIEL. C-c-come home already. Whenever you're w-w-w-wanted, someone always has to go looking for you. The m-m-m-mailman has arrived with a letter.

Reb Gavriel. Well, go tell him to wait a minute—I'm just about to leave. Or—tell him to leave the letter with you.

YERAKHMIEL. I h-h-h-had the same idea, but he got furious at me a-a-aand cursed you w-w-w-with the filthiest curses, because y-y-y-you o-oo-owe him for several letters, and haven't paid him for a long time.

Reb Gavriel. (Grabs him and tries to throw him out.) Nu, go to hell already. Yerakhmiel. Nu, I-I-I-I'm going—will y-y-you come with m-m-me, though?

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Laughs heartily.) That's what I call respect, all right!

REB GAVRIEL. (Throws Yerakhmiel out.) Get going already, you deaf dog. (Yerakhmiel leaves.) The reason he's so stubborn is because he earns so much money out of me from tips; do you think it's a small amount that the rat takes from all of the business that I do each week? You wouldn't believe it.

FREYDE-ALTELE. Ah! I believe you. I know that you are quite well-to-do. You see, they have approached me concerning a—concerning a—(*Tries to remember the word.*) concerning a—ah! I have forgotten how one refers to a—what is it called in Yiddish? A—a...

REB GAVRIEL. Might you mean, God forbid, a shidekh?7

FREYDE-ALTELE. Yes, that's what the Jews call it! You see, the bridegroom is also quite extraordinarily wealthy. He has his own money, quite a lot of it, silver and jewelry and one of the largest inns here in Lemberg.

REB GAVRIEL. Ah! Don't you believe it. It's all a big lie. That's just what that swindler the matchmaker is telling you so that he can get his commission. I bet he's got no money, no house, no jewelry—I know these swindling matchmakers pretty well!

FREYDE-ALTELE. But I happen to know for myself that he has an extremely large house, and Mother tells me that he is very, very rich.

Reb Gavriel. And I swear to you that he's a beggar, a scoundrel, a swindler, and the matchmaker is a liar and a villain!

'Freyde-Altele. Do you know the groom, then?

REB GAVRIEL. What do I need to know about him? What I do know is that he's a pauper, he's broke—and that's enough for me. Just so I can be sure, what's his name, hm?

FREYDE-ALTELE. His name is Reb Shmelke Troyniks.

^{6.} German "isn't that so?"

^{7.} Yiddish "an arranged match."

REB GAVRIEL. (To himself.) Uh oh! I'm in it deep this time: he really is loaded! Only a brilliant young man could get out of this one. (Laughs aloud.) Ha ha ha! Well, what did I tell you? That Litvak!⁸ That swindler! That pauper! I should have as much property as the difference between what he earns and what he owes. (To himself, quietly.) I'm being a fool, but what can I do? (Aloud.) And that rascal, that old dog, that's who you want to take for a bridegroom? (Laughs heartily.) That scoundrel of a Litvak? That villain who drove his first wife, poor woman, into the grave?

FREYDE-ALTELE. Did he truly cause her to pass away? She was always perfectly healthy; she accidentally fell down a flight of stairs and passed away. How is he to blame for that?

Reb Gavriel. How is he to blame? Who knows? When a Litvak hates his wife—it's possible, believe me, that the murderer threw her down the steps himself, just so that he could be rid of her!

Freyde-Altele. But he was not even here in Lemberg—

REB GAVRIEL. (Interrupting her and speaking very quickly.) But his servants were here, hm? But he sent her letters, the old thief, ha? Nu, nu, nu, he already knew what sort of advice he needed to give, that killer! (Pretends to get angry.) Nu, so leave me already and take the Lithuanian as your groom, believe you me, I'll also get a fine bride—I won't be a bachelor for long, that's for sure. It's nice to have met people like you. Now that I've seen you, may I please leave now? (Pretends to get ready to go.)

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Grabs him by the hand and prevents him from going.) But, my dear Herr Hendler! Do not leave, and, in God's name, do not be angry. I will never marry the Litvak, not if he were a thousand times richer and had millions! You, only you, must be my groom—I will certainly have no other.

Reb Gavriel. (Turns back to her and kisses her hand.) Well that, you see, is a completely different story. Because I love you terribly, my beautiful Fräulein! If only you keep to that statement, that you want only me, everything will certainly turn out well.

Freyde-Altele. Oh, yes, certainly, certainly, I will be true to my word. You must be my groom, you must become my husband—only do not get angry again, I beg of you.

Reb Gavriel. No, no, I won't get angry any more, it had simply bothered me that such a wise, such a clever, and such a beautiful Fräulein as yourself should suddenly believe the type of foolishness that a scoundrel of a matchmaker had babbled to you... (Enter Yerakhmiel.)

Scene 7

REB GAVRIEL. Are you back here again? What do you want? YERAKHMIEL. The p-p-postman is driving me c-c-c-crazy; he wants me to drag y-y-you home.

Reb Gavriel. Nu, go already, and to hell with you! (To Freyde-Altele.) Adieu, my beautiful Fräulein! Adieu, I must take my leave—it must be that I have some very important letters from Vienna and from Gdansk. I will return again today. Reb Yoykhenen will certainly arrive at your father's today. Just listen to whatever he has to say, and just keep to your promise—you understand what I'm getting at?

FREYDE-ALTELE. Don't worry; everything will remain as I wish.

REB GAVRIEL. (Leaving.) Adieu, my beautiful Fräulein! Adieu....

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Takes him by the hand.) Wait a bit, why are you hurrying so? Would you like to go to the theatre?

REB GAVRIEL. Yes, my dear!

FREYDE-ALTELE. Then what is going on?

REB GAVRIEL. Like it always is-half past seven.9

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Laughs.) Ha ha ha, but what sort of a piece is being put on today?

REB GAVRIEL. Alina, or Lemberg of the Other World.

FREYDE-ALTELE. Do you mean that it's Alina or Lemberg which is of the other world?

Reb Gavriel. It's all the same to me. Well, adieu, my beautiful Fräulein! Just keep your promise, for God's sake! I now have no more time, I have to go already. Adieu, be well!

FREYDE-ALTELE. Go in good health! (Reb Gavriel and Yerakhmiel exit.)

Scene 8

(Freyde-Altele alone. She examines the bracelets and the material and fixes her hair in the mirror, then skips around the room and sings.)

Whoever from a life of sadness
Seeks to find eternal joy
Must flee herself, as if from madness,
From love of any man or boy.
Many women, just like you,
In male arms solace hope to find
But later they will come to rue
The carefree life they've left behind.

^{8.} Litvak: Yiddish for a Lithuanian Jew. Litvaks tend to be seen as clever but cold, and their dialect is characterized by an absence of the sh sound. Where other Yiddish speakers say shabbes ("Sabbath"), for example, the Litvak says sabbes, and for loshn ("language"), the Litvak says losn. The Lithuanian Yiddish dialect thus earned the nickname sabbes-losn.

^{9.} Again, Gavriel is misunderstanding Freyde-Altele's somewhat mangled German.

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(Stands still and laughs.) Ha ha ha. That is one song that I can let Shmelke the Litvak have-no, it'll be an entirely different story with me and my Hendler; I know, for I am convinced of his love. Look at what he has already sent me, since he came to us—ay, ay, ay! (Quiet a moment, and then speaks gracefully.) Ach! And my heart, my pure heart, speaks only of you-I would be a fool if I were to accept the Litvak and then, after the main event, go back on my promise like a Jew. (Measures out the material on herself in the mirror along with the bracelets.) Ach! This is perfect for me—and with that hat with the feathers that's arriving—oh, how pretty! How glorious I'll look! Yes, I must dress in the most modern German styles, and my Hendler must too! When we look like this, and go out together for a walk-no one would ever imagine that we were Jews, that's for certain. (Quiet a moment.) If only that damned matchmaker would come. And what is he going to say to Mother? (Thinks a little more.) He is very rich, that's certainly true, he's told me so himself several times. I think I'll be very happy with him; I'll be the envy of all the other girls. (Silent for a moment, then suddenly slaps herself.) Ach! I have completely forgotten the time! That Redlekh is driving me crazy with his lessons! If only Reb Yoykhenen would arrive already... If I can just put the lesson off until the afternoon, then I can take a good nap. (Laughs and runs off.)

Scene 9

HINDE. (Comes through the door stage right, very upset.) Oy! What doesn't one have to suffer, when one has no father and no mother! I may not stay in the room when Altele studies with Redlekh! Is it my fault that Redlekh says that I understand the lesson just from listening from a distance better than Friederika? God knows, soon it will be impossible for me to endure the daily suffering I get at the hands of both Frieda and my aunt. What can I do, they don't like me a bit. (Calms down a bit.) But maybe I am a little bit of a nuisance, as they say? After all, that's exactly what Redlekh has criticized me for and said, "This thing and that thing, my dear Hindele, are wrong; here's where you made a mistake, look at these errors and correct them." And if he even tells it to me once, then I certainly follow his instructions to the letter, but in the eyes of the others, I see that even good things, things that I did properly and that anyone else might do, I'm also not allowed to do! Why? Because it would upset Frieda if I were right! (Silent for a moment.) Oy! How my aunt used to love me, when I was still with my father, God rest his soul. As God is my witness, I love her as much as ever, and yet I can see how she hates me more and more every day. Oy! Today it will be four years since my dear

father passed away! Even now he appears before my eyes, looking just the way he did when he was alive. Six years ago, before he went away from us, he took me by the hand and kissed me and cried over me. I remember—just as if it were yesterday—how he said that he would wait until Redlekh got out of school so that he could say goodbye to him. No, I will never forget as long as I live the kissing, the hugging, and the holding when Redlekh arrived, just as if he were his own son. Even total strangers, looking at us, lamented and cried. (Wipes her eyes and cries.) Good father! Sweet father! Did you already suspect that you would never return home again? That you would never see your child again? That it would be the last time? (As she continues, she speaks more faintly and grows more preoccupied.) Yes, yes, the last time! The last time? No, no. Beloved father! No...soon I won't be able to endure it any more. No, dear father! It was not the last time, not the last time you saw your child—we will soon, yes, soon, see each other again! (Falls, completely drained, onto the sofa.)

Scene 10

Chava. (Entering, does not see Hinde.) The apple doesn't fall far from the tree! Like mother, like daughter! Alte must have gotten up on the wrong side of the bed this morning, the way she's been fighting with me and with Hinde all day. Where is Hindele? I thought she was in here. (Looks around and notices Hinde, goes and sits next to her on the sofa.) Hinde my love! What are you doing lying there like that, my heart? Don't, I beg you, make a big deal of this. (Takes her in her arms and kisses her.) My dear! Don't get upset or suffer at all; you'll see that God will help you after all; you'll see that you will be happy once again. (Cries and wipes the tears from her eyes.) Don't cry, my dear! My heart! Don't cry, I beg of you!

HINDE. You're absolutely right, Chava, nicht wahr? I shouldn't cry, you say? Maybe you're right, Chava, but maybe you've forgotten what a completely dark day this is.

Chava. Believe me, I would forget my own name before I'd forget today's tragedy! I know full well that today is my master's yortsayt, but tell me, my dear: hasn't every day since the terrible letter came to your aunt been like Tisha B'Av?¹⁰ Have I ever seen you have a single happy moment since then? I swear! It is no sin for you to forget a little bit, that's for sure—you must keep your health...

^{10.} The ninth day of the Jewish month of Av. The saddest day of the Jewish calendar, it is a fast day commemorating the destruction of both Temples, as well as other tragedies of Jewish history.

HINDE. Chava! You're telling me this, you? (Sits up.) You can actually say

such things? You, who were with us in our house, who were like one

of the family? You, who know full well what sort of a father I had, you

can say such a thing? You, who know full well how happy I used to be, you can now say that I should forget my poor, dear father? Just completely forget about him? Even on the day when his awful yortsayt falls, should I forget him then as well? Nicht wahr, Chava? CHAVA. Oh, my love! I was wrong, you were right, you cannot forget-

who could ever forget such a father? Just tell me, my love: if your father was really so good to you, why did he . . .

HINDE. (Cuts her off.) Might you be referring to the fact that he left his entire fortune to my aunt? Believe me, you can say what you want, but he must have known what he was doing, because the whole world knows what a brilliant man he was, and how much he loved me, his only child. You yourself always talk about how he used to cry and stay awake all night long if I felt the least bit unwell. So that's why I think that he must have had a good reason for what he did. And as for the other thing, would I really be any happier if I owned everything? He really is dead, for once and for all, and I have no father.

CHAVA. What would owning everything help? Hm! Would you have had to live with your aunt? Would you have had the troubles, the sorrow that you suffer at other people's hands? Would any old worm dare to say a word to you? And let's not kid ourselves-that's not to mention some other people who are not able to get anywhere near you—other people, you understand what I mean, who would also be happy around you.

HINDE. (Looks Chava in the eye and examines her.) I have no idea—other people? Who do you mean? Who are these other people? I don't know-do you mean, possibly, you?

Chava. Believe me, Hinde dear! I know what I'm talking about, believe you me! I've got it on the best authority—just answer me one question: just tell me what I've done to you that you've become so dead set against me. Tell me, please, let me know!

HINDE. Me dead set against you? Chava! You must be dreaming!

Chava. Sure I'm dreaming—as if I don't see myself that you're not the same Hindele to me that you once were.

HINDE. Tell me, Chava dear! (She begs her.) For God's sake . . . what are you talking about?

CHAVA. What am I talking about? Oy, oy, I'm no fool, that's for sure. I see everything that's going on perfectly well, but to tell you the truth, I thought all along that you would tell me yourself-because who loves you the way that I do? Why shouldn't you tell me everything, heh?

HINDE. (Strokes Chava's cheek.) I beg of you (Kissing her.), just tell me and don't torment me any longer!

CHAVA. (Looks Hinde right in the eye.) Just tell me, do you know somebody named Markus Redlekh, hm? (They both remain silent a moment.)

HINDE. (Lowers her eyes and blushes, then clasps Chava with both hands and kisses her.) Chava dear! You are absolutely correct! I know myself that I've acted badly toward you-I beg of you, my dear Chava, please forgive me—I'll tell you everything. (She suddenly goes silent and blushes.)

CHAVA. Well, tell me! What are you blushing like that for? What's making you so red? You little fool! Tell me everything—even though a blind man could see what's going on . . . Well, so you love him—but who doesn't love Redlekh? Isn't he worth loving? He's very goodlooking, clever, wise, and he's certainly honest.

HINDE. Chava dear! How do you know what he is? There's no one in the world who's his equal! Wise, you said? The way he has behaved in my aunt's house for the past three years to each and every person, there's no one, even Frieda, who could possibly hate him-

CHAVA. (Interrupting.) And speaking of the mistress, she'd absolutely die for him-

HINDE. Good looking, you said? Just take a look at the beautiful face, the red lips, the lovely round cheeks, the high smooth forehead and the fiery eyes—he's pretty as a picture! What are you talking about, "if he's clever"?—his sweet little speeches, his honeyed words! He speaks just like a book. And who else his age is already in his third year of medical school? Soon he's going to be a full-fledged doctor!

CHAVA. You know, some time ago he spoke with the nobles who came to borrow money from the mistress in French and Latin-I swear! They might have been selling me off, and I would never have been able to tell— (They hear Serkele's voice from offstage, calling "Hinde! Hinde!")

HINDE. I think my aunt is calling me.

CHAVA. Yes, yes, you'd better go before she starts screaming for you.

HINDE. (Begins to leave, then looks back.) Chava dear! There's just one more thing I have to ask you...

CHAVA. (Interrupts her.) I already know what you want to ask me: go already, go, I won't repeat what you've said for anything. (We hear Serkele's voice once more: "Hinde! Hinde! Do I have the strength to say 'Hinde' a third time?—Hinde!" Hinde quickly runs off through the door, runs into Chaim, and, on the run, gives him a push into the main room.)

Scene 11

CHAVA. (Running to help him up.) What is with you today? Are you drunk, or what?

CHAIM. Let Hinde go in already, she was making such a fuss.

CHAVA. Well, she's gone already. But show me: haven't you hurt yourself somewhere?

CHAIM. (Angrily.) Whether I've hurt myself or not, what do you care? Did I ask you anything?

CHAVA. My, you're so angry with me, Chaim! Weren't you just pushed? CHAIM. Why are you talking to me so much, Chava! It's all over between us, finished!

Chava. (Smiling.) Doesn't that mean that there was something between us that started?

CHAIM. What? Nothing had started? Well, if that's how you want to play, so be it. (He walks around the room and speaks, as if to himself.) Do such things still happen? That a woman should allow a strange man to kiss her?

CHAVA. Who are you talking about?

CHAIM. (Suddenly stopping in front of Chava.) Who do I mean? (Laughs angrily.) It's you I mean, you!

CHAVA. (Laughs.) Ha ha ha, me? You mean me? I let myself get kissed? CHAIM. Yes, yes, you think maybe I didn't see how Reb Gavriel came through the kitchen and gave you a kiss? That's how you've become, ever since you went off with the mistress in the spring. (Chava laughs hysterically.) But I always used to say that a man shouldn't take a bride that hasn't been out in the world a bit. (Cries and wipes his eyes. Chava laughs even more loudly.) No, no, I'm not going to put up with it any more! And all because of those blasted thermal baths! When I become a bridegroom, I'm going to have it put explicitly in the marriage contract that the bride is forbidden to go to the baths. (Wipes his eyes and looks Chava in the eye.) I don't know why you think so much of yourself. Maybe it's because you think that I'll make a fool of myself begging for you? Well, that's true; you've certainly hit the nail on the head there. It's all because my father convinced me that I should have only you, and, like a fool, I listened to him. But wait, just you wait—I'm going to go and tell him about the kind of hussy you become for just a bit of business. (Chava holds her sides and laughs even louder.) Well, go on, laugh; we'll see who'll have the last laugh, me or you. I'm going right now to my father and I'm going to tell him every last detail! (He runs off angrily.)

CHAVA. (Laughs.) Ha ha ha, what a fool! Like I'm going to fight with that good-for-nothing! He really is a bit of a fool! But he's a good and honest fool, that's for sure. It makes me sorry how I've caused him so much distress. But he'll get over it, even though he went away so angry. Later, he'll come crawling back to me and beg for forgiveness. I'm as sure of that as I am that we'll grow old together! (Runs off.)

The curtain falls.

Act II

The same room in Moyshe Dansker's house as in Act I.

Scene 1

(Reb Moyshe Dansker, alone, sits at a table, his head cradled in his hands, deep in thought. He stands up, goes back and forth around the room a couple of times, and sighs. Then he sits down and thinks, as before. Suddenly he jumps to his feet and cries.) It was just a dream! (Calms down a little, then says a bit more quietly.) Yes, but why did I never dream such a dream before in all my life? Today of all days! This very day . . . (Looks around.) I can say it here, no one's listening: this is the date when I tricked everyone into thinking that my brother Dovid died during his travels. Oy! It would have been better if I had died then; I'd probably be better off! Some evil wind had to bring me to get advice from that Shmuel Shrayber!11 But it's not his fault either: he just did as he was told—you dance to the tune that's played for you. Serke! It was you who destroyed me! (Goes quiet for awhile, then as he starts to talk, he grows louder and louder.) Last night—it must have been past midnight—I dreamt that I had gone to the world beyond, and I was sitting in a corner in a place where hundreds of candles were burning, just like on Yom Kippur in the synagogue, and many of the dead were walking around, all dressed in shrouds, but so quietly that you couldn't even hear them moving. (Wipes the sweat from his brow.) My hair stands on end when I think about it! Suddenly I heard a shofar blowing somewhere. It started to thunder and lightning very hard. I heard many voices, as if all the winds and blizzards in the world gathered together in one place and wanted to show who had the loudest voice. Then all the lights went out, it grew terribly dark, the ground started to shake beneath me. I was seized by fear and dread, and when I think of it now, I shake all over like a leaf, my stomach turns to ice, and it's as if I can still hear the trumpeting: very quiet at first, then louder and louder and louder, like the final blast of the shofar. (Quiet for a moment.) Suddenly, two enormous gates opened, and I noticed two extremely tall people with fiery wings on their backs. One was holding scales in its hands, the other a rod—they were frightful to behold!12 Then one of them suddenly started to cry out in a

^{11.} Yiddish, "writer."

^{12.} These objects are often associated with angelic figures in the world after death: the scales of judgment, and the rods for flagellation and punishment.

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mournful voice, "Woe! Woe to him who has swindled widows and orphans! Woe to him who cannot bear the weight of judgment! Woe, woe to him! He has no remorse!" My head started swimming, and I stood there like a post. Next, the other one started to shout in a voice that could be heard from one end of the world to the other: "Wake up! Wake up for the resurrection of the dead!" And I saw with my own eyes how the earth and the sea coughed up heads, hands, feet, and guts, which came together again to form complete people, and they lived once more. Suddenly... (Speaks louder and louder, pausing between each word.) Oy! Suddenly I feel—as if someone—gives me—a slap—on the—shoulder. When I—look around—I notice—oy! I notice—my—my, my brother-in-law—Dovid—(Shouts at the top of his voice.) "Moyshe! Remember me?" (Exhausted, he falls to the floor as if dazed.)

Scene 2

REB YOYKHENEN. (Who, having entered in time to hear Reb Moyshe shout, "Remember me?", goes to him.) What do you mean, do I remember you? What kind of a question is that? Why, let me tell you something, we're practically from the same town! Your mother, Tsortl Zlates, may her memory be a blessing, came from around here! Ach! I knew her very well, and also knew your brother-in-law Dovid, may he rest in peace, very well, as if he were standing before me right now.

REB MOYSHE. (Gets up suddenly.) What? Oy! Where, where is he standing? Where? (He grabs hold of Reb Yoykhenen.) Where is he?

Reb Yovkhenen. What do you mean, where is he? Where should he be? He was a pious Jew, after all, a saintly man—of course he's sitting in Paradise with all the righteous ones. (Stares Reb Moyshe in the face and says to himself.) Oh boy! I didn't notice before—he must have some sort of disease in his head! I was surprised that he was so formal with me. (Aloud to Reb Moyshe.) Reb Moyshe! Tell me, it seems you aren't feeling well. What's the matter, ha? Do you feel sick?

Reb Moyshe. (Returning to his senses.) Ah, Reb Yoykhenen! Oy! Yes—yes—I'm a wreck.

REB YOYKHENEN. What's the matter, my dear Reb Moyshe?

Reb Moyshe. (Beating his breast.) Oy! Here, here is where the problem lies.

Reb Yoykhenen, Nu, let me tell you something, why don't you send for a doctor?

REB MOYSHE. (Moaning.) Oy! No, don't, don't, let it be, I'm perfectly healthy, nothing's wrong. (Tries to get up but cannot.) But—have you

been in the room with me long? Oy! I'm shaking like a fish, aren't I? I'm sick, very sick, I can barely walk—my worries, worries don't let me rest.

Reb Yovkhenen. What? Worries? You have worries too? That's very fine! Let me tell you something, one person worries about a noodle pudding, another about an entire meal. But granted, I, I, I worry—nu, I am, as they say, a poor fellow! Sometimes I have food for the Sabbath and sometimes I don't—but you? You are, after all—may you avoid the evil eye—a wealthy man (may you live to a hundred and twenty), you have just one daughter, a very decent girl, good and pious and, if I may say so, pretty too. Let me tell you something: she comes from good stock, and with God's help, you'll surely make a good match for her—it's about time.

REB MOYSHE. (Having come completely to his senses.) Yes, you're right, my dear Reb Yoykhenen! The time has come. (Scrutinizes him.) Isn't that right? (Stares at Reb Yoykhenen. Intently.) Let me ask you—may you enjoy good health—have you been here in my house long? To be perfectly honest, I'm not feeling in the best of health; for the past couple of weeks, there's been something missing—I don't know what. I can't sleep at night, and I often say things that lack all rhyme and reason. (Scrutinizes him further.) I bet you heard such things here, ha?

Reb Yoykhenen. Yes, in fact, I did hear you ask me if I know you. Let me tell you something—may you live long—you've known me since I warmed a bench in the study house. Well, praise God for that. Now I'm a matchmaker, and arrange the biggest matches—good, I make a few rubles once in a while! And I swear I'm going to arrange a very good match for your Altele—I'm telling you, an exceptional match. You and your wife, may you both live long, know him very well.

REB MOYSHE. (To himself.) He heard nothing, thank God! (Aloud.) My dear Reb Yoykhenen! You know that I rarely get involved in such things. That's a matter for my wife, bless her; I rarely have any idea about them, so you should talk to her directly. If you'll excuse me and wait here a little, I'll send her in! (Leaving, he runs into Serkele.) And here she is in the flesh! (To Serkele.) Here, Reb Yoykhenen has something to discuss with you, my wife. (Quickly exits.)

Scene 3

REB YOYKHENEN. I hope you're well, Serkele!
SERKELE. Welcome, Reb Yoykhenen! What's new? Sit for a bit, sit. (She sits.)

Reb Yoykhenen. (Sits.) I've just come for a short visit. After all, we're neighbors now, Serkele. I've heard that your husband was under the weather, so I came by to pay a sick call.

SERKELE. Who? My Moyshe? My goodness, where did you get that idea? He's perfectly healthy, thank God! Who on Earth told you such lies—who?

Reb Yoykhenen. I've completely forgotten who came by today and told me that. (He acts as if trying to remember.) Sorry—I just can't remember.

SERKELE. May pain seize them when they speak. Oy, I feel faint! The lies one's enemies come up with! I just wish I were as healthy as he is.

Reb Yovkhenen. Well, let me tell you something, I wish you health and strength. May you enjoy wealth and honor in your old age, and may your child bring you all the glory and happiness you deserve.

Serkele. Amen, dear God!

Reb Yoykhenen. Listen, I was just speaking to your husband about a match for your Altele, may she live long. Well, he likes the idea very much, I can tell you—I know he's gone out, but he said, "Whatever my dear wife wants to do, that's what we'll do!" I tell you, you're lucky to have such a husband. You're both master and mistress—your word is law.

Serkele. (Smiles.) Aren't I lucky to have found him? And besides, don't I deserve it? Pardon my saying so, but he is—just between you and me—utterly helpless. Just look at him; there's not a person in the world who would pay ten kreuzer for him, body and soul. He's just useless—I tell you, absolutely useless. Who does everything? Who works like a dog? Who wears mourning clothes? Oy, I feel faint! Who works as hard as I do?

REB YOYKHENEN. You're absolutely right! You have a child to raise, and he leaves it entirely to you. God willing, you'll make the wedding arrangements without him as well.

Serkele. That's the God's honest truth. But stop beating around the bush. Let's hear who the groom is—a student, perhaps?

REB YOYKHENEN. What? Would I bring you a student? Isn't that beneath a wealthy aristocrat like you? Go on—how could someone as clever as you think for a moment that I would match your perfect child to a student? (Spits as if angry.) Tfui! Let me tell you something: I didn't just hatch from the egg. I know that the innkeeper needs his wine and the weaver his flax—so would I bring your child a student? Look, I—I'm offering you a magnificent match. You can trust me on this: he has been sent from Heaven.

Serkele. Nu, alright, but who is he? Does he come from a good family? Is he nice to look at? Oy, I feel faint! Does he have money, huh?

REB YOYKHENEN. Does he come from a good family? No less than the greatest of the age! The mother's side is first class: she's related to the great Rabbi Zalmen on one side, and the other side of her family is just dripping with important people. And as for his father's family: it's crawling with rabbis. In short, what can I say? Let me tell you: it's easier to talk the talk than to walk the walk, but he can trace his genealogy back to ancient times, all the way back to the High Priest Eli, 18 you understand?

Serkele. (Shakes her head in surprise.) Really? Back to the holy High Priest?

REB YOYKHENEN. And money? Everyone should be so lucky! I wish I had what he spends in a year. Let me tell you something, show a dog your finger and it'll want the whole hand, but not me: I'd only like to earn what he spends in a month! He's a regular prince, lives like an aristocrat and is a wealthy merchant to boot—has dealings all over the world. (Freyde-Altele opens the door very quietly so that they won't hear, and eavesdrops.)

Serkele. But tell me already, who is the groom? Perhaps I know him? Reb Yoykhenen. You know him very well, he's a regular visitor. His name is—Reb Gavriel Hendler! Nu, what do you say? Do I know who to talk to, ha?

Serkele. Reb Gavriel Hendler! Yes, I do know him well. He comes here almost every day—was just here, in fact.

REB YOYKHENEN. Nu, so how do you like him? Isn't that an excellent match? It seems to me that a better catch just doesn't exist.

Serkele. Well, yes, I'll tell you the truth, it's not a bad match—oy, I feel faint! I even like him. He isn't bad, but—

Reb Yoykhenen. (Interrupts her.) Nu, what more do you want? If you like him, who else is there to ask? I tell you, your husband, long life to him, likes the match very much! The minute I brought it up, he was overjoyed! Believe me, he was simply beside himself!

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Aside.) May he live to be a hundred and twenty for that!¹⁴

Serkele. Yes, who knows what my only daughter will say to it—whether it will please my Altele?

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Aside.) What a question! (She closes the door and opens it again, as if she had just come in, and runs to Serkele.) Mommy! Have you taken the keys?

^{13.} See 1 Samuel 1-2.

^{14.} According to Jewish tradition, Moses lived to the age of 120, and it is a traditional Jewish blessing to wish someone the same long life span.

Serkele. What's that, dear heart? They're hanging around your neck. You're always looking for things that are right under your nose.

Reb Yoykhenen. So this is your Altele, may she live long? (He looks Altele over from head to foot.) Nu, I tell you, she's become quite a fine young lady. Let me tell you something—the way children grow up! Nu, my child, do you want a husband?

FREYDE-ALTELE. (*Pretending to be embarrassed.*) Oh, let me be with your bridegrooms.

Serkele. (Laughs and winks at Reb Yoykhenen.) Something's cooking there—just talk to her and she'll be yours.

Reb Yoykhenen. (Smiles.) Why are you so angry with me, my dear? Because I want to give you a handsome husband, heh? (Freyde-Altele looks at Serkele and laughs.)

SERKELE. Nu, why don't you answer? Have you gone mute, heh?

FREYDE-ALTELE. What do I need a bridegroom for? I do not need anyone. Reb Yoykhenen. Don't talk like a child, my dear, because I hate it when people talk foolishness! What's with this "What do I need a bridegroom for?" Let me tell you something, you've already reached the age of . . .

Serkele. Thirteen, may she live and be well.

Reb Yoykhenen. Nu, whatever you say. Listen, I have a very fine husband for you—you'll like him.

FREYDE-ALTELE. As long as he pleases my Mommy, I'll be happy too. (She starts to run out.)

Reb Yoykhenen. (Grabs her by the hand.) Nu, where are you running? Just come here; I'm not the one getting married. You see, when you talk like a smart girl, that's what I love. Believe me, I'm talking here about a husband who's very handsome, a good-looking creature, a big shot among big shots, has plenty of money of his own, is good and pious, behaves just as God commands—and, my child, you know him too.

FREYDE-ALTELE. I? I know him too?

Serkele. Yes, you know him, dear heart! You know him very well—you know Reb Gavriel Hendler?

Freyde-Altele. (Acts embarrassed.) Ja, ich ken ihm, ich habe ihm hierbei amal gesehn. 15

REB YOYKHENEN. Nu, do you want him for a husband?

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Laughs.) Ich habe ja schon einmal gesagt: 16 if my Mommy likes him, then I'm happy too. (She runs out.)

Scene 4

Serkele. That's how it always goes. Everyone depends on me: my husband and my daughter, neither makes a move without me. Believe me, it's too heavy a burden to have all that weight on my shoulders.

Reb Yoykhenen. Nu, let me tell you something: who else can they depend on?

SERKELE. Eh! What do you know, my dear Reb Yoykhenen? All day long it's nothing but "Go to my wife, go to my mamenyu, go to my aunt, go to the mistress, go to Serkele!" I don't know—even someone made of iron couldn't stand it. Oy, I feel faint! But besides all that, every time another accursed Thursday rolls around, the paupers start streaming in. I tell you, the door gets no rest, and my mouth actually hurts from telling everyone individually: "Please don't be offended, and go in good health." His poor relatives are enough of a burden. I've got a big girl on my hands who's absolutely worthless, and eats me out of house and home, the devil knows why, just as if she were the breadwinner around here. Oy, vey, I feel faint!

REB YOYKHENEN. Who can you possibly mean?

SERKELE. What a question! Hinde, my Dovid's little daughter; what that girl costs me!

Reb Yoykhenen. And what she will cost you yet! Of course you're absolutely right. After all, let me tell you something—there's no such thing as a Jewish nunnery, so some day you'll have to make her a wedding.

SERKELE. Who, me? Ach, why is that? If I knew she would stay unmarried 'til her hair turns gray, it wouldn't bother me a bit. Oy, I feel faint! What's the matter, is she ill? Let her go get a job.

REB YOYKHENEN. Oy! What are you saying? You're a very wealthy lady, after all—may you live to be a hundred and twenty—and she's your brother's only daughter! I'm telling you, that's not how to do things; what will people say?

Serkele. What, you think I have something to be ashamed of? May God strike me down in my youth if that bothers me at all. Well, let me just think: that can't do any harm to a match for my Altele, since I'm giving her a dowry of eight hundred silver rubles and jewelry and clothes, linens and bedding, on top of other stuff, and board, plus little presents and various other things. In other words, I'm offering a fortune. And I don't have to tell you what a fine family line she comes from, and who I am—oy, I feel faint. Nu, so tell me, may you be well, what harm could it do if the whole world knew that Hinde was somebody's servant?

REB YOYKHENEN. Maybe you're right. After all, different people reach different conclusions, and you don't know where the shoe pinches

^{15.} German, "Yes, I know him, I've seen him here once."

^{16.} German, "I've already said it once."

until you try it on. But tell me, Serkele, what's this? You're offering only eight hundred rubles?

SERKELE. What? Isn't that enough? I have to make ends meet, you know. It seems to me that I'm giving beyond my means. These days, who gives their child more than that?

REB YOYKHENEN. Oy, please don't be offended, but you ask who gives more? You know, you're as rich as Shifra Balban, and she is offering her daughter fifteen hundred rubles; and between you and me—even though I was the matchmaker—with whom did she make the match? With an ulcer.

Serkele. Who? Shifra the Pauperess is offering fifteen hundred rubles? (She pretends to laugh.) Ha ha ha, it's so sad I'm laughing, oy, I feel faint! Will she pay up, though? You know, that's how people are: marry off their children, promise mountains of gold, sign ironclad papers, and when it comes time to pay, there's no one home.

Reb Yovkhenen. Eh, what are you saying? Shifra Balban is a very wealthy woman; she made a huge profit on a horse trade, and a week or two ago, her husband won sixteen thousand Rhenish dollars in the lottery.

SERKELE. (Standing up.) What? Shifra?! Sixteen thousand? That's how it is in this crazy world: the lousiest cur gets the best bone, oy, I feel faint! Sixteen thousand? The Devil take her father's bones.

REB YOYKHENEN. Well, it doesn't matter, what are we going on about eight hundred rubles for? You'll change the terms a little, you'll make it better; let's just take care of this.

SERKELE. How much does he have of his own, huh?

Reb Yoykhenen. Him? What a question! His entire fortune; he's very wealthy, you know. He earns, well, a lot more, although they say he's worth two thousand Rhenish dollars. I know all about it. I myself have seen a whole wad of banknotes at his house. I'm telling you, seeing that absolutely killed me. Not to mention his business skill. You think he's anything to sneeze at as a breadwinner? The transactions that man handles! May the evil eye not strike—that's what I call a good provider.

Serkele. Believe me, my dear Reb Yoykhenen, the only things that matter to me are that my Altele, may she enjoy good health, won't have to live in her in-laws' house and won't have twenty people bossing her around. But those questions aside, I don't know that he's such a great bargain. I don't see that he's got any money lying around. Now and then when he's short of cash, I'm the first one he comes to for a loan.

REB YOYKHENEN. Nu, let me tell you something: what merchant isn't strapped for cash sometimes and is forced to borrow? But you can demand that he settle his debt to you before the marriage contract is signed.

Serkele. Now that's a different story. Let him settle up at the contract signing—yes, I insist on that. And you know what? When the time comes to sign, maybe I'll also bend and throw in another two hundred rubles.

Reb Yoykhenen. Now you're talking! You say a thousand, I say twelve hundred. Let me tell you something: no match falls through because of money. A hundred rubles more, a hundred rubles less—it'll be alright. But there's just one thing I would like.

SERKELE. And what might that be?

Reb Yoykhenen. I would like to see to it that the future bride and groom get together at some point before the engagement is announced and get acquainted a little, have a chance to talk.

Serkele. You know what? I'll send him an invitation to dinner today—in any case he comes here every day, and you can talk about anything over a meal; and we can sign the contract this very evening—I hate when things get dragged out for years on end.

Reb Yoykhenen. Of course you're absolutely right, because first of all, you can snap him up right away—he's being sought after for about twenty matches, so you can seal the deal—and besides, let me tell you, a person doesn't live forever.

SERKELE. Well, it's in His hands.

Reb Yoykhenen. I'll have my work cut out for me with that one, believe me; I'll have a few more gray hairs before I straighten everything out with him; but after all, as they say, that's why I'm a matchmaker. (He gets up.) Nu, let me tell you something: have a good day and be well.

Serkele. Go in good health, and don't be a stranger. (Exit Reb Yoykhenen. Serkele accompanies him to the door.)

Scene 5

Serkele. What do I know? Maybe that's the right way. You never know how something will turn out, but I'm starting to think this isn't so bad—he's rich, that's true; he has a few rubles. I just hope that Altele will have the sense to know what to do. She needs to take charge from the word go and not let him come to his senses, just like I did with my Moyshe, and then, God willing, she'll be successful with him. I've got to see that debt cleared, though; it has to be paid off. And he's certainly a nice-looking young man, and not old-fashioned either. (Looks at herself in the mirror.) Heh? What more do I need? (Thinking quietly for a moment.) I wish my Moyshe would travel to the spas. I just don't know what to do with him. He doesn't sleep at night, but walks around and talks to himself like a lunatic. I swear, it's a miracle that no one hears him. The Devil knows why he insists

on dredging up ancient history! (Quiet for a moment.) The whole business, he says, is my fault! So tell me, who's asking him? If you can't stand the smell of gunpowder, then stay off the battlefield. (Stamps her foot.) Enough! Over and done with-who can ask me now where I got so much money? Even in a hundred years, who could figure out that the whole will was a fraud? Dead and buried. If I hadn't done it, someone else would have gotten the idea, and what would have happened then? I, and my husband and child, would have died of hunger, and would have had to look on while somebody else took advantage of my dear brother's hard-earned money, which the poor thing sweated and toiled for. And besides-who knows?-even if he had lived, then he wouldn't have gotten angry, God forbid, over the whole business, since could anyone possibly be closer to you than a sister? (Thinks quietly.) The only question is, is he dead? (Quietly pensive; then she jumps.) But why am I going over all this for nothing? Reb Shmuel Shrayber himself read in the newspaper at the time that the ship-I forget what it was called-that Dovid took to America had sunk. (She sees Chaim approaching.) Aha! Who's coming? Chaim! Another fool who's good for nothing-except sending to get the Angel of Death.

Scene 6

SERKELE. Well? What did Redlekh say? Will he come? Oy, I feel faint! Did you tell him that I'm ill?

CHAIM. Did I tell him?! What good does that do, though? When you really need the worm, he's suddenly too good for you.

SERKELE. What? He doesn't want to come?

Chaim. He said that he can't cure your disease. What a doctor! Goes to school such a long time and still doesn't know anything.

SERKELE. But he's still going to come, nicht wahr?

Chaim. Not a chance! He won't come. He said he doesn't want to come, and that I should go call on someone else. Look across the road there, my dear mistress: at Reb Fishl's place, that's where the old doctor lives—some people say he's a great expert. I stopped to see him on the way back and told him that you asked whether he would please come and pay you a visit—wait, don't say anything yet—he said that he'll be right over. Didn't I do good?

Serkele. What? That old horse? You can both go to hell together—I don't know which of you is more useless! Who asked you to call on him, ha?

CHAIM. I don't know. I thought a doctor is a doctor—did I know you're in love with Redlekh?

Serkele. What? I'm in love with Redlekh? You villain! May the evil spirits plague your father! I'm in love with Redlekh? You scoundrel! I swear, it's a good thing no one can hear my troubles! Just wait, you'll rue the day you were born, oy, I feel faint!

CHAIM. Did I say you're in love with him? It speaks for itself—if you

don't want anyone but Redlekh, then . . .

Serkele. (Smacks him.) There! How's that for love—may the evil spirits plague your father and your mother! Now go this minute and tell the old horse not to come. You and he both are a thousand times worthless! Go, I tell you!

CHAIM. (Rubbing his cheek and crying as he goes.) Does nothing the whole damn day but scream and smack. She's not too faint for that. (Exits.)

Serkele. It's a good thing he told me beforehand that he called on the old man. (Laughs hysterically.) Ha ha ha! That would have been nice: for the doctor to come over, with me walking around as healthy as a giant! But how do you like that rogue, that Redlekh? He doesn't want to come? He can't cure me? He's such a scoundrel that he doesn't see how honored he should be that I call for him? (Looks at herself in the mirror.) Aren't I a pretty little wife, then? What's wrong with me, ha? (She gets angry.) I'll teach him some manners, that worm! He can't cure me! Wait, just wait, I'll teach you what curing is so you won't know what hit you! That pauper! That torn and tattered German! What's the matter? So he has a pretty face—that means he can order me to go call on someone else? Just wait, there are other fish in the sea, but I'll remember you. I'll show you who's boss. (She yells.) Chava! Chava! Oy, I feel faint!

Scene 7

Serkele. I have to shout for her a hundred times before she moves, that slut! (*Chava enters.*) Go over to Reb Gavriel's and tell him that he is most warmly invited to breakfast today, you hear? Go and don't dilly dally, because you still have three other errands to do.

Chava. My dear mistress, I have no time at all—the soup will boil over while I'm out. Send Chaim instead.

Serkele. That's how it is every time: I tell her to go, and she says, "Send Chaim." Why are you afraid to go? He'll bite off a piece of you? Just look at her, the royal pain—she thinks she really is royalty, the bitch!

Chava. Nu, okay, so I'm a bitch—don't marry me, then. But tell me something, please: if I'm such a bitch, why does he bother me with all sorts of things whenever he passes through the kitchen?

Serkele. Look at the mouth on this scurvy girl! I just hope your mother will see you suffering—so who am I supposed to send for him? Oy, I feel faint! Is it possible to endure this? I swear, it's really true what they say: you mustn't give money to an ugly girl or you'll live to regret it. She thinks I have strength to spare, so I can squander my health on squabbling with her. Oy, I feel faint!

Scene 8

CHAIM. (Stands by the door crying, and wipes his eyes with his sleeve.)

Serkele. Nu? Were you there?

CHAIM. Yes.

SERKELE. Nu? What was his answer?

CHAIM. What should his answer have been if he wasn't home?

SERKELE. So were you too sick to tell his servant?

CHAIM. But I did tell him; he even answered that the doctor was already on his way here.

Serkele. What? He's on his way here? (Wrings her hands and cries angrily.) Oy, I'm cursed! What will I do now? Where do I begin? I hope you die an unnatural death! What on Earth am I supposed to do? (Runs to the table, grabs a knife, and runs with it towards Chaim.) Get out of my sight, you bastard, before I kill you!

CHAIM. (Runs, hides behind Chava and screams.) Help! Oh my God! Chava dear! Help!

Chava. (Runs around the room with Chaim clinging to her skirt and running behind her, and Serkele pulling both of them.)

Chaim and Chava. Help! Save us! Help! (They trip over a chair and fall to the ground.)

Scene 9

(Reb Moyshe, Hinde, and Freyde-Altele come from the door on the right. The doctor enters from the door that goes to the street. When Serkele sees them entering, she pretends to swoon, falling to the floor in a faint. Everyone runs to her aid. Chava fans her with a handkerchief, while Chaim does so with his shirt-tails.)

Freyde-Altele (Cries.) Mommy! My dear Mommy!

Doctor. Just be calm; bring wine here, wine.

FREYDE-ALTELE. Right away, Herr Doktor! (She charmingly curtseys to him.)
I shall bring it from the cellar straightaway.

DOCTOR. Lassen sie, 17 that will take too long. Just give her some cold water or a bit of vinegar. (Hinde grabs a glass of water and sprinkles some in Serkele's face.) Recht so, mein kind. 18 You have done well.

SERKELE. (Pretends to come to a little and cries.) Oy vey, I feel faint!

HINDE. Thank God! She's alive! She's alive!

REB MOYSHE. (Aside.) I always knew that she would come to a bad end.
God, blessed be His name, knows what He is doing! (Aloud to Chava.)
What on Earth happened here?

Chava. I have no idea. She was talking to Chaim, and then got angry as always, and ran to him with a knife, screaming that she was going to kill him. So he, poor thing, hid behind me, so she ran to me with the

 knife in her hand, and both of us tried to run away, and she suddenly got so angry that she fell into a faint.

CHAIM. Eh, my dear master! She doesn't know the story from the beginning. She sent me to get...

Serkele. (Suddenly screams very loud.) Oy, vey! You scoundrels! Stop gabbing, or I'll faint again!

DOCTOR. (Sits next to Serkele and takes her pulse. Says quietly to himself.) This is a remarkable fainting spell: her pulse is completely regular. (Aloud to Serkele.) Well? How are you feeling now? Ist es ihnen besser? 19

Serkele. My dear Lord! Save me! Help! I am lost!

Doctor. There, there, do not worry, it will be alright. Bring her to bed; she must have had something terrible to eat or drink.

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Says charmingly.) Nein, Herr Doktor! She only had two cups of coffee and three buttered rolls for breakfast; other than that, she has not had a thing.

HINDE. (*To Freyde-Altele.*) Freyde-Alte-dear! Give me the keys; I'll give Auntie some eau de cologne.

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Angrily whispers to Hinde.) You're too sick to call me Friederika? (Aloud.) To tell you the truth, I have only a tiny bit, and I need that for myself today, since my bridegroom will be coming.

Doctor. (Getting up out of his chair.) Well, just bring her to bed, and please bring me a pen and paper. Everything will be fine. (Hinde and Chava help Serkele sit up.)

Serkele. Oy vey! Oy vey! Oy vey, I feel faint! (Hinde and Chava bring Serkele into her bedroom. Chaim looks for a pen and paper.)

^{17.} German, "Let it be."

^{18.} German, "Good, my child."

^{19.} German, "Are you feeling better?"

Scene 10

YERAKHMIEL. (Enters from the door leading to the street, carrying a jug. He removes his hat and says in a loud voice.) My ma-ma-ma-master! (Everyone shushes him. Freyde-Altele goes to Yerakhmiel and whispers something in his ear. Chaim brings the doctor a pen and paper.)

DOCTOR. Well? Wo ist di dinte?20

CHAIM. Milord only asked for pen and paper.

DOCTOR. Well bring me ink as well.

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Looking at herself in the mirror.) Oh, look at me! My curls are a mess! (Fixes her curls in the mirror.) I gave myself quite a fright.

CHAIM. (Brings an inkpot with some sand.) Here is some ink and sand for milord.

DOCTOR. Nu, nu, nu, very good. (Sits down and writes.)

REB MOYSHE. (Sighs very loudly.) Oy! I hope it will turn out alright!

Doctor. But why, my dear Herr Danziger, so downtrodden? Do not worry yourself, your wife is already better; it was just a little fit of hysteria. But can you tell me what the problem was before—why she had me summoned?

REB MOYSHE. There was nothing wrong with her—she's just very evil and very worthless. God knows what her bad behavior will bring her one day.

DOCTOR. There, there, calm yourself, mein lieber Herr Danziger, es wird schon alles gut,²¹ it will be alright. Her physical condition is not bad, I assure you, she is strong enough.

CHAIM. Yes, lord Doctor! She gave me quite a smack before—I actually saw stars! (Freyde-Altele pokes him to make him shut up.)

DOCTOR. (Gets up and gives Reb Moyshe the prescription.) Send this to the apothecary, and he will send a bottle here. Give her two tablespoons from it every two hours. When the bottle is empty, send for me again. Above all, she should keep warm, stay in her room, eat nothing but soup, and stop getting worked up and shouting. Take me to her one more time; I shall tell her that myself. Kommen sie.²² (He goes with Reb Moyshe to Serkele's room.)

CHAIM. (Follows them, then points at one palm, then at the other.) When hair starts growing here, that's the day she'll obey everything that old shoe says. Just wait 'til he leaves—then she'll be barking her orders again. (Goes into the bedroom.)

Scene 11

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Runs toward Yerakhmiel.) Now speak: what do you want? YERAKHMIEL. Ma-ma-ma-my master se-se-sent me with a-a-a note.

FREYDE-ALTELE. For whom?

YERAKHMIEL. For whom? F-f-f-for you.

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Pretends not to understand.) For whom, did you say?

YERAKHMIEL. A-a-again for whom-f-f-f-for you.

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Angrily.) What a scoundrel you are! Well, so who am I? What's my name, then?

YERAKHMIEL. You're name is F-f-f-freyde-Alte.

FREYDE-ALTELE. No. my name is Fräulein Friederika Danziger.

YERAKHMIEL. Well, I don't ha-ha-have any n-n-note for you at all. My mamaster told me to g-g-give the note t-to Freyde-Alte. (Starts to go.)

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Not letting him leave.) But come here, the letter is indeed intended for me. Show it to me!

YERAKHMIEL. (Hiding the note in his pocket.) Why should I?

FREYDE-ALTELE. You just told me yourself that you have a letter for me. Nu, so gib es hier.²³

YERAKHMIEL. (Turns back around.) Nu, t-t-tell me, what's your name?

FREYDE-ALTELE. Well I'm also called Freyde-Altele-what an idiot!

YERAKHMIEL. (*Pretending not to understand*.) What? Freyde-A-a-altele is an idiot? Th-that doesn't m-matter to me at all; I still have to g-give the letter to h-her.

FREYDE-ALTELE. Nu, so gib schon einmal hier.²⁴ I'm telling you that my name is Freyde-Altele, but I'm also called Fräulein Friederika Danziger.

YERAKHMIEL. She s-s-seems to have s-s-seven names, j-j-just like Jethro in the Bible. 25 (*He searches in his pochet*.) Yes, and n-n-nothing f-f-for my trouble?

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Gives him money.) There, now give me the letter.

YERAKHMIEL. (First puts the money in his pocket, then gives her the letter.) Th-th-there's the letter, and give me a-a-an answer right away.

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Reads the letter silently, then says.) Tell Herr Hendler...

YERAKHMIEL. (Interrupting.) Y-you mean my ma-ma-master?

FREYDE-ALTELE. Yes. Tell him that everything is fine, thank God. Reb Yoykhenen has been here, my mother gave him all the right answers,

^{20.} German, "Where is the ink?"

^{21.} German, "My dear Herr Danziger, it will be alright."

^{22.} German, "Come."

^{23.} German, "Give it here."

^{24.} German, "Give it here already."

^{25.} According to the midrash (commentary on the Bible), Jethro was known by seven different names. See Exodus Rabbah 27:8.

and tell him we also desire that he not go away, for my mother wishes to invite him to dinner, and this evening the desired event will be assured.

Yerakhmel. (*Hesitates a moment.*) It would be b-b-better if you gave me a-a-a note.

FREYDE-ALTELE. But it's impossible for me to write right now.

YERAKHMIEL. (Laughs.) Heh-heh-heh, and I kn-know why.

FREYDE-ALTELE. Tell me, why do you think?

YERAKHMIEL. (Taking the money out of his pocket and showing her.) Because you h-hold on to your money a l-little too tightly.

FREYDE-ALTELE. You impertinent thing! Well, just wait, and I will write. (Sits down at the desk and writes.)

YERAKHMIEL. (Stands on tiptoe and watches her write; he makes fun of her.) H-h-hoo-ha! My goodness, w-w-what skillful handwriting, all sticks and pokers!

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Folds the letter and gives it to Yerakhmiel.) Here you have my answer, and tell Herr Hendler that he dines with us today, he must not go away.

YERAKHMIEL. A-a-and I should s-s-stay home a-and ha-have nothing t-to eat? FREYDE-ALTELE. Just take it and go; that is no concern of mine.

YERAKHMIEL. B-b-but it's a concern of m-mine, s-so I'm not t-taking th-the letter.

FREYDE-ALTELE. All right, come with your master as well, but just take it. YERAKHMIEL. Attagirl, you're r-really a good girl, and I l-love you too. (Takes the letter and exits.)

FREYDE-ALTELE. What a good-for-nothing! After the wedding he must be sent packing, and I will have only Christian servants, not a single Jew! That one treated me as if we were slopping the hogs together! Ach, what a stupid fellow! I will complain about him to my bridegroom. And I will put this letter away with the other things that he has sent me. (Gives the letter a kiss and runs out.)

The curtain falls.

ACT III

The same room as in the first act.

Scene 1

Reb Gavriel. (Lies on the sofa half-dressed.) I hope I can figure out how to pay off this debt. This opens up a whole new world for me. Reb Moyshe Danziger's son-in-law! Who would have ever believed it? I'm

going to lead all of them around by the nose. True, the father-in-law is nothing but a common run-of-the-mill boor, who doesn't know his ass from his elbow-to him, I'll be the rabbi. And I'll run such rings around my mother-in-law that she won't know which way is up. And my bride, the Fräulein Freidrika, all I've got to do is tell her just once how pretty she is, and she's completely sold. Gavriel! You're on fire, you're well on your way to the top! (Rests for a moment.) Yes, everything's going perfectly, but what am I going to do about the damn payment? Where am I going to get a thousand big ones? And that wonderful woman insists that I settle my debt directly with her before anyone signs anything. What am I going to do now? (Gets up from the sofa and walks up and down the room twice, thinking.) Maybe I should tell her that I can't pay it off now, because all my money's tied up in business deals-no, Serkele's not one of those dime-adozen fools; she'll just say (Imitating Serkele.) "Oy, I feel faint! My Altele, she should live and be healthy, is only thirteen years old; she can stand to wait a little bit, until you collect your money"—and then what? I'm afraid she'll have to wait a pretty long time. (Thinks a little more.) Maybe I should let Alte in on the secret that I don't have any money? Well, then what? Once a fool throws a stone into a garden, even ten sages can't get it out. Altele will tell Mamaleh right away, and Mamaleh will tell Papaleh, and then Gavrieleh will be thrown out into the streeteleh! (Thinks some more and then, with a cry.) Wait, that's it! But what does that help? (Thinks further, then suddenly he slaps himself on the head and speaks more quietly.) Aha! If this will save mewhat am I saying? This must save me—need shatters even iron, as they say. (Walks around the room, gesturing with his hands as if he were explaining something. Afterwards says very slowly.) Listen, Gavriel, this sounds good to you. I'm telling you, Gavriel, it's good-better than good! You're a fine young man! (Rests a moment.) I swear, if I could only reach, I'd give myself a big kiss on the cheek! (Looks in all of the corners.) If only I knew where they kept it! Everyone has gone off to take a nap after lunch. Now's the time to strike, that's for sure. (He goes to the door stage right and listens; goes to the door leading out to the street and bolts it; then goes to the dresser and sees if it's locked.) Damn, locked. (Goes to the cupboard and tries it as well.) Awful! Also locked! (Points to Serkele's bedroom.) If only I knew for sure that no one would arrive, I'd clean the place out for Passover.26 Nothing ventured,

^{26.} The extremely strict laws regulating what food can be eaten on Passover call for a thorough cleaning out of all leavened bread and other forbidden products before the holiday begins. On the night before the first Seder, the family checks every corner of the house for any remaining crumbs, which are collected and burned.

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nothing gained... (Starts toward the bedroom and listens.) I think someone's coming. (Gets angry and quickly throws himself down on the sofa.) Damn it!

Scene 2

CHAIM. You're not sleeping, my dear Reb Gavriel.

REB GAVRIEL. (Angrily.) No, I can't sleep.

CHAIM. (Smiling.) It's the same with me; you're distracted by Frieda and I can't stop thinking about Chava.

REB GAVRIEL. Is that so, boy? You and Chava—I had no idea you were such a young stallion! I swear!

CHAIM. (Proudly.) Well, what did you expect?

REB GAVRIEL. So what does Chava have to say about it?

CHAIM. Don't ask. Sometimes she says one thing and other times another—it's like she's crazy. I'll tell you, just today we fought over some little thing, because she was in one of her crazy moods—I have no idea what's going on with her. She's screaming, all of a sudden I'm a fool, an idiot, a no-goodnik, even though I know—from personal experience—that none of that's true. The long and the short of it is, even though she likes me, she blames me for everything.

REB GAVRIEL. And you keep quiet, you fool?

CHAIM. The thing is, I'm not sure myself what's going on with me. I have this terrible character flaw—it won't let me get angry with her, even once. It must be some sort of spell. Maybe it's a spell. And then again, whenever it occurs to her, she finds me and comes over to me with all of her sweet talk, saying, "Chaim my dear! I want to ask you something since you're such a fine young man... do thus-and-such for me, since you know how much I love you." Nu, you can't even imagine how that paralyzes me. And who could describe how when she makes one of her little graceful gestures and strokes my cheek—oy, vey! It almost drives me crazy; I can't sleep and I toss and turn the whole night long, and even in my dreams it always seems to me as if Chava is talking to me, murmuring to me...

REB GAVRIEL. But tell me, what is it that you find so attractive about that ugly maid?

CHAIM. Who? Chava? Ay! What are you talking about? Chava ugly? You'll have to pardon me for saying so, but you have no taste. Chava ugly?? Just look at her with my eyes. I think she's even prettier than . . . well, I mean, let me just put it this way, there isn't anyone prettier than Chava. But what I wanted to tell you in the first place is that you don't know her as well as I do—that's clear from what you said.

Reb Gavriel. What on Earth has come over you, that you think Chava is so pretty? Well, I guess that's one way to get yourself a pretty wife. What difference do all these stories make? If she really doesn't like you, then she'll find someone else quickly enough, and you'll be twisting in the wind.

CHAIM. (Clutching his head in both hands.) Oy, vey! God should protect and preserve me! Chava with someone else? No, it can't be—it mustn't be! I would rather go on the road to find work, I'd rather go begging from door to door—anything, but I'll never let her do that.

REB GAVRIEL. Well, what sort of advice do you want then, Chaim?

CHAIM. Look, my dear, Reb Gavriel... (He scratches himself behind the ear and says.) I actually came here to ask you—well, I can see that you are going to become our young master, and I know that whatever you—God should grant you long life—whatever you say, the master, the mistress, and Altele—may they all stay strong and healthy—will second with a healthy "Amen"—so because of that I wanted to ask you... (Kisses his hand.) You see, I am, as you can see, a poor young man—and so I wanted to ask you if you would keep me, a poor young man, in mind... I know that you are a good man, and so I wanted to ask you if you would make the match between me and Chava—you'll see that I'll never forget it as long as I live.

REB GAVRIEL. So, young man! That's what you were getting at? If only you had just told me what you meant. Have no fear, it'll all work out just fine. (He claps him on the shoulder.) Don't worry, Chaim! Let us just get married, and then you'll see what I can do. Just leave it all to me, and I tell you, Chava is already your bride, so sleep soundly.

CHAIM. (Cries and kisses Reb Gavriel's hand.) Oy, my dearest Reb Gavriel! You've made me a new man, better than God Himself could have! I don't know how I can possibly repay you! God, blessed be He, will surely pay you back double for what you've done for me, a poor young man.

REB GAVRIEL. Nu, nu, stop crying already, it's not right for a bridegroom to cry. Go already, stop being foolish, just have faith in me and you'll see that everything is going to turn out well, and you'll get a very nice wedding present from me into the bargain.

CHAIM. Oy, you'll see how much faith I'll have in you—I'll listen to everything you say!

REB GAVRIEL. (Suddenly gives himself a slap, as if he was just reminded of something.) Yes, there was something I was going to say to you, that's right—yes, why is the mistress going around today without her kerchief?

CHAIM. You don't know? Today's the date her brother died.

REB GAVRIEL. The date her brother died? This is the first I've heard of

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it. Her brother's yortsayt? You hear about having yortsayt for a father or a mother, but suddenly to have a yortsayt for a brother? And also, just because you have yortsayt you go around without a kerchief?

CHAIM. I'll explain everything. She only had one brother. He was very rich, and a fine person to boot. She loved him as much as she loved life. Well, in the meantime it happened that he died on a trip somewhere, and he left his entire property to her. So she took an oath that on the day of his *yortsayt* she would go without her kerchief and not wear a single piece of jewelry.

REB GAVRIEL. And she must have quite a bit of jewelry, nicht wahr?

CHAIM. Oy, oy, oy! Does she have a lot of jewelry! You know—she has a full, and I do mean full, little trunk with pearls, diamonds, necklaces, medallions, brooches, and besides her own jewelry she has a lot that people have pawned to her.

Reb Gavriel. I don't understand—how can someone hide so much jewelry?

CHAIM. Oh, I should explain, the trunk is actually quite small, but it's very full, and she always keeps it right by her in her bedroom at the head of her bed, and she always has the key with her and doesn't trust anyone in the world with it.

Reb Gavriel. Very wise of her, I must say! She truly is a great mistress. She's afraid of a thief, you see. Oh, I forgot the main thing I was going to ask—what time is it? Is it two o'clock already?

CHAIM. Ah, what are you talking about? The town clock struck three long ago.

Reb Gavriel. What, it's already three? Ah! What should I do now? They're all still sleeping, and I really need to run and catch the mail coach, but I don't like to leave without saying goodbye. Now I'm the one who needs advice. What should I do now?

CHAIM. You know what, I'm not afraid of the mistress. Maybe I could run and try to catch the mail coach.

Reb Gavriel. Oy, you really are a fine young man. You could do that for me.

CHAIM. But what will the mistress say about it?

REB GAVRIEL. Go on, fool! Since I'm sending you, she won't say a word about it, that's for sure.

CHAIM. It's not her words I'm afraid of; it's her... (Illustrates how Serkele hits him.)

Reb Gavriel. Her blows? Go, already, go—if I'm sending you, you can go. I'll be responsible for you, don't you worry.

CHAIM. I'm asking you this way because you know her already: when she gets angry, she starts with the orders... (Makes the same motions as before.)

Reb Gavriel. Nu, go already, go, it's getting late. (Chaim puts on his shoes and exits. Reb Gavriel looks after him. Then.) Thank God, I'm finally free of him again. But I've just learned something new—that you can learn things from a fool as well. It always used to puzzle me: why did 'God put fools on His earth? But now I see how right He was. God created fools so that wise men could do what they wanted with them. If the world were simply full of wise young men, I do believe they'd all die of hunger—and you, Gavriel, among them. It was beautiful how I squeezed a cure out of him for what ails me. (Points out Serkele's bedroom.) That's where the sleeping dog lies... (Looks closer.) Yep, the dog's there all right. (Chaim returns and looks in all of the corners of the room, apparently searching for something.) Well, what did you come back for? And what are you looking for? Why don't you go? It's getting late.

CHAIM. (Walking around the room, searching as he speaks.) Yes, I'll go right away, but just tell me this: what should I do when I get to the mail coach? Huh?

Reb Gavriel. Look, in my hurry I completely forgot: you should ask them there if there's any mail for me.

CHAIM. (Keeps searching and speaking.) Yes, but who should I ask there? Heh?

Reb Gavriel. What does that mean? You'll go to the postmaster, you'll take off your hat, and you'll ask if there is a letter for Gavriel Hendler. He will then tell you, right away, either yes or no. He's a perfectly nice man, don't worry. So go already, go quickly, because it's getting late.

CHAIM. (Goes, talking quietly to himself.) She's not in the front room. Not in the kitchen either. I really thought that she must have come in here. (He exits through the middle door.)

Scene 3

Reb Gavriel. There's something I don't like about that guy, with his coming back and looking all around the room—could he have guessed something? Ah, who knows what the idiot was looking for. And even if he does arrive, it's also not such a big deal. I've just promised him Chava for a bride. Okay, Gavriel, get down to business. First, though, I should check to see if the family is still asleep. (He goes over to the door stage right and listens.) Like the dead! Now, if only my ancestors' merits stand me in good stead, everything will turn out all right. (Very quickly, on tiptoe, he enters Serkele's bedroom but returns quickly.) I think someone coughed. (He listens again.) Yep, they're

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sleeping like after a wedding—no catnaps there! Sleep on, sleep well—I'll be the one making the wedding. (He enters the bedroom once more and spends several minutes there. He returns with the small trunk tucked under his arm.) Here's the payment. I've got the last laugh. You've done good, Gavriel; you read the situation perfectly. (He dresses himself very quickly, and tucks the trunk under his overcoat.) Now—home! It's going to be something to see here when Serkele realizes that she's missing her little head pillow. "Oy!" she'll cry. (He imitates Serkele.) "Oy, vey, I feel faint!" But this time she'll have a reason to faint. (He goes once more to the door stage right to see if they are sleeping, and then exits through the middle door.)

Scene 4

REDLEKH. (Enters through the middle door and looks around to all sides.) No one here? What is that? Where is everyone? (He looks through the door stage right.) Sleeping? Well, that's certainly careless—the room empty, the doors open-it's simple for anyone who wants to come in and steal whatever they wish, while the house is sound asleep. Where is Hindele, then? It seems that I'll finally be able to surprise her because of the carelessness in the housekeeping. (He goes up and down the room.) Should I go in there and call for her? But then who'll stay here? No, it's better for me to stay here, and then when she arrives, I'll be waiting to give her a talking-to. (He thinks a bit more.) But no; the talking-to can wait; why should I make her archenemy Friederika happy? Yes, that woman is diligence herself! In the morning she doesn't feel like a lesson, so she decrees that I come here in the afternoon—and now she's in the middle of an afternoon nap! (He laughs.) Ha ha ha! Her mother is very diligent when it comes to her business affairs. She sent for me today, calling yet again because she was sick, terribly sick, and she wants me to come to her bedroom only at night and cure her, that is, fix her up some medicine. Yes, yes, I understand your schemes, you good-for-nothing woman, I know you too well, you disgrace to humanity, you're making a big mistake if you think I'm going to break my back for you. Aha! You're far off the mark, my dear Danziger! You haven't calculated correctly, and it won't work! (He stays quiet a moment.) Unfortunately I know all too well that this so-called saint will revenge herself on me-on my one and only lesson, my last means of support which alleviates my extraordinary need. I also feel strongly that I should no longer see my beloved Hindele. But better to go to an early grave always yearning for my heart's beloved, than succumb for a single minute to the base

demands of a fallen woman. But wait! Someone's coming! Aha—my dear Hindele!

Scene 5

HINDE. See here, Herr Redlekh! Where is the new groom? Chaim just told me that he was here.

REDLEKH. I arrived not long ago to find the door open and no one in the room. Who is the fresh-baked bridegroom that you supposed would be here?

HINDE. Don't you know that our friend Friederika has been freshly baked today?

REDLEKH. Baked? Today? By whom, may I ask?

HINDE. With Reb Gavriel Hendler.

REDLEKH. So! With Reb Gavriel Hendler? I wish her well, if she's satisfied with that.

HINDE. Ah! She is eminently satisfied, since she has managed to get her parents to support her own desires in the matter.

REDLEKH. So? She loved him before? Well then, that is true happiness for her, for there are many, especially among our people, who find their parents' choice for them utterly distasteful, but in the end either shame or obedience leads them to marry a good-for-nothing of their parents' choosing, whether or not he has money.

HINDE. Wait a moment, Herr Redlekh! The case is difficult to apply to our Friederika, since the Almighty has provided her with good, loving parents.

REDLEKH. (Laughs.) Ha ha ha! Truly good loving parents?—oh, yes! Anyone who has ever entered this house and had the opportunity to conduct any business here can see that right away. (Laughs.) Ha ha ha! Truly good and loving parents—I've never heard anything less true.

HINDE. You laugh? If you'll excuse me, appearances usually deceive.

REDLEKH. Deceive? No, no, if they deceive, then my senses have completely deceived me—nicht wahr, dear Hindele? Your aunt is a good person? Does she treat you the way a good person would?

HINDE. I don't believe that I have anything to complain about as far as my aunt is concerned. Tell me, Herr Redlekh, have you ever heard me say a word against her?

REDLEKH. No, you've never complained. Fine, that is very noble on your part, but it's not as if it does you any good. On the contrary, it may even be making your situation much worse. Ah, I have often seen how they begrudge you even the little bit of food they give you for

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all your hard work, how contemptuously they treat you, and the dreadful sight has broken my heart.

HINDE. I thank you for your heartfelt concern, but I must ask you not to express your feelings about my beloved aunt in front of other people, because by doing so, you could cast not only her, but also me and yourself, in a bad light.

REDLEKH. Do not be the slightest bit worried, my dear Hindele! If you were going to be cast in a darker light, no matter how dark, it would all be dissipated by your glorious rays of light! As far as your aunt is concerned, people understand her character much better than you do! Ah, if you could only know everything that the people in the streets say, that this female Fury...

HINDE. (Refuses to let him finish speaking and interrupts him. She covers her ears so that she cannot hear what Redlekh is saying.) I don't wish to know about such things, I don't want to hear of them, my dear, good Herr Redlekh! I beg of you, approach me only with happy news, spare me these kinds of sentiments and allow me to think only good of my aunt, my second mother.

REDLEKH. (Remains quiet for a moment and looks at Hinde with pity; afterward, he goes over to her and takes her by the hand.) Godly maiden! Please forgive me if I have discomfited you; please believe me that it was only my love for you which has caused me to call attention to your lot. I see now how rude it was of me, who was so self-satisfied, to try and darken what is so good. (Serkele slowly opens the door stage right and stealthily looks on.) I beg of you, my dear Hindele, do not despise me. (He kisses her hand.) Here I await your pardon, like a poor servant.

HINDE. For heaven's sake, I beg of you (Tries to extract her hand from his.), let me go, I ask of you with my whole heart, let me go. (To herself, quietly.) I cannot bear it any longer! (Aloud.) Dear, good, precious Herr Redlekh! (She gives him a kiss.) Let me go! Allow me. (She tears her hand away.) I ask you from the bottom of my heart.

REDLEKH. Ah! Now my joy is boundless! Now let the whole world chase after diamonds, pearls, and whatever they call riches. (*He takes both of Hinde's hands*.) But if I have you, Hinde, then that is pearls, diamonds, and jewels enough!

Scene 6

(Hinde and Redlekh separate with Serkele's entrance.)

Serkele. Well, well, this is something I never expected. Well done, Hindele! You're doing your dear departed father proud. Oh, nice!

Very nice! You've fallen so low that you pick the very day of Dovid's yortsayt to go fooling around with Germans.²⁷ Oy, I feel faint!

Redlekh. (Looking at Serkele as if she were joking.) Don't get any more upset, my dear Frau Danziger—you are quite sick, very sick, and you can't bear it.

HINDE. (Trying to prevent Redlekh from speaking any further.) For heaven's sake, be silent, I beg of you.

Serkele. (With both hands clutching her sides.) And who is this? You scoundrel! You villain! Do you think that I'm running some sort of meat market here? I'll teach you to respect your elders, you rascally German. What a scoundrel! The nerve he has, to come to visit me in my house and then incite the women in it to riot against me! (Redlekh wants to respond, but Hinde pleadingly gestures to him to go. Serkele shouts loudly.) Out of my house, you ragamuffin, you two-bit German! Out immediately, I say! If you ever dare to darken my door again, I'll rend you limb from limb, oy, I feel faint! (Hinde takes Redlekh by the hand and guides him out through the middle door.)

HINDE. If you want to please me, you'll go. (Redlekh looks angrily at Serkele once more from the door and exits.)

Scene 7

(Hinde stands by the door, head bowed, and weeps.)

Serkele. Nu, nu, that I have lived to see this—who could have possibly expected that that shlimazl would cause me such embarrassment, such shame! You wait, just wait, I'm going to take care of you, believe me, you animal, may a blight plague you all your years and days. Oy, I feel faint! This is what I get for all the troubles, all the suffering, that I've had day and night for you! Ah, what does she have to worry about?—nu, and she wants a German, too . . .

HINDE. (Crying.) Auntie, auntie! I am

Serkele. (Interrupting her.) Shut your trap, you wretch! While you still have a trap to shut! How much do you contribute to the household, huh? You're crying? You should be crying—you've had something to cry about for your whole life. Why were you ever brought into this world? Tell me, you, you disaster: how could you not have had God

^{27. &}quot;German" here refers not actually to someone from the German principalities, but a modernizing Jew, whose adoption of German modes of speech and dress led to that nickname by traditional Eastern European Jewry.

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in your heart on this fine, bright day in my house, whose door gets no rest from all the strange men. To sit down with such a hooligan, such a good-for-nothing? God only knows what would have happened here, if something hadn't yanked me out of bed, oy, I feel faint! My ancestors were looking out for me!

HINDE. (Goes to Serkele with a cry and tries to kiss her hand.) Auntie! Wonderful auntie! Just hear me out...if only you'll listen... I'm... completely innocent.

Serkele. (Pushing Hinde away from her.) Get away, you, you...Go kiss yourself in the you-know-where! (She is so angry she can't speak.)

HINDE. (Falls on the ground and cries.) Oy! May God forgive you for this!

Scene 8

(Chava enters through the stage right door.)

CHAVA. (Running to Hinde.) Oy vey iz mir, my sweet Hindele! (She helps her up.) Have you done something to yourself, my dear?

REB GAVRIEL. What's happened here?

Serkele. Don't ask, everything's fine now. Everything's all better.

REB GAVRIEL. What's that? Did something happen?

Serkele. Oy, I feel faint! Believe me, it's too much of a scandal and a shame even to repeat it! Just look at her—wouldn't you have sworn that she's pure as a baby's bottom? The hussy!

HINDE. Oy, Chava dear! Take me to my bed, I need to lie down, I'm completely overcome—oy!

CHAVA. (Taking Hinde in her arms.) God will make sure that all of this fighting turns out well. Everyone has to pick on the poor orphan.

Serkele. Just look at the way she pretends to be so weak, the little bitch!

Now she says she has no strength—just bring Redlekh back and she'll be strong enough. Oy, I feel faint!

Chava. (Takes Hinde away very slowly and cries strongly.) It's high time that God gets around to showing some of His mercy.

Scene 9

REB GAVRIEL. What happened here that has made you so angry? It's not like you to act like this. Just tell me—or is it too much of a secret to tell even me, ha?

Serkele. A secret here, a secret there—why shouldn't I tell you so that you can have your share of heartbreak as well? Believe me, I have more than my share—but you're the only one; this is between us. You can't tell anyone else.

REB GAVRIEL. Don't worry about it for a minute, my mother-in-law-to-be. Who do I have tell? As far as I'm concerned, it's in one ear and out the other.

Serkele. Listen up, then, and you'll hear quite a story. I was lying down earlier, sleeping—and it wasn't even a proper sleep, I was lying there and dozing, like someone in a daze, and there was something that wouldn't let me lie in one place, I'm telling you, it was like it uprooted me, and demanded that I go into the main room . . but then I reminded myself that you were lying in here sleeping—

REB GAVRIEL. (Standing as if he were slightly afraid; now he interrupts.) Yes, you're right, I certainly was sleeping here, only I remembered that the mail coach was leaving here today at four o'clock, and I still needed to write a few letters, so I quickly ran away, it was my good luck that I remembered—so what happened then?

Serkele. Meanwhile, I heard that good-for-nothing here, his nasty voice. And I'm telling you the truth, I was never able to stand him, and believe me, if he weren't teaching my dear Alte her French, I would never have let him inside this house, that's for sure. Oy, I feel faint!

REB GAVRIEL. You're talking about Redlekh? Aha! Aha! You must be correct. That sort of trickster can walk off with something of yours just like that, and all you can do is shout and moan.

SERKELE. Meanwhile I thought to myself, let me go see who he's talking to so seriously over there, and so I got up and went over to the door and very very quietly watched what was going on there. What can I tell you, my dear Reb Gavriel?-I thought I was going to sink right down into the earth. Just imagine that here (She places Reb Gavriel where Redlekh was standing earlier.) is where Reb Redlekh was standing and close to him was that animal (She places herself near Reb Gavriel, where Hinde was standing earlier.) and he is embracing her all the time and caressing her. (She takes Reb Gavriel with both hands and caresses him.) Afterward he even gives her a kiss-I just watch and keep quiet. (She is silent a moment.) He gives her another kiss-I watch, and keep quiet. (She is quiet another moment.) He gives her a third kiss then, you know what I'm saying? And she gives him one back. (She is silent a moment and looks at Reb Gavriel. He turns away from Serkele and makes a face, as if he is disgusted by something.) Well, I think that's the whole story! Now's the time for me to show myself, because I have, sad to say, seen that this was clearly leading up to bigger things. (She claps a hand over her mouth.) Oy, I feel faint! I come in suddenly-well, I made an end of him, he'll never darken my door again; she's still going around, that shameless bitch, and trying to persuade me that the whole thing-what I saw with my very own eyes-is all a lie, and wants to apologize for everything—

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Reb Gavriel. (Interrupting her.) So you went and smacked her—nu, so what? You didn't turn her into a thief just by hitting her. Besides, we have an old saying, written down by our sages in black and white: spare the rod and spoil the child.

Serkele. Well, no, I haven't hit her, but it always drives me crazy the way she's always denying things I tell her; and also, why should my house, which has always had the reputation of being good and pious, become the topic of conversation among decent people because of such a worthless creature? So I barely touched her, and she fell down—so let her fall down; does she think that's going to bother me?

REB GAVRIEL. You know, my dearest mother-in-law, you should thank your lucky stars that he didn't take anything from you in the course of things, because I'll tell you the truth—I always used to marvel at how you let him and the troublemaker stay in the house by themselves. He used to march all over the place exactly like he owned it.

Serkele. Who could have expected something like that all of a sudden from such a *shlimazl*?²⁸ He always used to drop by to visit my brother, may he rest in peace and may his merits intercede for us, and at first, when he began to drop by my place, he did act as if he were some sort of master. And I'll tell you the God's honest truth, I always thought that a young man like that could come in handy—that's why he taught French to Altele, may she live and be well.

REB GAVRIEL. Oh, I almost forgot the most important thing—is my bride around? I swear, a few hours away from her, and I'm already starting to yearn for her! I don't know how I'm ever going to be able to tear myself away from her!

SERKELE. Where do you need to go?

REB GAVRIEL. For the time being, nowhere, but being a merchant, you never know—today you're here, tomorrow there; wherever the business goes, you go.

SERKELE. Just wait, I'll be right in. (She exits.)

Scene 10

Reb Gavriel. (He looks after Serkele and makes fun of her.) Serke-dear! Where's your kerchief, heh? (Laughs heartily.) Ha ha ha! She doesn't suspect a thing. The way it looks to me, Redlekh's going to be the one in hot water. It's a shame, that's for sure—he's not a bad kid. But what do

I care? Whatever happens, happens. These days, it's every man for himself. Today I need to make a payment, and I have to think of something; it's true, the corpse is safely stowed away, but how to make sure I end up in the clear? . . . I'll have to make sure to hang the whole thing on the poor shlimazl. The jewels can't stay in the city once and for all, that's for sure. I won't wait too long to get rid of them, you can bet on that—because no matter how much I make on the deal, it'll pull me out of the poorhouse. (Laughs.) Ha ha ha! (Grows quiet and thinks.) I don't know what to make of this. I remember, once I studied in a kheyder²⁹ where the teacher used to hit me day and night; he really gave it to me, but only if I was asking for it. Nu. good, my dear rebbe, I'm sure asking for it now... Nowadays, everyone says, "Don't covet other people's things." Idiots! If it was mine already, what would I need to covet it for? (Gestures sweepingly with his thumb, as if making a Talmudic argument.) My Rebbe, Reb Treytl the Hunchback, certainly had the right idea when he said that one could only covet other people's things, and there's no need to think about it any further-because think all you want, I'm going to stay as deep in debt as I was before. The creditors are so obnoxious! Day and night, all you hear is their complaining. I wish they'd get tired of it for once! They're already running after me in the streets and are actually tearing the clothes off my back; that I should suddenly pay them back what I owed them-isn't that a scream? It's a paradox: if I had the money to pay them back, wouldn't I have given it back to them? And besides, if I had been careful with my money in the first place, I certainly would never have borrowed so heavily that no one would trust me enough to lend me any more money. (Suddenly looks up and sees Freyde-Altele.) Gavriel! Guard your tongue! (Shuts his mouth with his hand and says quietly.) Just look at the airs she puts on!

Scene 11

REB GAVRIEL. (Crosses to Freyde-Altele and kisses her hand.) Did your dear mother tell you I was longing for you?

FREYDE-ALTELE. Yes, she told me so—God be thanked that we have come so far.

Reb Gavriel. Praise be to God! It should only go so far that we have nothing to worry about!

^{28.} Yiddish, a luckless person.

^{29.} A traditional school for young Jewish boys, where only religious subjects were taught. Maskilic literature often depicts the *kheyder* as a benighted place where corporal punishment was common and unjustified.

FREYDE-ALTELE. Will you always love me the way you love me now?

REB GAVRIEL. (Gives Freyde-Altele a kiss.) What kind of a question are you asking me? You're my golden Altenyu!

FREYDE-ALTELE. I beg you, my dear bridegroom—do not call me by that diminutive Yiddish name any more! Pfui! How old do you think I am?

Reb Gavriel. All I know is that you're still a youngish sort of girl, and since you are very delicate and tender, you're called "Altele," so that you should grow up big and strong, because there is good luck in the name.

FREYDE-ALTELE. I know quite well that I have been very delicately brought up, but I would still rather be called "Friederika," and you should always refer to me by that name.

Reb Gavriel. (Quietly, to himself.) As far as I'm concerned, she can call herself Nouveau-rike! (Aloud.) Nu, my love, from now on I will always refer to you as my beloved, majestic Frieredike, alright?

FREYDE-ALTELE. But not Frieredike, Friederika, and you, you yourself must also have a proper German name, like, for example—(She remains silent for a moment; they look at each other and think.)

REB GAVRIEL. Maybe-Chapriel?

FREYDE-ALTELE. Ah, feh! That's not at all pretty!

Reb Gavriel. Nu, no, no. (They look at each other once more and think.)
Maybe ... Havrilo?

FREYDE-ALTELE. Ah, no, that sounds like a name for our coal man. No, no, let me just think a little bit more, by myself. (Thinks some more; he wraps himself in her shawl and laughs while she is quiet and makes fun of her; she whacks herself on the head, happily.) Guess what! You know what would be good—Gabriele! That's a very nice name. Yes, yes, that's what it's got to be, Gabriele is what you'll be called! I saw that beautiful name in a book once. (Takes his hand.) My dear Gabriele Hendler!

Reb Gavriel. (Quietly.) And a mazl tov to you on the name! (He takes her hand.) My golden Frire- no- Friederikenyu!

Scene 12

Reb Gavriel. (Runs across the stage to Yerakhmiel) What is it you want this time?

YERAKHMIEL. C-c-c-ome home with me f-f-f-for once! I-i-i-i-if you graft y-y-y-yourself onto something, i-i-it will be impossible for y-y-y-you to tear y-y-y-ourself away.

REB GAVRIEL. Nu, talk already. What do you want?

YERAKHMIEL. Rabbi Shmuel Se-se-se-secondhand is looking for y-y-y-you again.

REB GAVRIEL. Nu, for what? Has he brought me back my two hundred rubles? (He motions to Yerakhmiel to say "Yes.")

YERAKHMIEL. Ay, ay, just the opposite; he s-s-said that if y-y-you don't pay him the two hu-hu-hundred rubles today that y-y-you owe him, that he's going to g-g-g-go to the p-p-p-p...

REB GAVRIEL. (Not letting him finish, and frantically gesturing to him to keep quiet.) Go, go, I know already. I know already!

Yerakhmiel.... p-p-p-police and will f-f-f-force it out of y-y-y-you. (Freyde-Altele laughs loudly.)

REB GAVRIEL. (Taking Yerakhmiel by the hand and throwing him out of the center door.) Go to hell! (Yerakhmiel exits.)

Scene 13

Reb Gavriel. That's the price of having servants—they get everything backward. Like here, poor Rabbi Shmuel had to come begging to me; he came to ask me not to call in the police if he wasn't able to pay me back the two hundred rubles today.

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Laughs.) Ha ha ha! I certainly love to listen to the funny way your servant talks. (She imitates him.) "To the p-p-p-police." Ha ha ha!

REB GAVRIEL. (To himself.) I'm going to have to find some way to shut that trap of hers right away—the fool could babble everything to her mother. (Aloud.) My golden Friederikenyu! I've brought you a gift, which I think you will enjoy greatly.

FREYDE-ALTELE. Ah, give it to me, I beg you.

REB GAVRIEL. (Takes out a ring from his overcoat and gives it to her.) Just give me your golden hand, and I will put it on myself. (Freyde-Altele gives Reb Gavriel her hand, and he puts the ring on her finger.) Oy, vey! How beautiful! Just look at how that ring sits there like that! Oy, vey! How magnificent!

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Happily.) Thank you. My dear Gabriele, what are these four stones?

Reb Gavriel. Ah? Those—those are very precious stones. Really, aren't they pretty? Just look. That one—that one's a topaz. And those two there are carbuncles, and the others are pure abellines and premethysts! (He leans away from Freyde-Altele, makes fun of her, and laughs.)

FREYDE-ALTELE. My dear Gabriele, now you wait here, because I have something that I wish to give you as a present. (She begins to leave.)

Reb Gavriel. (Holds her and does not let her go.) What's the hurry? There'll be plenty of time later for me to see it. I believe you; I'm sure it's beautiful.

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Serkele

Freyde-Altele. Just wait here one minute, I'm just going to call my mother. (Screams at the top of her lungs.) Mamenyu! Mamenyu!

Scene 14

SERKELE. What are you screaming like that for, my dear? What do you want, my sweet?

FREYDE-ALTELE. Just look, Mamenyu, at what my bridegroom has given to me! (She shows her the ring.) Now, Mamenyu! I ask you, show him what you have purchased for him.

Serkele. (Examines the ring and then gives it back to Freyde-Altele.) Why do I have to go and look for it right now? It's all packed away with the jewelry. Oy, I feel faint!

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Kisses Serkele on the hand.) I beg you, Mamenyu, show him, show it to him right now!

REB GAVRIEL. (A little bit confused.) Ah, there's no need to bother my mother-in-law right now! I'll have plenty of time to see it later as well. Let it go for now; I know that there's no way that it could possibly disappoint me.

FREYDE-ALTELE. No, no, Mamenyu! Golden Mamenyu! Go, go, get it for him right away! (She takes her in her arms and kisses her.)

SERKELE. Nu, nu, I'm going already. (She goes into her bedroom.)

REB GAVRIEL. Damn! (He remains still, confused and distracted.)

Freyde-Altele. Now you're going to see something beautiful, you won't be disappointed—I'm telling you, it's magnificent.

REB GAVRIEL. (To himself.) Bad news, Gavriel! But stiff upper lip!

Serkele. (Enters running from the bedroom, wringing her hands and screaming.) Oy, vey! Gevald! I'm dying! Gevald!

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Running to Serkele.) What is it? (She screams.) Gevald! REB GAVRIEL. (Simultaneously; screams even louder.) Mother in-law! What is it? What is it?

Serkele. (Screaming loudest of all.) Help! Somebody's robbed me while I was gone! Oy, vey iz mir! Where should I start? What should I do? (She screams even louder and begins to hit her head with both fists.) Oy, vey, my things! All my hard work! Moyshe! Moyshe! We've been left complete paupers! Help! Help! My jewels! My jewels! Help!

Reb Gavriel. For God's sake, just tell me, what are you missing? Did you fall? Don't scream like that! The jewelry—you're saying—it must be here, just look, search everywhere!

Serkele. (Rakes her face with both her hands; wrings her hands and hits herself on the head, runs about the room and screams, finally throwing herself onto

the sofa.) Everything's going black! The whole chest with all my jewelry is gone! Oy, my life is over! I'm dying! Oy! Search, children! Search! Oy, gevald! Come on, come on, it was over there, in the bedroom, in my bed, at the head! Come on, come on, let's look! Help! (They all run into the bedroom.)

The curtain falls.

Act 4

Scene 1

At night, in the same room as in act 1. A candle is burning on the table. Serkele and Reb Gavriel are seated at the table.

SERKELE. This city is for the dogs! Such a big city, and there's not a single person who can give me some advice!

REB GAVRIEL. Believe me, my dear in-law, if I know you, you don't need anyone's advice. Because in a matter like this, it's best to keep your own counsel. Because you—may you be well—know better than anyone where you kept the chest, and you know everyone in your household and all your visitors. It seems to me that with your good sense, you'll accomplish more than the rest of us put together.

Serkele. Oy, I feel faint! You know, I was feeling anxious before, as if I am completely lost. Listen, my dear Reb Gavriel! I was thinking something completely different. My idea was that you should have a little chat with Redlekh. But understand: so clever, really clever, that he won't suspect a thing. That's right. But I don't have to teach you. And I'll go to Hinde myself, and find out a little more from her. And I'm telling you, my heart tells me that with God's help, we'll find out everything from them.

REB GAVRIEL. Now you see, my dear in-law—please don't be insulted—you're talking like a child. What do you think: Redlekh is some kind of fool? Redlekh won't immediately guess what I'm up to as soon as I tell him what I've come to him about? And above all, if he is a thief, won't he watch every word he says? Because of all that, I have a very different suggestion: for now you should let it be and not let people know that something is missing, and I assure you that in a little while, everything will turn out just fine. Because the thief will definitely sell the jewels to someone. And tell me, who around here doesn't know your jewelry? They'll bring everything back to you just when you least expect it.

Serkele. Well, yes, maybe you're right, but do you think I'll be able to contain myself until then? Will I get a moment's rest? Will I survive it? Won't that be an enormous strain to keep such anguish to myself? The holidays are coming soon—and how will I be able to go to synagogue? I won't even be able to show my face in the street, oy, I feel faint!

Reb Gavriel. I just don't understand. Was all your jewelry stolen? How could that be? There must be something left!

Serkele. What do you mean? How could there be anything left, when I kept all my jewelry in one chest and the thief took it all—so how could there be anything left? And to top it off, fate has dealt me such a heavy blow that this had to happen on the day Dovid died. And the thief managed to do it because he knew that on this day, I don't wear a single piece of jewelry! Oy, it's very grim! I'm practically going out of my mind! And the worst part of it is that no one can give me any advice on what to do, oy, I feel faint! It's really true what they say: when the wheels are too heavy, the wagon gets stuck.

REB GAVRIEL. Absolutely. What sort of advice can I give you? I have no idea. SERKELE. I beg you, do what I tell you just this once, and talk to Redlekh. What are you afraid of? He won't hit you, you know. God knows I can't look that thief in the eye.

REB GAVRIEL. You know what, my dear in-law? I'll do that for you, so that afterward you don't start second-guessing me. But I'll ask you just this one thing: you do something for me too.

SERKELE. Well, tell me, what is it?

REB GAVRIEL. If you'll beg my pardon and send for Reb Yoykhenen to help me a little, you can be sure that we'll question the boy together, and we'll get to the bottom of it, no matter how deep we have to dig. Two heads are better than one.

SERKELE. Yes, that's true, but when can that happen?

Reb Gavriel. As far as I'm concerned, today if you want.

Serkele. Good, I'll send for Reb Yoykhenen right away. And you can both sit down and have him called in. I don't even want to be there. (She gets up to leave.)

REB GAVRIEL. Where is the boy, then? He's probably at home! Who knows whether he'll want to come here?

Serkele. Eh, what are you saying! He's already here at my house, the rascal! I was afraid that he wouldn't come, so I tricked him into coming here by telling him that my Moyshe wants him. And once he came here, I wouldn't let him go home. So he's sitting in there, in the kitchen, and two beadles are watching him.

REB GAVRIEL. You've done very well. But now don't delay any more and send for Reb Yoykhenen right away, since it's getting late. And let

him know why, and prepare something to drink to get him here sooner, since he won't say no to that.

SERKELE. I'll send everything in. (Starts to go.)

Reb Gavriel. I almost forgot, come back for a minute, I forgot to ask you something.

SERKELE. (Turns around.) What is it?

REB GAVRIEL. What happens if Redlekh is a smart boy and keeps his mouth shut? What will you do if he doesn't confess to the truth, ha? SERKELE. Don't you worry about that! If he doesn't confess here, he'll do it somewhere else! Just do what you need to and don't worry about me; I'll do what I have to. (She goes.)

Scene 2

REB GAVRIEL. Whatever she finds out from him, she can keep it. And at the same time, Redlekh came here to play around with Hinde! Nothing will help here; once she's decided that Redlekh robbed her, that's it. Even if the Grand Rabbi of Babylon were to come along, he couldn't talk her out of it. I pity him, I swear! She'll make mincemeat out of him. The poor guy will rue the day he was born! A real kangaroo court! But for all that, I want to do him a favor. I have to ask her not to press criminal charges. I have no idea how to begin with him, but it will be a nice little party! She thinks I had a drink prepared for Reb Yoykhenen's sake. No, no, it's for poor me; I need it! Gavriel, take heart!

Scene 3

(Enter Reb Yoykhenen with Chaim, who is carrying a lantern, a bottle, and two glasses.)

REB YOYKHENEN. A good evening to you, Reb Gavriel!

REB GAVRIEL. A good evening, a good year, welcome, Reb Yoykhenen!
REB YOYKHENEN. (*To Chaim.*) Go call him in, and don't tell him who wants him, you hear?

CHAIM. (Going.) Right.

REB YOYKHENEN. It seems that I have you to thank you for the negotiation—you suggested that they send for me.

REB GAVRIEL. Who, me? Not at all! I know nothing—Serke called for me, and when I got here, she told me that she had sent for you too: that the two of us should interrogate Redlekh together to see

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whether he took the box of jewels. Besides, what do you care? There's plenty of ale.

REB YOYKHENEN. Yes, that's true. (Sits down and fills both glasses.) But what good does it do me? I'll tell you the truth, the whole town will be upset that an honest young man is accused of being a thief. Let me tell you something, I also go to the houses of wealthy people here, and I've heard several people praise him as an honest student. Even Reb Dovid, may he rest in peace, once mentioned that he wanted the boy to be his son-in-law. At the time, I expected to collect a handsome fee for the match.

Reb Gavriel. Well, that's a lost cause now. Believe me, I find the whole business distasteful myself. And I really regret having promised to intercede. But we're already involved, and there's nothing we can do to make it better. (*Drinks*.) L'chaim, Reb Yoykhenen—to life!

REB YOYKHENEN. To life and happiness! (Drinks.) A glass of ale—that's alright.

Scene 4

(Redlekh is brought in by two Beadles.)

REDLEKH. What do you want from me? Where are you taking me?

REB YOYKHENEN. Don't be afraid. We won't do anything to you. (To the Beadles.) You can go back in now. We'll call you if we need you. (The Beadles exit.)

Reb Gavriel. (To Redlekh.) Have a seat. (To Reb Yoykhenen.) How do you like that stupid servant! He only brought two glasses! (He finishes his glass of ale, then pours another glass and gives it to Redlekh.) Have a nice glass of ale!

REDLEKH. I thank you, but I do not drink any spirits.

Reb Gavriel. Don't worry, drink, drink! You study medicine; it must say in your books that a little alcohol is good for you.

Reb Yoykhenen. Why are you forcing him? Let me tell you something, ask the patient, not the doctor. For me, ale is really good for my hemorrhoids. But I still hate it when people force me to drink. (He drinks.)

Reb Gavriel. (Aside.) Beats me if I know how to get started here. (He drinks.)

REB YOYKHENEN. I think I saw you once up at Reb Yitskhok Roytfeld's? REDLEKH. Perhaps.

Reb Yoykhenen. Did you used to go there often?

REDLEKH. Whenever time permitted.

REB YOYKHENEN. You had to tutor someone there? REDLEKH. No.

REB YOYKHENEN. So how come you were a regular guest there?

REDLEKH. He came from my home town, and was my best friend as well.

REB YOYKHENEN. Your friend? Get out! Yitskhok Roytfeld—your friend? How could you be his friend? You're talking nonsense! He's a wealthy man and from a good family too, even though he dresses like a German! So what brought the two of you together?

REDLEKH. He and my father, blessed be he, were the most intimate of friends, and so it is with me.

REB YOYKHENEN. Your father's name was Blessed-be-he?

REDLEKH. My father was Reb Zalmen Redlekh from Prague.

REB YOYKHENEN. Reb Zalmen Redlekh from Prague. I spent Passover once with a Zalmen Redlekh. But let me tell you, that's an amazing coincidence! There must have been two Reb Zalmen Redlekhs. Because the one I spent Passover with was a very wealthy man, a big tycoon, and a very pious Jew to boot, even though he dressed like a German. I had a wonderful holiday with him! The food, the drink! Everything was delicious, and was all served in silver dishes! I remember like it was yesterday how on the second day of Passover, they served a carrot stew, a tsimes—or as they pronounce it in Germany, a tsomas. I swear to you that I can still taste it. And that's not to mention what happened after the meal, when the man poured forth with words of learning. Let me tell you, I can't remember all of it, but I tell you, I was astonished—it was as sweet as honey! (Drinks.)

REB GAVRIEL. (Aside.) The taste of the tsomas is still in his mouth and he can't remember the sermon!

Reb Yovkhenen. And after the holiday, when I was leaving, I was given a terrific package of food for the journey. I tell you, I was treated so well by that Reb Zalmen, that I can't tell you enough about it. Anyway, if you're from Prague, you must know him? His wife's name was Leah. The name suited her, because she was so modest, such a pious woman you just don't come across. Did you know them?

REDLEKH. (Cries and wipes his eyes.) Oh, alas, both of them have gone. Reb Yoykhenen. Really? They've left Prague? I'm really surprised; to have such an estate in a big city like Prague, and suddenly leave just like that? Where do they live now?

^{30.} Literally, "There is such a thing as a red heifer," a reference to the animal (Hebrew parah adumah) whose ashes were used to purify people and objects defiled by a corpse. In colloquial Yiddish, though, a red heifer simply represents an extremely rare occurrence (see Mishna Parah 3:5).

REDLEKH. (Crying very hard and pointing skyward.) There, where all distinction ends. There where everyone takes his place according to his merit. There where every person must go, leaving behind their worldly goods.

Reb Yoykhenen. What? Reb Zalmen is dead? Blessed is the true Judge!³¹ Oh, what a shame, what a shame, I swear! He was a pious Jew. And Leah too? How terrible—may God have mercy on us! (*Thinks for a moment.*) So tell me, I beg of you, I think there must have been a son who survived them? Let me tell you, I remember as if it were today how I saw a very nice-looking boy sitting at the table . . . what became of him, poor thing?

REDLEKH. (Wiping his eyes.) Oh, that boy lost not only his good, dear parents, but also, through various misfortunes, everything they left behind as well. And now he's in a situation where he may also lose sein guter ruf—his good name.

REB YOYKHENEN. What? He lost his entire fortune? I can't stand it, such wealth! Such goods there were in that house! Oh, I could faint from the grief! (*He drinks*.) Anyway, tell me—may you be healthy—where was that good roof that you said the boy was going to lose?

REDLEKH. I was not talking about a roof, but rather about a guter ruf—that is, that young Redlekh may lose his good name.

Reb Yoykhenen. His good name? But tell me, I beg of you: how can someone lose his good name? (*He drinks*.)

Reb Gavriel. (*Drinks too.*) In any case, you needn't cry like that, Reb Redlekh, for even when a wealthy or pious Jew dies in this city, no one moans so loudly.

REDLEKH. Listen to me first, and then you can say what you think. That Zalmen Redlekh, along with his wife Leah, were ill for two years, and then died in the same month. While they were still alive, the most famous doctors and apothecaries inherited half their estate, and the attorneys took care of the other half after they died. Their son was forced to rely upon the benevolence of a stranger by the name of Reb Dovid Gutherz, 32 who was an old acquaintance of his parents. This Reb Dovid took the boy in and became like a father to him. But the cup of sorrows was not yet filled to overflowing, so it pleased Divine Providence to add to it the most precious of the boy's rare solaces; that is, the same Reb Dovid Gutherz suddenly died on his way to America, and had made his sister Serkele the sole heir to his

entire fortune. For that reason, that only son of Reb Zalmen Redlekh had to work hard to earn his crust of bread by tutoring. One of his tutorials was at the house of the aforementioned Serkele. (*He suddenly stands up.*) He now stands before you, accused by the same Serkele of an ugly theft. (*He cries. The others sit mutely for a moment.*)

REB GAVRIEL. Well, so you are Reb Zalmen's son.

REB YOYKHENEN. What, you are Reb Zalmen's only son?

REDLEKH. Unfortunately, I am the very same. (He cries, and covers his face with a handkerchief. The others are again silent for a couple of minutes.)

Reb Gavriel. (Aside.) Gavriel! Think of yourself, for God's sake, take heart! (Drinks.) This ale is very good. Drink, Reb Yoykhenen!

Reb Yovkhenen. (Drinks; to Redlekh.) L'chaim, Reb Zalmen's son! (Drinks the rest, fills it again, and gives it to Redlekh.) Have a glass of ale! Drink, drink, you'll enjoy it! This ale is delicious. Drink, I beg of you!

REDLEKH. I thank you, but I really do not partake of spirits.

Reb Yokkhenen. Nu, let me tell you something, it's always really good to have a little chat. But tell me now, since you are Reb Zalmen's son and I knew your father and your mother—how could you do such an awful thing? Remember, you must have studied Torah at some point, so you know that it says in our holy Torah, "Thou shalt not steal." Let me tell you, that's no way to behave. And if a person goes through some tough times, does he have to become a thief?

Reb Gavriel. That's absolutely true. Isn't that beneath a young man like you?

REDLEKH. Listen, my dear Gavriel! I would rather leave your question unanswered, feeling that anything I say would fall on deaf ears, since you consider every student capable of doing every wrong—every crime, even—without a pang of conscience. So I would rather not waste my breath. But the realization that one can stand before almighty God with a clean conscience is enough to convince even a myopic person of one's innocence. And isn't it every person's duty to justify his actions, and to defend himself as far as possible? Therefore, my dear Reb Yoykhenen, that duty forces me to demonstrate my innocence with a sacred oath, either in front of everyone in the holy synagogue, or under the auspices of the local rabbi.

REB GAVRIEL. An oath? Bah! That doesn't mean anything to Serkele.

REB YOYKHENEN. (To Reb Gavriel.) Please don't be offended, but why not? An oath is an oath. But let me tell you something... (To Redlekh.) Reb Gavriel just means, is Serkele such a fool that she'll believe your oath?

^{31.} The traditional formula recited upon hearing of someone's death.

^{32.} German/Yiddish, "good heart."

^{33.} Exodus 20:12.

REDLEKH. (His head in his hands.) If even the first oath that I have ever sworn in my entire life does not have the power to save me in this difficult moment (Raises his hands skyward.), then You, all-knowing God, save your innocent creation from this shameful rumor! (He cries.)

REB GAVRIEL. (To himself.) I deserve a good lashing for this.

REB YOYKHENEN. Still, there's no need to cry like that. Let me tell you, Serkele is not an unjust person. Everyone's possessions are precious to them. But the simplest thing to do would be to tell the truth, because I've got to tell you that Serkele certainly won't keep quiet. And I'm really afraid that she'll have your hide.

REB GAVRIEL. And I'm also telling you, my dear Reb Redlekh, that I have the same fear. You have no idea what sort of a person this Serkele is.

REDLEKH. (No longer crying, but speaking with strength.) Believe me, my dear Reb Gavriel, I know this Serkele very well—perhaps better than anyone else. Nevertheless, I am not afraid of her at all, despite her belligerent character. For God, the Judge of all worlds, knows that my conscience is clean, and will undoubtedly guide the heart of my judge to make his verdict compatible with my innocence.

REB GAVRIEL. (To Reb Yoykhenen.) What's the use? Put an end to this; I can see that we won't get anywhere with him today. We've done our

part; that's enough. End it!

REB YOYKHENEN. (Fills both glasses and empties out the bottle.) The end is the end! Let me tell you, we've done what we could. (He drinks.) And that's that!

REB GAVRIEL. (Shouts.) Beadles, come in! (The Beadles enter.)

Reb Yoykhenen. (*To Redlekh.*) Now go with them, back where you came from! (*To the Beadles.*) And while you're going, tell Serkele to come in. Beadles. Good, very well.

REDLEKH. Gute Nacht, meine Herren.34

REB GAVRIEL and REB YOYKHENEN. (Simultaneously.) Good night, a good year! (Redlekh and the Beadles exit.)

Scene 5

REB GAVRIEL. (To himself.) Thank God that's over!

REB YOYKHENEN. (Pours from the bottle.) Why did you have them bring so little ale?

REB GAVRIEL. And if I had asked for more, would Serke have listened?

REB YOYKHENEN. Eh, what can I say? Let me tell you something: she'd be quite happy if people worked for her for nothing, but not me.

Scene 6

SERKELE. (Comes running in.) Nu? Did he confess?

REB GAVRIEL. Bah! Something like that, something like that...We

couldn't get it out of him.

REB YOYKHENEN. Why should I go on and on about it? I'd rather give you the short version and not drag it out: we questioned him plenty, here and there, one of us on one side of him and the other on the other side; in short, let me tell you something, we both—I as a good friend and Reb Gavriel as your daughter's groom, gave him a good talking to—sometimes gentle, sometimes rough. Because let me tell you something, if you want to do someone a favor, you have to go at it from every angle. I spoke to him separately and your bridegroom, long life to him, didn't spare any effort, we worked him over and made him plenty scared, and then we pleaded with nice words, because, let me tell you something...

Serkele. (Very impatient, interrupts him.) Let me tell you something here, let me tell you something there, and I still have no idea what he said.

Just answer this one question: did he confess or not?

Reb Yoykhenen. Confessed, that's what he, to tell the truth, didn't do, but he says that he wants to go to synagogue in his white robe and

prayer shawl, and swear that he knows nothing about it.

Serkele. (Smiles angrily and mocks him.) Really?! Look, this isn't a joke! Redlekh wants to take an oath! Oh! (To Reb Gavriel.) I don't understand why you're so quiet, Reb Gavriel? Do you also think I'm such a fool as to believe that scoundrel's yows?

REB GAVRIEL. That's just what I said to Reb Yoykhenen.

Serkele. Alright, so where does this talking get me? I've just thought of a completely different idea. I know what to do with him. Don't worry, Serke isn't dead yet. He did his homework, but I'll make one more try and ask Hinde some questions; maybe I'll get further with her than you did with him. I can see that if you want to get something done, you have to do it yourself.

REB GAVRIEL. I beg of you, my dear mother-in-law, why are you so suspicious of us? We did all we could, of course; he just stuck to his story.

I think even the hangman wouldn't help in this case.

REB YOYKHENEN. Nu, go ahead, we'll see what you can do; we'll see if you learn anything more from Hinde. And believe me, I wish with all my heart that you have more success than we did, but (Shrugs.) I think you're wasting your time.

^{34.} German, "Good night, gentlemen."

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REB GAVRIEL. Ay, how come? I agree with my in-law: that if she threatens Hinde just a little, maybe the girl will confess.

Serkele. And if she won't confess, then there's still a criminal running loose in the world, oy, I feel faint!

Reb Yoykhenen. It must be getting late. (Gets up.) I'd better be getting home. And Serkele, please don't rush things with the criminal. Because let me tell you, it's better sweet than sour.

REB GAVRIEL. Reb Yoykhenen is absolutely right. Because a thing like this can drag out sometimes, and take a hundred years to come to an end, and in the meantime, it costs money. Meanwhile, here comes my father-in-law, may he be well. Go through the whole story with him one more time before you do anything drastic.

SERKELE. Oh, sure, that's just the person to tell, oy, I feel faint! (She signals to them not to tell Reb Moyshe.)

Scene 7

(Reb Moyshe enters very quietly, preoccupied and sad, and not looking at anyone.)

REB YOYKHENEN. Good evening, Reb Moyshe!

REB MOYSHE. (Looks around.) A good evening, a good year, Reb Yoykhenen! Welcome! How come you're here so late?

REB YOYKHENEN. I heard about your burglary, so I came to find out what's happening—whether you've found out anything or not. What do you think, my dear Reb Moyshe: who could have done it?

REB MOYSHE. I think it's very simple: she lost it the same way that she got it! Just ask her; I always used to...

Serkele. (Cuts him off.) Why are you talking to him? The things he comes up with! What does he think: I gave it away myself? Didn't I put my headband with two kinds of pearls in the trunk early this morning with my own hands and lock the trunk with the key, and didn't I turn the key two times, and bury the trunk in the straw at the head of my bed?! If someone had ten heads, he would never have guessed there was a trunk there, oy, I feel faint! Isn't something strange going on? Has there ever been a punishment in the world like what's happened to me?

Reb Moyshe. Ay, I always knew it would end this way. I always said, "Serke, that money won't bring you any blessings." Oy, don't ask, Serke—we've brought this on ourselves! I just hope it will be alright in the end.

SERKELE. (To Reb Yoykhenen and Reb Gavriel.) What do we need his crazy talk for? Does he even know what he's saying himself? Nu, it's late

already, that's enough for today. May you go in good health. But tomorrow, God willing, please come back here again just in case I need you, oy, I feel faint!

Reb Gavriel. Nu, nu, I'll certainly be back at the crack of dawn; I won't be able to sleep a wink tonight anyway.

Reb Yoykhenen. I'll also come, of course. But I beg of you once more, Serkele: bear in mind what I asked you before. Because let me tell you, don't do it for him, but for his dead father's sake—I knew him very well, he was a pious Jew.

Serkele. Nu, nu, I'll do it for your sake. Good night, good night, go in good health!

REB YOYKHENEN and REB GAVRIEL. (Simultaneously.) Good night! Good night, Reb Moyshe! (They go.)

Scene 8

Serkele. Moyshe, Moyshe, you want to drive me into an early grave? Tell me, what do you want? What do you want from me? You talk like that with strangers in the house? Tell me, should I send for the rabbi so you can confess? Oy vey, Moyshe, Moyshe! What happened to your common sense? I swear, I'm amazed that you don't stand in the middle of the street and shout out everything you know! My father, may he rest in peace, spoke the truth when he said that a Jew is good for nothing but going to synagogue. He just doesn't care that I'm sick from all my troubles, oy, I feel faint! (She cries.) Will I sleep at all tonight? He doesn't care: so what if someone robbed him!

REB MOYSHE. Oy vey, what do you want from me? Nu, what can I do for you? I ask you, do I know who the thief is?

Serkele. What are you saying? It was none but that thief, that Redlekh! And if the whole world says otherwise, it still was no one but him, that swindler, that thief!

REB MOYSHE. Oy, I don't know what you'll come up with next! Next you'll be saying there's a man in the moon! Is there a more honest young man than Redlekh? Suddenly, to you he's become a thief! Tell me, why do you want to spare the real criminal? Don't you have enough sins of your own? Oy, I, I've had enough.

Serkele. Oy, I feel faint! Look at what a *shlimazl* you are—just listen to yourself! When I woke up this afternoon, there was no one in the house except that thief, that murderer, with that *shlimazl* Hinde. And she herself confessed that he was the only person she saw when she came home. Whatever he did, she hasn't yet told the truth about. And maybe he'll deny it to me too? Didn't I hear him tell her how

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happy he is, that now he has plenty of pearls and diamonds? Ask him, let him say to my face that it's a lie, the thief! Where did he get them, the murdering scoundrel? Where did he get pearls and diamonds? What, maybe an angel tossed them down from heaven? May he be so lucky!

REB MOYSHE. You can say it to me 'til tomorrow, but he still didn't do it. He wouldn't do such a thing!

Serkele. Nu, good, okay, you and I didn't do it. Altele either. Chaim hasn't got the brains to do it. As for Chava, she's scum, but I'll swear she's not a thief. Because she's gone through the house on her own ever since she's been with us, and not so much as a hair has ever been missing. As for Reb Gavriel, you yourself know that you can leave countless rubles lying around with him. And besides, he was out at the post office at the time. There was not another human being in the house. If you brought two little children here, they wouldn't reach any other conclusion but that an insider did this, and that it was Redlekh. Oy, oy, I feel faint! I'm cursed to have you for a husband, when all you can say is, "He wouldn't do such a thing!"

Reb Moyshe. Yes, yes, and I'll say it again, he wouldn't commit such a sin.

SERKELE. Of course he doesn't sin, the hooligan! Have you ever seen him kiss the mezuzah? Have you ever heard him say the blessing after the meal, or before bed? Does he pray? Does he put on tefilin? Does he kiss the fringes of his prayer shawl, like you're supposed to? Does he know how to celebrate *Shabbes* or holidays properly? You've seen it: when he sees women, girls, he comes to life, the rascal! Then he's in heaven, the lecher! But just you wait, I'll bury him! Let's bring in the police, give him thirty lashes, and the bastard will confess soon enough!

Reb Moyshe. Nu, go and do what you wish; I wash my hands of the whole matter! I don't want to know about it. I've had enough. By all means, let's see how you proceed with your speculations. (Starts to leave.)

SERKELE. Where are you going? Shmuel's coming soon! Don't you know that we have to file a police report early tomorrow morning? I sent for him!

Reb Moyshe. Write and say what you want—you know how to take care of such things. (He again starts to leave.)

SERKELE. At least send Hinde to me.

Reb Moyshe. (Stands by the door and glares at Serkele furiously.) Tell me, what more do you want from that poor swindled orphan? Isn't she already halfway in the grave?

Serkele. What are you so afraid of? I won't bite her! I won't do anything to her. I just want her to sew something on for me. Why are you making such a fuss over her?

REB MOYSHE. Just listen, Serkele! I'll send her in to you, but God forbid if you do anything to her—as you're inclined to—just remember that I'm in the next room! (He exits through the right-hand door.)

Scene 9

Serkele. I'll start off by chatting nicely to her, in case that's the way to get her to confess. But if she stonewalls me, I wouldn't want to be in her skin! If she wants to marry that Redlekh, I'll give them a ball and chain for a present. He'll regret that he didn't want to come. I'll tear them both to pieces!

Scene 10

(Hinde enters and remains standing by the door, hanging her head and crying.)

Serkele. Come here, Hindele! Come here . . . Closer . . . Closer . . . That's it . . . Sit down next to me on the sofa, my dear . . . (Hinde moves fearfully this whole time, gradually nearer, and sits.) Did you already have your bit of coffee, dear heart? You know, I forgot to put sugar in it . . . (Hinde cries loudly and kisses Serkele's hand. Serkele fakes a laugh.) Heh heh heh, nu, please, stop crying! I know that you're very concerned that something terrible happened to me. Still, you don't have to cry like that. You might make yourself sick, Heaven forbid. And we can't have that—it's not as if I have lots of nieces, do I? Oy, I feel faint! . . . There's just one thing that I really miss . . . the diamond earrings and the little pearls with the clasp. The ones that I always said that when you become a bride, God willing, I would give them to you! . . . Just the day before yesterday, I put them in the chest too, oy, I feel faint! (Looks at Hinde intently. A long silence.)

'HINDE. My dear aunt! Did you have me come in to sew something? What should I sew?

Serkele. There's always time for that tomorrow. Just listen, my child. To tell you the truth, I decided a long time ago, dear heart, that I would have a little chat with you. Of course you know that besides losing your mother so young, poor dear, you're without a father as well. (She wipes her eyes.) And if I hadn't taken you into my house, who knows what might have happened to you... Oy, I feel faint!...I

mean, on top of all that, I love you like my own child. And I don't think you yourself could say that any harm has ever come to you in my house . . . Ay, what, so I get mad at you sometimes? That, my dear, I think you yourself will recognize, I do only for your sake. You're no fool, and you might ask, what do I care when someone else's child does something foolish? Why? It reminds me of the old story: "Don't look at me, Rebbe, it's your cow." (Hinde cries and kisses Serkele's hand.) Anyway, you can see for yourself that although I don't show it, deep in my heart you mean very much to me-I love you like I love myself. I just want you to be good and pious, just as our dear and holy God commanded, oy, I feel faint! What do I want from you then, my dear, ha? I'm not asking, God forbid, that you leap over the roof...I only want you to tell me every tiny little thing that you know about him . . . about Redlekh, I mean. And believe me, may I be struck down in my young years if it brings the slightest harm to you or even to him! Because what do you think, I'm a fool? If someone makes a little mistake once in a while, do you think that really matters? No! People are not angels . . . It's okay, my dear, it won't shock me . . . You can tell me everything.

HINDE. My wonderful auntie, don't be angry, I'll tell you everything. I'm sure that when you hear me out, you'll forgive me. (She kisses Serkele's hand.) You're my dear father's sister, after all. I know that I've done a terrible thing, which I haven't told anyone up to now.

Serkele. Nu, nu, don't be afraid. Tell me everything, but only the truth. The truth, my dear, is what God loves. You'll see, my child, that you won't regret it. Oy, I feel faint!

HINDE. It was about two years ago, when you were at the spas, remember? You remember? ... I was, as you know, very ill. You weren't here, and Uncle, may he live long, had also gone away somewhere. Meanwhile, I kept getting sicker, to the point where I didn't even have the strength to walk around the house. But Redlekh used to ... I beg you, Auntie, don't get angry...

Serkele. Just tell me, tell me more ... Nu? I promise I won't get angry. You're so silly. If I swear? You know how precious an oath is to me. Just tell me: but Redlekh used to ...

HINDE. But Redlekh used to sit with me day and night. One time he told me that I should let him call for a doctor. "I," he said, "am very worried, Hindele, that you are seriously ill." But I was very ashamed to tell him that I had no money to pay the doctor. But when he saw that I was getting worse as each day went by, he went and brought a doctor. After that I lay in bed and had no idea what was happening to me. Only when I began to return to my senses a little, did Chaim start to tell me how I talked nonsense, and that I had been in bed

for twelve days, and that one time I was doing so badly that Redlekh cried out loud, and called in three doctors, and that I was given all sorts of medicines from the pharmacy... In short, it was no joke. I had cost so much! Afterwards, thank God, I got better, and only then did I find out that it was all with Redlekh's money. He went whole nights without sleep on my account, and he sold all his clothes and things, even his watch. Several times I told him that little by little, I would pay him back what I had cost him . . .

Serkele. (Interrupting her.) Nu, and then? Health is the most important thing to all of us. Nu, what then, my dear: you told him to take the chest of jewels, is that right, my child?

HINDE. (Staring at Serhele.) What? God forbid! I sold the earrings that I got from my mother, may she rest in peace. He didn't want to take a single kreuzer from me. But he did say that he would give his life for me, and that I deeply insulted him by offering to repay him. And from then on . . . (She suddenly becomes silent and embarrassed.)

SERKELE. Nu? From then on, what?

HINDE. And from then on, I began to see how much he loves me. (Looks straight at Serkele.)

Serkele. Nu, yes, that's true. What did you do this afternoon though, ha? Hinde. My dearest Auntie! I'll tell you the whole truth: he was here and said he pitied me for suffering so much from you, that you even begrudge me the bit of food I eat. I told him that that was a total lie, that he was quite mistaken. Of course, you're very good to me. He tried to make up with me for what he said and he . . . gave me a kiss. But I was afraid that someone would suddenly come in, so I asked him to leave me alone. He didn't want to. I asked him again. I don't know how it happened . . . but I kissed him back . . . (She becomes quiet and embarrassed.)

Serkele. All true. (*Becoming somewhat angry*.) I forgive you. But what did he say, that he has more than enough pearls and diamonds? Is it then that he took the jewel chest, ha?

HINDE. What? Where did you get that idea? He would take your jewel chest all of a sudden? He? Him?! He has no idea about all that. He only said that if I loved him, the whole world could have all the pearls and diamonds it wanted... If he had me, he'd have more than enough pearls and diamonds!

SERKELE. So where is my jewel chest?

HINDE. Why are you asking me? How should I know?

Serkele. (Suddenly stands up in anger.) What? You don't know? You don't know that Redlekh stole my jewels? Who are you trying to fool, you nasty girl?!... Maybe you think that because I've been talking nicely to you up to now, that you can trick me? Well, I'll show you, or my

name isn't Serke! (Louder and louder, in a rage.) Just wait, I'll have him bound hand and foot 'til he tells the truth! Let them give him a few hundred lashes until his boiling blood flows like water, and he'll say where my jewels are! I'll have him skinned alive, bit by bit! And you, you thief, you'll have to stand by and scream until your voice reaches the heavens! I'll let him rot in prison! And you, you little outcast, will have to scrape the worms off him by the heap! No, I won't rest, I won't take pity! I'll take no prisoners! I'll sacrifice everything else, but he'll have to give me back what's mine!

HINDE. (Extremely frightened, she hides her face in her hands. Suddenly she runs to Serkele and falls to the ground in front of her.) Auntie, my wonderful Auntie! No ... no ... I can't ... stand it ... any longer ... no. Auntie!

Serkele. (Screams very loudly, in a rage.) Just tell me where my jewels are!!! Where did Redlekh put them? Tell me, where is my stuff?! Where are my possessions?

HINDE. (Stands up, trembling.) No...no...Redlekh...is...not... a . . . thief!

Serkele. (Runs to Hinde and raises both hands to strike her. Meanwhile, the right-hand door opens, Moyshe runs in. He throws Serkele onto the sofa, takes Hinde by the hand, and runs with her out of the door through which he entered. Serkele screams miserably.) Oy vey, oy vey, I feel faint!

The curtain falls.

2

Act 5

The next morning. One can see a small street through the open doors and the windows of Reb Shmelke Troyniks's guesthouse. A window shutter bears a picture of the Jewish spies carrying a gigantic cluster of grapes on a stick,35 and written beneath the picture, in large letters, is "Shmelke Troyniks." A large bench stands in front of the door.

Scene 1

THE STRANGER. (Sitting alone on the bench, half-undressed and half-dressed in German clothing, like a traveler.) I am extraordinarily tired. That was a trip indeed! Day and night, by land and by sea, without a place to stop and to rest. May God be thanked, I have returned again to my homeland, after six long years. It seems to me that everything here has changed, improved-indeed, become more beautiful: the streetsso clean; the houses-how charming and beautiful! God! Do the interiors match the façades? How strange! How truly strange, that after so many years of suffering, after these extraordinary yearnings and longings for the favorite of my heart, I am unable to learn the least bit of news about her circumstances. (He thinks silently for a moment.) Dearest child! Whatever was it like for you during the time of my absence? Have your health and my fortunes kept pace? Beloved daughter of mine! What do you look like now? Has the delicate little sprout grown here on the tree of hopelessness? Have you, as your father who loves you so much has wished, come to resemble my never forgotten, deceased Rokhl? (He remains sitting, overcome by sadness, lost in thought. Subsequently, he starts.) No, no, away with these hellish thoughts! Ah, Ever-Beneficent Creator, You who have so often stood by me in my time of need, Heavenly Father who knows all! Take back Your blessings, take my health, my life, take everything from me, everything, but not this love, this beautiful child of mine! (He is quiet for a moment.)

Scene 2

REB SHMELKE. (Enters from the street with a stick in his hand and is about to go, in the door; he remains still when he sees the Stranger.) Aha! Good. Praise the Lord, Who has sent me a guest! (He takes off his fur hat and bows deeply to the Stranger.) My deepest greetings to ya', sir; how fares His Excellency?

STRANGER. (Still not seeing Reb Shmelke and continuing to talk to himself.) What is my life, my happiness worth, without the child?

REB SHMELKE. (To himself.) Aha! He's a German!

STRANGER. (Looks around and notices Reb Shmelke.) Are you perhaps the

proprietor of this house?

REB SHMELKE. (He draws closer to the Stranger and bows to him again, as he did earlier; he remains standing in front of the Stranger and speaks to him very softly.) Yes indeedy, my good sir! Please accept my very warmest welcome, Your Grace! What can we do, what does Your Grace command? A beautiful, gorgeous, painted, light-filled room? A magnificent stable? Fresh hay? A good sack of oats? A hearty meal and lots to drink? Whatever Your Grace could possibly wish: some good ol'fashioned mead, a dry glass o' wine, from the very best sort of grapes. Just snap your fingers, Your Grace! I'm Your Grace's to command!

^{35.} See Numbers 13:23 for the original source of this image, where the spies sent out by Moses to investigate the promised land return with a bunch of grapes so large it is suspended between two poles.

Immediately, instantly, I'll take to my heels and bring you a cup o' tea, o' coffee, a glass o' strong punch, a liquor, a Swiss cheese, a piece o' meat—anythin', anythin' Your Grace desires can be obtained by your humble servant Shmelke Troyniks, and for just a teensy weensy bit o' money, Your Grace! Just say the word!

THE STRANGER. (To himself, quietly.) It pleases me mightily that this man here doesn't recognize me in the slightest! (Aloud, to Reb Shmelke.) You mistake yourself, Reb Shmelke! I am a Jew.

REB SHMELKE. (Quickly puts his hat back on.) A Jew! (To himself, quietly.) My very worst dreams should fall flat on his head; I thought he was a nobleman! (He sits down near the Stranger and gives him his hand.) Sholem aleykhem!³⁶ Where ya' from? Where ya' headin'?

STRANGER. Aleykhem sholem! I'm originally from right around h— Reb Shmelke. Don't you have bristles, fats, anise, cowhides or groceries to sell?

STRANGER. No, I don't have anything to sell.

REB SHMELKE. Maybe you wanna buy from us? Piecework, haberdashery, cloth, maybe even straw? No? Just tell me, I'll go with ya', I'll show ya', you'll get everything half-price, no question. Just tell me, tell me, what stuff of ours do you want to trade in Lemberg? I'm a great expert in all kindsa commerce.

STRANGER. I have nothing to buy now; I only beg of you, don't you have some sort of separate lodgings for me?

REB SHMELKE. For you? Nope, nuttin'. (He begins to leave.)

STRANGER. If the answer is yes, I'll pay you well, I swear.

REB SHMELKE. No, no, nuttin'. You musta made a big mistake.

STRANGER. Didn't you yourself just say that you indeed have a beautifully painted room?

Reb Shmelke. Yeah, I've got a very beautiful painted room, but it's only for traveling noblemen. Sorry—today's the day I gotta take care of some contracts. (He is about to go and then makes a joke at the Stranger's expense.) But don't worry, my dear sir: you can leave your thousands of rubles here in the inn—no one's gonna steal 'em here, that's for sure! (He laughs.)

STRANGER. Don't go away; come here, please, I simply want to tell you something. Just a word, I beg of you!

REB SHMELKE. (Comes back.) Well, what is it?

STRANGER. Why are you running away? Just sit down here next to me for a moment.

REB SHMELKE. (Angrily.) So, tell me already, whaddya want? I don't have all day to sit around with you. On a day like today, every minute's like an hour, every hour like a day—and every day is worth a few rubles.

STRANGER. I will be absolutely honest with you: I have arrived here after a very long journey; I have traveled day and night, and I am now exhausted, and all I would like is to rest somewhere. I beg of you, my dear Reb Shmelke, give me a room of my own—anywhere you wish to put me is fine—but just somewhere for me to rest. I will pay you very well, possibly better than a nobleman would. In short—I will pay you any price you ask.

Reb Shmelke. Yeah, I know how Jews pay; how much would you gimme for a twenty-four-hour stay? And how long d'ya think you'll stay? Tell me, tell me!

Stranger. (Aside.) A little lie must serve in this time of need. (Aloud, to Reb Shmelke.) I cannot tell you precisely, because I must wait for a count who has ordered me here. He will arrive today or tomorrow, and will bring a large retinue. I am certain that you will make a large profit from him, since he is very rich.

REB SHMELKE. So... Nu, a Jew may do anything out of need, as the Berdichever Rebbe, may he rest in peace, useta say. ³⁷ Nu, I'll give you a room; it's a little close to the stable, but for a Jew it's a nice enough room. All I'm asking is eight Rhenish thalers a week; I'm practically giving it away to you, but I'll do it since we're both Jews. What won't one do for a Jew on the road?

STRANGER. (To himself, quietly.) If he calls this "giving it away," what could he possibly call "charging?"

Reb_Shmelke. So? Didja think it over? Is there a problem? (He begins to leave.) Nu, go, find somewhere cheaper and maybe he'll give you a room for free—go to the communal hostel if you want; the synagogue sexton has the keys...

STRANGER. (Grabs him by the hand and doesn't let him leave.) Listen, I'll give you eight Rhenish thalers; just take my things over to the room.

REB SHMELKE. Nu, nu, there'll be plenty of time to take the things; let's see the cash first.

STRANGER. (Takes off a moneybelt filled with money, takes out a ducat, and gives it to Reb Shmelke.) There! Here's a ducat for you, and you can hold on to the change as a reserve.

REB SHMELKE. (Gestures delightedly.) Aha! A ducat! (He grabs the ducat.)

Nu, nu, excellent! (He weighs the ducat in his hand and shouts out the window.) Berl! Carry in the German merchant's things and put 'em

^{36.} Literally Hebrew/Yiddish "Peace be unto you," a generalized greeting, responded to by "Aleykhem sholem."

^{37.} Rabbi Levi Yitskhok of Berdichev (c. 1740-1810), a noted Hasidic rabbi well known for his sympathies for the needs of the Jewish people.

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in the nice painted room. (To the Stranger.) May your days and years be long! What's your name?

STRANGER. My name is . . . (He thinks for a moment.) My name is Solomon Gutherz.

REB SHMELKE. Gutherz! Gutherz! Are you by any chance related to Reb Dovid Gutherz, who's been away from here for the past few years? STRANGER. I can't tell you whether I am or I'm not, but I've forgotten the most important thing—you mentioned earlier that you had an excellent house wine?

REB SHMELKE. Oy, vey, such a wine! Such a wine! I'm telling you, so dry, so sweet, so strong, such a picker-upper! And, I promise you, it's pretty good, too; the Savranier rebbe, may he have long life, was once here, and he wouldn't drink any other wine but mine, I swear; I made quite a bit of money off that holy man. You can get all sortsa vintages here: red, white, two-thaler bottles, four-thaler bottles, and even eight-thaler bottles.

STRANGER. Nu, tell them to bring a bottle of four-thaler wine here—with two glasses.

REB SHMELKE. With two glasses? Immediately, right this minute, right away! (He shouts out the window.) Berl! Bring a bottla wine here quickly-the good stuff, with two glasses, ya' hear? (He sits down near the Stranger.) I'm tellin' ya', my dear Reb Solomon, times ain't what they useta be. People ain't what they useta be. I remember very well, how several years ago, when the time came for the contract signings, this place was bursting with noblemen; you couldn't even find a spot on the ground to fit a needle. Every noble had three coaches and six horses, who were just like lions, and maybe twelve servants—I'm tellin' ya', the place was swimmin' with princes, and the money was flowin' from one pocket to the other! It was such a pleasure; and when one of those princes useta drive in, we made a pretty penny out of 'im. These days, though, if a nobleman comes once in a blue moon, he drives me absolutely nuts! Oh sure, he rumbles and grumbles, just like he useta; he tosses his hair around like always; he screams and shouts that he wants somethin', just like he useta. But when the time comes for settling up the bill, everything changes; he gets so shy, so quiet, so calm—you don't hear a peep outta him. except for a little "Wait a bit, my dear Shmelkenyu, I'm a little short right now, I'll give you some grain instead." So what do I need his grain for? I need the money, the money!

STRANGER. But do you know why this happened, my dear Reb Shmelke? Because previously, a noble used to take very little care of his estates; he used to just travel around the region carousing and running up debts, until he had drunk up the whole estate and in the end had

nothing left. If the nobles who had taken care of their estates and don't come around here any more did come to visit, they would be a lot richer in land and in cash.

Reb Shmelke. What?! I beg your pardon, but you don't know what you're talking about; I'll tell you what's caused all of this. In the past, it seems to me, there was a great blessing on the country, and no one knew anything about these modern new-fangled machines for plowing, sowing, and threshing, so there useta be very little grain and lots o' profit. If someone had a little wheat or corn, it was worth its weight in gold. It was an absolute pleasure, and both the noble and your humble servant Shmelke had plenty; but now, since the machines have come along, there's plenty o' grain everywhere. And what's more—the noble knows very well how to calculate now.

STRANGER. (To himself, quietly.) Unfortunately, swindlers like this give more broadminded Jews a bad name. (Berl enters through the main door, bringing a bottle of wine with two glasses and putting them down on the bench. He pours the wine, then exits through the same door.)

REB SHMELKE. (Taking a glass of wine and drinking.) L'chaim! This certainly tastes good. May the Holy One, blessed be He, strike me down if you can find me another wine like this in the whole of Lemberg. It's a real picker-upper, taste this!

STRANGER. (Drinks.) L'chaim! No, I'm not sure it's so good. It seems a bit watered down to me.

Reb Shmelke. What? Watered down? Believe you me, on my honor, in my entire cellar you won't find a single drop of wine that's watered down, I assure you. No kiddin', I'm not braggin'. Ask anywhere in Lemberg, anyone'll tell you that the best wine is to be found at the simple Lithuanian's. I'm not like one o' those guys who has to send to the tavern keeper if a guest of mine wants a glass o' wine; at my place, you see (He shows him the sign on the shutter.), at The Spies, I gotta a wonderful cellar fulla wine. And 'causa this, with the help of the Lord, I'm able to make my living, I'chaim! (He drinks.)

STRANGER. So apparently, you're not doing too badly here?

REB SHMELKE. I scrape by. (He drinks.)

STRANGER. And how goes it with this Reb Moyshe? . . .

REB SHMELKE. (Interrupting him.) Good, everything's good. (He drinks.) Just dandy.

STRANGER. So which Reb Moyshe do you mean, then?

REB SHMELKE. Do I know? Which one do you mean? Are you gonna drink something, or not?

STRANGER. (Smiling tolerantly.) Don't worry, I'll drink. I mean the Reb Moyshe known as Reb Moyshe the miller, because his wife sits among the grain and the meal.

REB SHMELKE. Reb Moyshe the Mill Jew? Aha! Now I know—his wife's called Serkele, right?

STRANGER. Yes, yes, Serkele, Serkele, that's who I mean, exactly!

REB SHMELKE. That's who you mean? Ha ha! Where has Serke gone to! She's no longer sittin' with the meal and the grain! (*Drinks*.) Ha ha! STRANGER. (*Frightened*.) What? Has Serke died?

REB SHMELKE. What? What're ya' talkin' about dyin' for? The angel of death's got no power over evil, that's for sure! (He drains his glass of wine, refills the Stranger's glass, and pours himself another.)

STRANGER. Then what on earth do you mean? Tell me, my dear Reb Shmelke! (Very impatiently.) Is she perhaps ill, God forbid?

Reb Shmelke. What're ya' talking about? Every Jew should have her health and wealth—may she be punished from above! What does she need grain for? Don't you know that Serke's got something like twelve thousand rubles of her own—maybe even more?

STRANGER. (Very quietly.) She is a wealthy woman? Excellent, that is something quite different.

REB SHMELKE. What? A rich woman, you say? It's simply impossible to get close to her now. She's become so high and mighty, the Devil take her. And why and how it all happened the Devil also knows. You think it's 'cause she has money? Fat chance! She can't hide every little stain. The wheel hasn't come full circle yet, that's for sure.

STRANGER. I beg your pardon, my dear Reb Shmelke. You know that I am a complete stranger here, and this Serkele does not concern me at all, but I'm curious to know: why are you so angry at her?

REB SHMELKE. Since I see you're a wise fella, I'll tell you the whole story—briefly, of course. (*Drinks*.) I call myself Reb Shmelke, from my German name, Shmelke Troyniks. But the locals—my enemies, for the most part—call me "The Litvak." And why? 'Cause I happen to be from Lithuania, born in Vilna. Vilna—a holy place! No doubt you've been there?

STRANGER. Once, once.

Reb Shmelke. What did you think of the great chandeliers and the courtyards of the houses of study? Beautiful, eh? I swear, what a jewel! My father's fathers were rich big shots there; my righteous father—may he rest in peace, may his merits stand in our favor—always useta take his business to Lemberg: sometimes cowhides, sometimes with milk, and sometimes anise. Once he traveled here with bristles, and he settled down here and at the same time arranged me a marriage with the daughter of a local householder who always useta put him up. (Drinks.) In short, I got married, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, sent me His blessings. I became a powerful man, I got myself a nice guesthouse, a nice little wine cellar, a little

silver, and plenty o' money. But God sent me a great trouble last year: my young wife Feygele suddenly fell down an entire flight of stairs and died. I cried for her, wept and wailed, but what does that get you? Dead people stay dead, and I'm all by myself and there's nothin' I can do about it. (*He drinks*.) She left me a nice bit o' jewelry, and in short, I don't want to babble on too long, I became a very rich man...

STRANGER. (Impatiently.) Get to the point.

Reb Shmelke. All right, to the point, I won't drag it out. (He drains his glass and refills it.) For the past few weeks, I've been sending a matchmaker, a Reb Shmerele—a fine Jew—to this Serkele; she has a young girl, a beautiful girl, you could say. True, she's a bit of a Frenchwoman and one of these modern types as well—but in society, 'specially the circles I move in, you need a woman like that. I know very well how to talk with a nobleman and how to receive him with honor—and also how to stand up to him and shout at him. You certainly know how to conduct yourself in the circles I move in.

STRANGER. (Impatiently.) Nu, nu, get on with it, get to the point!

REB SHMELKE. The point is—I won't go on too long—you must be tired from your trip, I'm sure! Yeah! That's right! Ha!—Ya' see, I've forgotten one thing after another. The main thing is, why did I send the man to Serkele? 'Cause I've heard from the mouth of a reliable witness that she's gonna give the girl about fourteen hundred rubles cash, not including all sorts of other goodies, and she's an only child to boot! The point is, Serkele knows that a few years ago she was a miller's wife, and her father was no great scholar—nu, so what, he had a good head on his shoulders, everyone says, and what's more, I myself have seen how lots of learned Jews have come begging to that house!

STRANGER. Unfortunately, this is the truth. Nu, go on, the point.

REB SHMELKE. Yeah, the point, in short... (Drains his glass and refills it.)

Should I have another bottle brought out?

STRANGER. Go on, go on!

Reb Shmelke. Right away, right away. (He shouts out the window.) Berl! Another bottle!

STRANGER. (Aside.) Look how well he serves me now, he doesn't even wait for my command. (Aloud.) Nu, the point, keep it short...

REB SHMELKE. Certainly, the point—in short, what sort of family does the bitch have? It's true that her brother might have become a somebody, but he had to leave town a few years ago over some incident and no one's seen him since. Anyway, can such a nuisance, such a Serkele, order me around? Me, a rich man? (Strokes his belly.) A wealthy man, I swear! She sent Reb Shmerele to tell me, "My only daughter

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must first learn how to measure the oats and to speak in the Lithuanian style, and then it will be possible for her to become Reb Shmelke's bride." That's the kind of order that such a common grain-woman can give me! I'm embarrassed for the matchmaker, for Reb Shmerele; nu, what difference does it make how I speak? Here in Lemberg they make fun of how we Litvaks talk, and in Vilna we make fun of the Lemberg accent. I'm telling you, I wasn't the one who invented all these accents. (Berl brings in another bottle of wine and exits.) So there, my dear Reb Solomon, I didn't drag out the story one bit. But why aren't you drinking? It's really good! (He drains his glass of wine with one gulp.)

STRANGER. Don't concern yourself; you drink, I'll join you in a little while. (*Drinks*.) So, Reb Shmelke, do you actually have a reason for being so angry?

REB SHMELKE. (Filling the the Stranger's glass as well as his own again.)
L'chaim! (Drinks.) Do I have a reason! A good reason, even!

STRANGER. I know this Serkele from a long time ago; her husband is an extremely honest Jew, is he not?

REB SHMELKE. Who, Reb Moyshe? Yeah, he's just a bit of a fool, unfortunately, and goes his own way—but what good's the very best of drinks if it's in the hands of an evil innkeeper? Sure, the drink's good, but the innkeeper destroys it. That's the story, here's its meaning: Serkele tells Reb Moyshe what's what; she's got him wrapped around her little finger. (He drinks.)

Scene 3

(Reb Gavriel begins to enter from the street, goes back and forth a few times past the Stranger and looks him over. He plays with a little stick in his hand and quietly sings a little tune to himself. In his other hand he carries a small box, wrapped up very well in a tablecloth.)

REB SHMELKE. So you do know Serkele? So you must've been here in Lemberg in the past, eh?

STRANGER. Once, but it was a very long time ago.

REB GAVRIEL. (Suddenly stands still in front of the Stranger and asks Reb Shmelke): This gentleman seems familiar to me—he's from Brody, ha? Nicht wahr?

REB SHMELKE. (Already a little sleepy.) Right, yeah, I don't know...

STRANGER. (To Reb Gavriel.) No, I'm not from Brody.

REB GAVRIEL. But you're certainly no local, right? (He puts down the wrappedup box on the bench and offers his hand to the Stranger.) Sholem aleykhem! STRANGER. (Shakes hands with Reb Gavriel.) Aleykhem sholem!

REB SHMELKE. (Rouses himself from his stupor and drinks.) But my dear Reb Solomon! You're not drinking anything! (He falls asleep sitting on the bench and holding the bottle of wine.)

REB GAVRIEL. (To the Stranger.) So what's the news from your corner of the world?

STRANGER. No news.

REB GAVRIEL. Are you going to do any trading here? Or might you be buying something? I'm sorry for asking you, but, as you can see, I'm a local merchant, and, as it happens, quite a speculator. I have business all over the world; my name is known everywhere. Any place you can think of, everyone knows me there; I'm always getting letters from all of the biggest cities! Tell me, do you do any business with the Woltzman brothers in Moscow?

STRANGER. No.

Reb Gavriel. No? That's a surprise! I didn't think there was anyone who didn't know them! Here, I'll show you a letter (He searches in his pockets.) that I just got from them the day before yesterday, about a little commission of twelve thousand bales of cotton...It's too bad, I don't seem to have the letter on me...but...do you perhaps know the Kitoyev House in Berlin?

STRANGER. No, I don't know any of these gentlemen; I've never even heard of them.

Reb Gavriel. (To himself, quietly.) Me either! (Aloud.) What? You don't know of the Kitoyev House? You must be joking! How can you not know such huge speculators? They must be the biggest speculators in all of Holland!

STRANGER. In all of Prussia, you mean; Berlin is the capital of Prussia. Reb Gavriel. That has nothing to do with it; I get letters from them all of the time, that's the point. When was it, hm?...I think it was the eleventh, yes, that they sent me a whole box full of jewelry, pearls and diamonds—are you an expert on these kinds of things?

STRANGER. I used to be a great expert in the diamond trade; now, I don't know—I haven't been in the business for a long time.

REB GAVRIEL. You really seem very familiar to me, may you live to be a hundred and twenty; have you ever been to Breslau?

STRANGER. I just traveled through Breslau on my way here; I had never been there before that.

Reb Gavriel. (Aside.) Me either. (Aloud.) And you've never heard of me? I'm fairly surprised, to be honest, that you don't know of me; I'm known far and wide as an honest man, God be praised. Just ask your host. (Turns to Reb Shmelke.) Reb Shmelke! Do you know me? Aha! He's fast asleep! (Shouts.) Reb Shmelke! Reb Shmelke!

Serke

REB SHMELKE. (Starting.) Ha? What? Right away!

REB GAVRIEL. Do you know me? Reb Shmelke!

REB SHMELKE. Good, it's very good, it's been in my cellar for eight years already, a real picker-upper! (Drains the bottle and puts it down again on the bench.) Yes, a real picker-upper! (Falls asleep again.)

STRANGER. (Laughing.) Let him be, he's had a bit too much to drink. Reb Gavriel. Yes, he certainly doesn't mind a drop; that's been his nature for a long time. So tell me, my dear fellow Jew, now that we've had the chance to become a little bit better acquainted, would you grant me the good fortune to make a profit on some pearls, diamonds, earrings, beautiful rings? I'm telling you, it's a good investment. Or let me trade for something; I'll certainly treat you honestly. You'll have to admit that you're getting it from me at a steal. Just buy it, buy. You'll thank me later.

STRANGER. I'll tell you the truth; I've completely gotten out of the trading business.

Reb Gavriel. I'm telling you though, such a find, you're sure to make three times your money back, or—you know what?—buy something to bring home to your wife and kiddies, they should have long life! Honestly, I'm going to sell you these things dirt cheap, even below cost, since I need the cash. Make me a good opening offer.

STRANGER. How can I? Let me see the merchandise; maybe there's something that will catch my eye. Do you have it here with you?

Reb Gavriel. I have just a little bit here with me, because I've just come from the Countess Strelkovska's—she ordered me to bring her a few pearls and diamonds today, but I didn't find her at home just now; now I see that it's your good fortune. If you like, I'll show you the merchandise. (Looks around in all directions, to make sure that no one else is watching.)

STRANGER. Just let me see.

REB GAVRIEL. (Unpacking the little box while he speaks.) Certainly, what harm can it do for you to look at it, you're not going to pay me before you see it. (Looks around in all directions once more.)

STRANGER. Why are you always looking around like that? Are you afraid of something?

REB GAVRIEL. You're not a local, so if you'll excuse me, you don't know anything; in Lemberg you have to be worried about any business transaction and particularly in diamonds, because, first of all, thieves are more common here than anywhere else. And second, I'm very afraid of the evil eye. (He opens up the small box.) Look how dazzling! (He takes out a miniature surrounded by diamonds.) How do you like this diamond-rimmed miniature? This must be a portrait of Queen Esther. (He closes the small box and covers it with the tablecloth and gives the

miniature to the Stranger. During the time that Reb Gavriel is involved with the little box, the Stranger stands lost in thought; now he takes the miniature from Reb Gavriel and examines it; suddenly he falls to the earth near Reb Shmelke, overcome, and cries.)

STRANGER. Oh, God! My Rokhele! (He drags Reb Gavriel down by his belt. Reb Gavriel falls down on top of the Stranger, tries to get up but is unable to. With his other hand, he pushes the little box under the bench and covers it up. Reb Shmelke starts awake from his sleep, greatly frightened, falls over Reb Gavriel, hits him, and shouts loudly.)

REB SHMELKE. Berl! Feivel! Hershel! Velvl! Danger! Save us! Save us! Quickly! Oy, vey! Quickly, quickly, the rich merchant has fainted!

Scene 4

(Berl and several Youths come running out of the door.)

BERL and the YOUTHS. (Help Reb Shmelke to his feet, shouting.) Help! What's going on?

REB SHMELKE. (Shouting.) Grab him, hold him, that murderer! Berl! Save the rich merchant, quickly, quickly, and grab the wine, rub his temples! (Berl grabs the bottle of wine and spills it on the Stranger and rubs his temples and his wrists. The Youths drag Reb Gavriel to his feet, hold him, and shout.)

YOUTHS. Hold him, the thief, the robber!

Reb Shmelke. (Shouts loudly in both directions.) Help! Over here! Help! Save us, save us!

Scene 5

(Policemen and three Beadles come from the street, leading Redlekh and Hinde, who are tied together with a rope. Chava and Chaim follow, in tears.)

BEADLES. (Shouting.) What's this? What's this? What's all the shouting about?

REB SHMELKE. Come, come here! We've caught a thief.

Beadles. Good, good, give him to us! We've already got two. Give us one more, and we'll have three of them dead to rights.

Reb Shmelke. (Points to Reb Gavriel.) Here—take 'im! (To Berl.) Give 'im a good shake.

BEADLES. (Taking Reb Gavriel.) Come on, buddy!

REB GAVRIEL. (Pointing to Hinde and Redlekh.) Let me go; these people know me. What do you want from me? I'm a local merchant. Get

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away from me, get away, let me go! Go ahead, ask these people whether I'm an honest man! (He tries in vain to pull away from the Beadles).

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REDLEKH. (To the Beadles.) Let him be, it is true. We know him, he is a local merchant.

HINDE. Yes, yes, I know him very well—as well as I know myself.

REB SHMELKE. Yeah, yeah, I know you do. You're all the same: he's a thief, and so are you. (Shouts to the Beadles.) Send 'em back to kindergarten!

BEADLES. (Shouting.) Take him, the dog! (They start to go with Redlekh, Hinde, and Reb Gavriel.)

CHAVA. (Suddenly falls to the ground next to the Stranger.) Oh no, my master! Help, do something!! Hindele, help, help! It's your father! Your father! Oy, vey, my dear master...help him!

Beadles. (Stopping.) What is it this time? (Hinde and Redlekh run to the Stranger and shout simultaneously.)

HINDE. My father? Where? Where is he? Help! (She tugs at him.)

REDLEKH. Herr Gutherz? For God's sake! Help him! (Takes a bottle out of his pocket and holds it under the Stranger's nose.)

STRANGER. (Slowly coming to.) Who . . . What . . . My Hinde? Where? Where? My child!

ALL. (Shouting simultaneously.) He's alive! He's alive!

REB SHMELKE. (To Berl.) Bring two or three bottles of wine right away! The rich merchant's alive...Quick, quick! But wait, wait, write it down first, that'll be good enough....But hurry, hurry! (The Stranger remains very still, unable to remember anything.)

Chava. (Stands to one side of the Stranger, fanning him with her handkerchief.)
Help! Save my dear master!

CHAIM. (Stands on the other side of the Stranger, fanning him with his shirttails and crying.) Help, my Chava, my love!

STRANGER. (Rubbing his eyes.) God! Is this real, or just a dream?

HINDE. (Kisses the Stranger and helps him to his feet.) No, my dear father! It is not a dream. I, Hinde, am at your side. I am your daughter. Just remember, Father! You are here with your child.

STRANGER. (Goes to embrace Hinde, but when he sees that she is tied up, he stops, takes her head in his hands, and cries.) Ach! What is this? My daughter tied up? No, no, this is not my daughter! It's just a dream! (He buries his face in his hands.)

HINDE. (Also covering her face, she sobs loudly.) God, let me die now...

REDLEKH. But my dear Herr Gutherz! Get a hold of yourself, for God's sake! Just listen to us for one minute: a horrible slander has put us in these chains!

HINDE. Daddy! We're innocent! (She cries and moans loudly.)

CHAVA. Praise God, my dear master, as you are alive! Just hear me out: I'll tell you. This is the story: someone walked off with all your sister Serkele's jewelry; so she up and accused these two. I'm ready to swear that it's a lie, that it's . . .

STRANGER. (Cuts her off.) What? My sister? Serkele? Her jewelry... stolen? (To Reb Shmelke.) Reb Shmelke! Where did that merchant go? Where is the young man who wanted to sell me jewelry? Where is the chest? God! Where is the picture of my blessed Rokhele? (He finds the portrait on the ground, picks it up and kisses it, then picks up the chest from under the bench.) Oh, divine Providence! How miraculous are your works!

CHAVA and CHAIM. (Shout simultaneously.) Oy vey, those are the mistress's jewels!

REB SHMELKE. The boy's here! (To the Beadles.) Just bring that pious Jew over here, yeah, yeah, some fine merchant he is! He buys everything with his kosher little hands. Just bring 'im over here!

BEADLES. (Leading Reb Gavriel to the Stranger.) Here he is.

STRANGER. (Shows him the jewels.) Don't try anything fancy; tell the truth, it will go better for you. Where did you get the jewels from? Tell us, are these yours or not?

Reb Gavriel. I beg your pardon not one time, but a thousand times. I'll tell you the truth. But I beg of you, please have them untie me. Have pity, as you are a Jew! You are making me indescribably unhappy.

CHAVA. Aha, is that you, Reb Gavriel? Now I understand the whole story. How are things, Reb Gavriel? I think congratulations are in order? (She takes Chaim by the hand.) Come on, Chaim, let's go run to the mistress and tell her what's going on here! (They both run out.)

STRANGER. (To the Beadles.) Let go of his hands. He will not run away. BEADLES. (Release Reb Gavriel's hands.) Don't worry, no one runs away from us so quickly.

REB GAVRIEL. (Falls to the ground before the Stranger and kisses his feet.) My good man! Have God in your heart! Have pity on my tender years! I'll confess everything to you—both of them are completely innocent. (He gets up.) Do what you want with me. I'm responsible, I'm the only guilty one. They knew nothing about it. I did it myself. Have mercy!

REB SHMELKE. (Slaps Reb Gauriel.) There's mercy for ya'. A curse on your whole family, you thief! (Shouts to the Beadles.) Send him back to kindergarten!

POLICEMEN. (Shouting and laughing, in a singsong.) Nyah, nyah, nya-nyah nyah!

BEADLES. (Taking Reb Gavriel.) Come!

Stranger. Let him go, don't take him until my sister comes. Just keep an eye on him.

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Beadles. (Obeying.) Okay, okay, we'll watch him, don't you worry.

STRANGER. (Untying Hinde and Redlehh.) Yes, you are innocent, my child! (He hugs and kisses her.) God be praised! He has given me back my golden child! (Covers her face with kisses.) The very picture of my Rokhele. (Kisses her.) I have you back, my daughter, my Hinde! (He lifts her up high and kisses her).

HINDE. (Embraces the Stranger, kissing him and crying.) My dear, wonderful father!

STRANGER. (To Redlekh.) How horrible! You were tied up too? (Embraces and kisses him.) Don't you worry, I am here with you again! (He looks at Redlekh and Hinde.) My dear children!

REDLEKH. (Kisses the Stranger's hand.) My benefactor! My guardian angel!

Scene 6

(Reb Moyshe's voice is heard in the distance.)

REB MOYSHE, My Dovid! Oy, where is he, my brother-in-law? (Comes running in without his hat or belt, his coat hanging open. He embraces and kisses the Stranger.) You're here, my Dovid, my dear brother-inlaw, my salvation! Thank God, you're back, you're alive! (He kisses and pats him the way one does a little child.) Yes, my joy, my glory, you are here. (Speaks as if somewhat confused.) Yes, I know that God sent you to us. Yes, yes, I know, you come from very far away. I know it all. I saw you. I've known for a long, long time that you would come. I remember, oy, I remember so well how you asked me, "Do you know me?" (Kisses the Stranger.) And now you're here. Now I've lived long enough. Now I can die. (Gives the Stranger a bear hug.) No, now I'll never let you go, no, no! (Pats him and cries.) I beg of you, my Dovid, my heart, don't go away from me again. Don't leave me alone! Or no-take me with you, because without you I've become a thief, a murderer. Yes, yes, your child's murderer! (Falls to the ground, exhausted, next to the Stranger.)

STRANGER. (*Picking him up.*) Moyshe, Moyshe, what's happening to you? Calm yourself!

Reb Moyshe. Oy, my dear Dovid! Pardon me, pardon me! I've done you much wrong. Or, no, no, don't pardon me, no, punish me, it's only right! Punish me however you can, I deserve it, Yes, yes, have me thrown in jail, have me whipped, beaten, stabbed, roasted, burned! Oy, I've certainly earned it.

STRANGER. Moyshe, are you mad? Why, what for? Calm down, for God's sake! Get a hold of yourself. Why should I punish you? Just settle down, be calm.

REB MOYSHE. (A bit more quietly and calmly.) Nu, yes ... okay ... whatever you say ... yes, I'll calm down, I am calm ... Whatever you say ... yes, I'll do what you say ... I'll do anything you say, my dear brother-in-law, as long as you punish me ...

STRANGER. Okay, whatever you say, but just calm down first. Just sit down for a while. (*To Redlekh.*) Herr Redlekh! Please be so kind as to assist him, seat him on the bench.

REB MOYSHE. (Sees Redlekh and Hinde and suddenly falls to the ground in front of them.) Oy, vey iz mir! Can you ever forgive me?

HINDE. Uncle dear! You've done nothing wrong!

REDLEKH. Herr Danziger! Bleiben sie nur ruhig! 38 (They help him to his feet and sit him down on the bench.)

REB SHMELKE. (Aside.) Real nice, I tell ya'. A whole family o' thieves.

Scene 7

(Enter Serkele, Altele, and Reb Yoykhenen. We hear Serkele long before we see her.)

Serkele. Why do you keep talking about it? Oy, I feel faint! I have to scream my heart out a thousand times before anyone listens to me once! Nu, go already, take them to jail, the thieves! And you, my dear Reb Yoykhenen, don't waste your time pleading for them, because it won't work with me.

REB SHMELKE. (Runs quickly to Serkele.) Come greet your guest, Serkele! Your brother Dovid's here! (He indicates the Stranger.)

Serkele. (Runs to Reb Dovid and tries to embrace him.) Oy, vey iz mir! I am thunderstruck! My dear Dovid! I am absolutely bowled over! My beloved brother, oy vey, you're alive!?

STRANGER. (Pushing her away.) Away, you beast! Get away from me—you are not my sister!

Policemen. (Shouting.) Nyah nyah nya-nyaaah nyaah! (Serkele stands with her head bowed and arms limp, and cries. Complete silence for a moment.)

STRANGER. You're crying? Yes, at crying and screaming you're a great expert. That's easy for you, but behaving honestly—that you find very hard! To act that way to my child, my only, innocent child, your own niece! Tell me, you wicked snake: can a person with any sort of conscience treat someone else like that? Just look at yourself, the way you stand there now... did you need it? You, I thought, will bring

^{38.} German, "Just keep calm!"

up my child, teach her, console her, protect her from misfortune. That was some consolation to me while I was away, thinking that my own sister will look after my daughter. How happy I was whenever I imagined the moment that I would come home! How you would bring my Hinde to me, healthy and strong, honest and educated! I would often get so lost in my thoughts that I would forget myself, stretch out my hands, and in my mind take you in my arms and kiss you and hug you. But this I never imagined. This never entered my mind: that you would treat my child so horribly! To make your own niece feel such shame and disgrace! To treat her like a thief, to tie her up and take her off to jail! No, I never dreamed of such a thing. And on top of that, I hear that God did not abandon you either, that you've become a very wealthy woman. You hardly needed my money—God gave you plenty of your own ... Nu, when you enjoy success, do you have to treat others so badly?

REB MOYSHE. (Interrupting him.) What are you saying, my dear brother-in-law? God willed it for her? God blessed her? For what? For her goodness, maybe? Maybe for her piety? No, God, blessed is He and blessed is His Name, rewards only the good, the honest, the pious... but her? Why? What for? Oy, my dear Dovid! Poor thing, you know nothing of how she ruined me, and you, and all of us! Oy, it will never make any sense.

Reb Gavriel. (Aside.) Now's the time, now it must all come out. I've buried myself—I may as well bring her down with me! (To the Stranger.) A hundred pardons, my dear Reb Dovid, if you look in the chest, you'll find something much more precious than jewels. You'll be very happy, you'll find out everything...

STRANGER. (Opens the chest and looks inside.) There's nothing else here, just jewels.

REB GAVRIEL. Look carefully! There's a piece of paper underneath! STRANGER. A piece of paper? (Looks through the chest.) Yes, it is here. What sort of a paper is this?

REB GAVRIEL. Just read it, you'll see . . .

STRANGER. (Takes a piece of paper out of the chest, opens it, and reads it to himself, then exclaims.) Almighty God in heaven! This is how far Your pure creation, made in Your image, can go astray! Oh, this is extraordinary... a false will!

Reb Gavriel. Yes, just yesterday was the anniversary of your death, my dear Reb Dovid!

Serkele. (Suddenly throws herself at the Stranger's feet.) Oy, do with me as you wish! I'm completely in your hands! (She sobs forcefully.)

REB MOYSHE. (Very happy.) Now that's nice. That's the way it should be. You see, Serke, that makes me happy!

STRANGER. (Embraces Hinde and kisses her.) You, my only child, I disinherited you? You, my life, you my soul? (To Serkele.) Feh, shame on you! You can still look me in the eye? It's no surprise that strangers could have done me wrong, when you, my own sister, treated me like that! (To Hinde.) Oy, now I understand how you must have suffered here, you poor girl.

HINDE. (Kisses the Stranger.) No, no, Daddy! Not as much as you think. I have suffered . . . that is true . . . but I have not suffered alone. (Takes Redlekh by the hand and leads him to the Stranger.) This man here befriended me in my suffering. He was my partner, my teacher, my pillar in my time of need!

Stranger. (Embraces and kisses Redlekh.) Ich danke ihnen, mein teuerer! ³⁹ I thank you; may God reward you with more, but I can repay your worthy actions only with this, the dearest thing I have. (Places Redlekh's hand in Hinde's and kisses both of them.) Always strive to deserve God's goodness, and He, the Almighty Father, will never forsake you! (He places his hands on their heads and blesses them.) Live happily together, my children! (Hinde and Redlekh embrace and kiss the Stranger.)

REB YOYKHENEN. (Shaking the Stranger's hand.) Sholem aleykhem, Reb Dovid! Praise God, I find you in good health. I tell you, a very good match. It occurred to me when the two of them were tied together. But let me tell you something, the words "birds of a feather flock together" are written in our holy Torah. 40 You, my dear Reb Dovid, are matchmaking in the modern fashion. But do you know with whom you're making the match? Who your in-laws were? That you have to ask me, Reb Yoykhenen the Matchmaker. I've known that little German over there ever since he was a little pisher. I knew his pious father, may he rest in peace, and also his modest mother. He is none other than the son of Reb Zalmen of Prague... that's right, the eminent genius... so I'll tell you up front, my fee will be very, very large.

STRANGER. Alright, alright, we'll take care of it.

HINDE. (Takes the Stranger by the hand and asks.) Daddy! I have just one request.

STRANGER. Tell me, my sweet, what would you like? I'll do anything you ask—just name it.

HINDE. (Kissing his hand.) My dear father! Please forgive my aunt. She'll reform. I beg of you, dear father, forgive her!

^{39.} German, "I thank you, my dear!"

^{40.} Literally "Each raven according to its species"; see Lev. 11:15 and Deut. 14:14.

STRANGER. Forgive who, Serkele? No, no, she doesn't deserve it. No, I want nothing to do with her. (*He thinks for a moment.*) But I must do it for your sake, my child... It's no use, I promised. Alright, for your sake, my child. Come here, Serke!

SERKELE. (*Who. up to this point, has been lying on the ground. Now she picks*

Serkele. (Who, up to this point, has been lying on the ground. Now she picks herself up and runs toward the Stranger with outstretched arms and a very loud cry.) My dear brother! Remember, we come from the same parents! Have pity on me, on my Moyshe, on my only child! After all, we have no one else to turn to! Without you, we have no hope. My good, dear brother. (She cries loudly.) Oy, vey iz mir! We'll all starve to death if you don't have pity on us...

STRANGER. Well, what can one do—do I have a choice? You're my sister, after all.... Come here... I forgive you. But be a little better; it's high time. You're getting old, you're already forty-something. I shouldn't forgive you, but what can I do—a bad sister is still a sister. I'm not worried—you won't starve to death. God, blessed be He, gave me enough, and I hope He won't forsake me in the future.

Reb Gavriel. It's amazing! Since yesterday she's lost ten thousand rubles and gained twenty years.

REB SHMELKE. That's nice, I tell ya'! I would make her pay, a sweet sister like that! (*He goes to Serkele*.) Serkele! Will you have some nice flour ready for Shabbes?⁴¹

FREYDE-ALTELE. (Who, up to now, has been standing and crying very quietly. Now she goes up to the Stranger and talks to him very charmingly.) Dear Herr Uncle! I give you my sincerest thanks for everything that you have had the decency to forgive my mother for, and for your tender heart, for which I have the utmost respect, and your excellent goodness does not let me rest until I ask of you that my betrothed, my beloved Gavriel Hendler, may be released.

REDLEKH. She is your sister's daughter and has been promised in marriage to Reb Gavriel Hendler. (He indicates Reb Gavriel.)

STRANGER. Come here, my child! Tell me, what do you want? Why don't you speak plainly? Tell me, what do you want? (Freyde-Altele is silent and embarrassed, and hides behind a handkerchief.)

HINDE. I'll tell you, Daddy: she was supposed to be married to Reb Gavriel Hendler; now she asks you to let him go.

STRANGER. No, my dear girl, you won't pursuade me to do that. I am your uncle and must have you provided for better than your mother would have. I cannot let him go. He'll serve out his sentence some-

where else, just as he deserves. (To the Beadles.) Is my old friend, Police Inspector Rechtzammer, 42 still alive?

BEADLES. Yes he is, may the good man live to a hundred and twenty. STRANGER. Good, take him there. That upstanding man will know what to do with him.

Beadles. Good, good, we'll take him there. (As they start to go, Yerakhmiel comes running in, out of breath.)

Scene 8

YERAKHMIEL. (Runs up to Reb Gavriel.) Ma-ma-ma-master! Clear out, r-r-right away... Reb Shmuel Se-se-secondhand came with p-p-p-policemen and already took your th-things away. Now they're looking for y-y-you, they really want to put y-y-you in j-j-jail.

REB SHMELKE. Go tell Reb Shmuel we saved him the trouble. We're taking him to the police, the thief.

YERAKHMIEL. What, y-y-y-you're taking him to the p-police? Where are my wages f-for the whole year, that I b-b-busted my back for? L-listen here: p-p-pay me m-my wages!

REB GAVRIEL. What are you shouting for? Your year isn't up yet. There are still six days to go. You know what? Come join me in my new place.

YERAKHMIEL. Go to hell w-with your pay, and with your place! (He takes a watch out of his pocket and shows it to Reb Gavriel.) Look here, y-y-you thief: this watch runs all b-by itself, but y-you have to be taken!

REB GAVRIEL. (To the Beadles.) Take that watch away from him, it's mine! REB SHMELKE. (To Reb Gavriel.) You, thief! A curse on your ancestors! I'll stand up for him. Pay up; if not, he keeps the watch! I know him. He was my servant for five years, he's a very honest young man, and you're a thief, a criminal... Send him to kindergarten!

Policemen. (Shouting mockingly.) Ha ha ha, nyah nyah nyah, ha ha! Beadles. (Tie up Reb Gavriel with the rope.) Come brother, it's time for kindergarten.

REB YOYKHENEN. (Grabs Reb Gavriel by the hand.) Nevertheless, let me tell you something. None of this changes anything. You still owe me my fee for trying to make you a match. I hate to forgive a debt, especially from a thief.

REB GAVRIEL. (Pushing Reb Yoykhenen away.) There's your fee for you!

^{41.} The Sabbath.

^{42.} Yiddish "justice encloser."

Serkele

POLICEMEN. (Shouting and laughing.) Ha ha ha, nyah nyah nyah, ha ha ha, nyah nyah nyah!

YERAKHMIEL. You can t-t-tell from the wedding party what the g-g-groom is like! (The Beadles take Reb Gavriel away, with several policemen running after them, shouting "Ha ha, nyah nyah!")

Scene 9

STRANGER. Well, that takes care of one person. Now let us continue. You, Reb Shmelke, you remember what you told me earlier about my sister Serke and Reb Shmerl the matchmaker?

REB SHMELKE. Some of it I remember, and some of it I don't.

STRANGER. (Takes Freyde-Altele by the hand and brings her to Reb Shmelke.)

Do you have any objection to taking my sister's daughter for your bride?

Reb Shmelke. Well, Serkele the miller's girl says she won't have me. And why? 'Cause she's her only daughter and can't measure the oats and doesn't speak my language . . . Maybe she's right, what do I know?

Stranger. Nu, nu, stop being angry. I assure you that in half a year, she'll speak your language and will obey you in everything. (To Freyde-Altele.) Nicht wahr, mein Kind?

Freyde-Altele. (Very charmingly.) Ja. (Catches herself.) No . . . not "ja," "yeah," I should say.

STRANGER. (Laughs and takes Reb Shmelke by the hand.) Nu, Reb Shmelke, take her! She's starting to speak plainly. And I'm sure that you'll thank me again later. Your inn needs a woman like this. Take her!

REB SHMELKE. (Scratching his head.) Yeah . . . It's all true . . . but . . . you're forgetting something. I mean . . . you don't understand . . . remember . . . ya' see . . . I mean . . . just . . . the main thing . . .

STRANGER. Just take her. I'm telling you, I'll make sure that she doesn't take after her mother.

REB SHMELKE. Yeah, my dear Reb Solom ... Reb Dovid, I mean. But I think, the main thing ... you understand?

Reb Yoykhenen. Let me tell you something, every negotiation needs an arbitrator and every match a matchmaker! I'm telling you, my dear Reb Dovid, that although you're offering Reb Shmelke a very good match in terms of money, he's an aristocrat to boot, and you can tell that to anyone. I'm telling you, he comes from a distinguished family, and his ancestors were great scholars and rabbis, very holy men. When you talk to him again, take his family tree into account . . . But even then, what will come of it? Reb Shmelke is right. What does Serkele's daughter have in that department?

REB SHMELKE. Yeah, that's it, that's just what I mean. My dear Reb Shmer... Reb Yoykhenen, I mean, I love you for seeing just what I meant. What's the amount and who's paying it?

STRANGER. Is that it? That's what you mean by the main thing. (Picks up the chest of jewels and gives it to Reb Shmelke.) Have that appraised, and whatever they tell you it's worth, I'll pay you.

Reb Shmelke. (Opens the chest and looks inside.) Oy vey! Quite a bundle! (Very happy, he takes the Stranger's hand and agrees to the arrangement.) Mazl tov! You see, my dear Reb Dovidl, that's another story! Yeah, that's good. (He takes Freyde-Altele by the hand.) Don't be silly or ashamed of how I talk. Be a good wife. Don't be afraid. You won't have to measure the oats; I have more than enough servants for that.

Reb Yoykhenen. Nu, I've made another successful match! Let me tell you something, it's really a match made in heaven. (*He shouts.*) Mazel tov! Policemen. (*Shouting.*) Mazel tov!

Serkele. (Embraces reb dovid, cries, and kisses him.) My golden, wonderful brother! I don't deserve everything you're doing for me and my daughter. May God reward you for it.

STRANGER. God has already rewarded me a thousand times over. I'm doing what it's my duty to do, nothing more. You see how nice it is to do good? If you behave from now on, I'll forget everything that you've done. I'll also do right by you for as long as God allows me.

Chava. But my dear master, you've completely forgotten about me. Don't you remember your servant Chava? You remember those delicious poppy cakes I used to make you?

STRANGER. Aha, Chava! How are you? Who do you work for now?

HINDE. She's always been faithful to me. True, she got no great joy from it, but she never abandoned me. She works for Auntie.

STRANGER. (To Chava.) Well, pick out a nice groom, and you won't have suffered in vain. I'll pay your dowry.

CHAVA. (Takes Chaim by the hand and leads him to Reb Dovid.) My dear master, I'll ask what you asked Reb Shmelke... Would Chaim object to being my husband? He's an honest young man, and not at all bad at his work.

STRANGER. So have you asked him if he objects?

CHAIM. Oy oy oy, do I object?! But she has to promise me this one thing: that she'll never go off to the spas again.

REB YOYKHENEN. (To Chaim and Chava.) You see, my children, that's a good match... Let me tell you something, every pot finds its lid. But I get a fee, because on my word of honor, I thought of this match three weeks ago.

STRANGER. Nu, nu, I'll reward you for everything. Now come, children! Let's go into Reb Shmelke's, and tonight we'll sign all three betrothals!

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The Way of the Wind

59

"Don't touch the cables, Gidi. Stretch your body

backward and keep as clear as you can!"

The whole tightly packed, panic-stricken crowd began to edge slowly in an easterly direction. There were shouts. There was a wail. Sheinbaum silenced them with his metallic voice and ordered everyone to keep calm. He broke into a fast run, his feet pounding on the soft earth, reached the spot, pushed aside the officers and curious bystanders, and instructed his son:

"Quickly, Gideon, release the straps and drop. The ground is soft here. It's perfectly safe. Jump."

"I can't."

"Don't argue. Do as I tell you. Jump."

"I can't, Dad, I can't do it."

'No such thing as can't. Release the straps and jump before you electrocute yourself."

if'I can't, the straps are tangled. Tell them to switch off the current quickly, Dad, my boots are burning."

Some of the soldiers were trying to hold back the crowd, discourage well-meaning suggestions, and make more room under the powerlines. They kept repeating, as if it were an incantation, "Don't panic please don't panic."

The youngsters of the kibbutz were rushing all around, adding to the confusion. Reprimands and warnings had no effect. Two angry paratroopers managed to catch Zaki, who was idiotically climbing the nearest pylon, snorting and whistling and making faces to attract the attention of the crowd.

The short officer suddenly shouted: "Your knife. You've got a knife in your belt. Get it out and cut the straps!"

But Gideon either could not or would not hear. He began to sob aloud.

"Get me down, Dad, I'll be electrocuted, tell them to get me down from here, I can't get down on my own."

"Stop sniveling," his father said curtly. "You've been told to use your knife to cut the straps. Now, do as you've been told. And stop sniveling."

The boy obeyed. He was still sobbing audibly, but

he groped for the knife, located it, and cut the straps one by one. The silence was total. Only Gideon's sobbing, a strange, piercing sound, was to be heard intermittently. Finally one last strap was left holding him, which he did not dare to cut.

"Cut it," the children shrilled, "cut it and jump. Let's see you do it."

And Shimshon added in a level voice, "Now what are you waiting for?"

"I can't do it," Gideon pleaded.
"Of course you can," said his father.

"The current," the boy wept. "I can feel the current. Get me down quickly."

His father's eyes filled with blood as he roared:

"You coward! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"
"But I can't do it, I'll break my neck, it's too high."

"You can do it and you must do it. You're a fool, that's what you are, a fool and a coward."

A group of jet planes passed overhead on their way to the aerial display over the city. They were flying in precise formation, thundering westward like a pack of wild dogs. As the planes disappeared, the silence seemed twice as intense. Even the boy had stopped crying. He let the knife fall to the ground. The blade pierced the earth at Shimshon Sheinbaum's feet.

"What did you do that for?" the short officer shouted.
"I didn't mean it," Gideon whined. "It just slipped out of my hand."

Shimshon Sheinbaum bent down, picked up a small stone, straightened up, and threw it furiously at his son's back.

"Pinocchio, you're a wet rag, you're a miserable coward!"

At this point the sea breeze also dropped.

The heat wave returned with renewed vigor to oppress both men and inanimate objects. A red-haired, freckled soldier muttered to himself, "He's scared to jump, the idiot, he'll kill himself if he stays up there." And a skinny, plain-faced girl, hearing this, rushed into the middle of the circle and spread her arms wide:

"Jump into my arms, Gidi, you'll be all right."

"It would be interesting," remarked a veteran pioneer in working clothes, "to know whether anyone has had the sense to phone the electric company to ask them to switch off the current." He turned and started off toward the kibbutz buildings. He was striding quickly, angrily, up the slight slope when he was suddenly alarmed by a prolonged burst of firing close at hand. For a moment he imagined he was being shot at from behind. But at once he realized what was happening: the squadron commander, the good-looking blond hero, was trying to sever the electric cables with his machine gun.

Without success.

Meanwhile, a beaten-up truck arrived from the farm-

elderly doctor, and finally a stretcher.

At that moment it was evident that Gideon had been struck by a sudden decision. Kicking out strongly, he pushed himself off the lower cable, which was emitting blue sparks, turned a somersault, and remained dancing before his eyes. He stuck his tongue out. The suspended by the single strap with his head pointing

It was hard to be certain, but it looked as though so hands instead?"
far he had not sustained any serious injury. He swung Sheinbaum moved to hit the brat, but the blow landed

pended from a butcher's hook.

at the sky.

A second group of jets plowed through the sky overhead. A dozen metallic birds, sculpted with cruel beauty, flashing dazzlingly in the bright sunlight. They flew in a narrow spearhead formation. Their fury shook the earth. On they flew to the west, and a deep silence followed.

Meanwhile, the elderly doctor sat down on the stretcher, lit a cigarette, blinked vaguely at the people, the soldiers, the scampering children, and said to himself: We'll see how things turn out. Whatever has to

happen will happen. How hot it is today.

Every now and again Gideon let out another sensevard. Ladders were unloaded from it, followed by the less laugh. His legs were flailing, describing clumsy circles in the dusty air. The blood had drained from his inverted limbs and was gathering in his head. His eyes were beginning to bulge. The world was turning dark. Instead of the crimson glow, purple spots were children interpreted this as a gesture of derision. downward and his scorched boots beating the air a "Upside-down Pinocchio," Zaki shrilled, "why don't feet or so from the cable.

limply upside down in space, like a dead lamb suson thin air because the child had leapt aside. The old
pended from a butcher's hook. man beckoned to the blond commander, and they held man beckoned to the blond commander, and they held a brief consultation. The boy was in no immediate ing children. They barked with laughter. Zaki slapped danger, because he was not in direct contact with the his knees, choking and heaving convulsively. He leapt up and down screeching like a mischievous monkey. What had Gideon Shenhav seen that made him suddenly stretch his neck and join in the children's laughter? Perhaps his peculiar posture had unbalanced his mind. His face was blood-red, his tongue protruded, his thick hair hung down, and only his feet kicked up the situation was humiliating. Not to mention the children was humiliating. Not to mention the children was humiliating. the situation was humiliating. Not to mention the chil-

dren. So the short officer removed his shirt and wrapped a knife in it. Gideon stretched his hands downward and tried to catch the bundle. It slipped between his outstretched arms and plummeted uselessly to the ground. The children snickered. Only after two more unsuccessful attempts did Gideon manage to grasp the shirt and remove the knife. His fingers were numb and heavy with blood. Suddenly he pressed the blade to his burning cheek, enjoying the cool touch of the steel. It was a delicious moment. He opened his eves and saw an inverted world. Everything looked comical: the truck, the field, his father, the army, the kids, and even the knife in his hand. He made a twisted face at the gang of children, gave a deep laugh, and waved at them with the knife. He tried to say something. If only they could see themselves from up here, upside down, rushing around like startled ants, they would surely laugh with him. But the laugh turned into a heavy cough: Gideon choked and his eyes filled.

9

Gideon's upside-down antics filled Zaki with demonic glee.

"He's crying," he shouted cruelly, "Gideon's crying, look, you can see the tears. Pinocchio the hero, he's sniveling with fear-o. We can see you, we can."

Once again Shimshon Sheinbaum's fist fell ineffectually on thin air.

"Zaki," Gideon managed to shout in a dull, painracked voice, "I'll kill you, I'll choke you, you little bastard." Suddenly he chuckled and stopped.

It was no good. He wouldn't cut the last strap by himself, and the doctor was afraid that if he stayed as he was much longer he was likely to lose consciousness. Some other solution would have to be found. This performance could not be allowed to go on all day.

And so the kibbutz truck rumbled across the plowland and braked at the point indicated by Shimshon Sheinbaum. Two ladders were hastily lashed together to reach the required height, and then supported on the back of the truck by five strong pairs of hands. The legendary blond officer started to climb. But when he reached the place where the two ladders overlapped. there was an ominous creak, and the wood began to bend with the weight and the height. The officer, a largish man, hesitated for a moment. He decided to retreat and fasten the ladders together more securely. He climbed down to the floor of the truck, wiped the sweat from his forehead, and said, "Wait, I'm thinking." Just then, in the twinkling of an eye, before he could be stopped, before he could even be spotted, the child Zaki had climbed high up the ladder, past the join. and leapt like a frantic monkey up onto the topmost rungs; suddenly he was clutching a knife-where on earth had he got it from? He wrestled with the taut strap. The spectators held their breath: he seemed to be defying gravity, not holding on, not caring, hopping on the top rung, nimble, lithe, amazingly efficient.

10

The heat beat down violently on the hanging youth. His eyes were growing dimmer. His breathing had almost stopped. With his last glimmer of lucidity he saw his ugly brother in front of him and felt his breath on his face. He could smell him. He could see the pointed teeth protruding from Zaki's mouth. A terrible fear closed in on him, as though he were looking in a mirror and seeing a monster. The nightmare roused Gideon's last reserves of strength. He kicked into space, flailed, managed to turn over, seized the strap, and pulled himself up. With outstretched arms he threw

himself onto the cable and saw the flash. The hot wind continued to tyrannize the whole valley. And a third cluster of jets drowned the scene with its roaring.

11

The status of a bereaved father invests a man with a saintly aura of suffering. But Sheinbaum gave no thought to this aura. A stunned, silent company escorted him toward the dining hall. He knew, with utter certainty,

that his place now was beside Raya.

On the way he saw the child Zaki, glowing, breathless, a hero. Surrounded by other youngsters: he had almost rescued Gideon. Shimshon laid a trembling hand on his child's head, and tried to tell him. His voice abandoned him and his lips quivered. Clumsily he stroked the tousled, dusty mop of hair. It was the first time he had ever stroked the child. A few steps later, everything went dark and the old man collapsed in a flower bed.

As Independence Day drew to a close the khamsin abated. A fresh sea breeze soothed the steaming walls. There was a heavy fall of dew on the lawns in the

night.

What does the pale ring around the moon portend? Usually it heralds a khamsin. Tomorrow, no doubt, the heat will return. It is May, and June will follow. A wind drifts among the cypresses in the night, trying to comfort them between one heat wave and the next. It is the way of the wind to come and to go and to come again. There is nothing new.

Before His Time

1

The bull was warm and strong on the night of his death.

In the night, Samson the bull was slaughtered. Early in the morning, before the five o'clock milking, a meat trader from Nazareth came and took him away in a gray tender. Portions of his carcass were hung on rusty hooks in the butcher shops of Nazareth. The ringing of the church bells roused droves of flies to attack the bull's flesh, swarming upon it and exacting a green

revenge.

1962

Later, at eight o'clock in the morning, an old effendi arrived, carrying a transistor radio. He had come to buy Samson's hide. And all the while Radio Ramallah piped American music into the palm of his hand. It was the wildest of tunes, some unbearably mournful piece of jazz. The church bells accompanied the wailing melody. As the tune came to an end, the transaction was concluded. The bull's hide was sold. What will you do, O Rashid Effendi, with the hide of Samson the mighty bull? I will make ornaments from it, objects of value, souvenirs for rich tourists, pictures in many colors on a screen of hide: here is the alleyway where Jesus lived, here is the carpenter's workshop with Joseph himself inside, here little angels are striking a bell to proclaim the birth of the Saviour, here the kings are coming to bow down before the cradle, and here is the Babe with light on His forehead, parchment work, real bullskin, all handmade with an artist's vision.

Rashid Effendi went to Zaim's café to spend the morning at the backgammon table. In his hand the

particularly unpleasant episode with his wife, Mendele cries out in glee that he has just thought of another category. Cutting Fishke short, he describes the practice of a certain beggar in Ksalon who considered the town a kind of personal fiefdom and went so far as to maintain records of all the householders who "owed" him handouts. As Fishke continues, the gap between his pathetic tale and Mendele's response grows wider. Fishke tells how his wife bullied him into accepting a rather ominous invitation to join a band of beggars, adding that "only God in heaven knew the depth of my misery at that moment." (H117; Y94-95) Ignoring Fishke's pathetic outburst, Mendele is merely reminded of his relative Chaya-Traina and her henpecked husband. "It appears to me," he comments light-heartedly, "that our Fishke, too, receives sure blows from his wife from time to time." (H117; Y95)

Even while Mendele admits that there is a certain naive eloquence to Fishke's tale, he cannot resist the temptation of poking fun at Fishke's sudden inspiration. Like Balaam's ass, boring preachers, and "the worst of cantors," Mendele explains, Fishke, too, has his moment of glory, surprising us with unaccustomed eloquence before lapsing into his usual bootishness. Fishke, Mendele tells us, is like a golem requiring special care. To be sure, Mendele admits, animating this particular golem does not require any esoteric knowledge, but, then again, "all ages are not equal, and neither are their golems." (H123; Y118)²⁵

Mendele seems, then, particularly two-faced in his response to Fishke's tale. From one side he retells the tale, improving it with the necessary corrections and clarifications in order to make sure that the reader experiences the full impact of Fishke's plight. At the same time, he himself ignores that plight and subverts the pathetic melodrama with satiric digressions, ironic commentaries, and cynical asides. Once again, Mendele presents us with a seemingly irresolvable psychological puzzle. Is he really of two minds about Fishke's plight? Is he, for some reason unknown to us, attempting to cover up his real feelings? And if so, from whom? Does his inconsistency indicate some deep-rooted inner conflict? These questions are resolved-are in fact rendered irrelevant-nce we realize that Mendele is not a "character" whose behavior must form a more or less coherent pattern based upon our notions of psychological realism. His narrative activity is not designed to reveal psychological complication nor does it provide any basis for a reconstruction of a coherent, meaningful identity. As a narrative device, Mendele's function is to transform potentially pathetic situations into comic narrative, to evoke and deflate conventional sentimentality, in sum, to prevent the reader from adopting a monocular view of Jewish society. In order to effect the disorienting juxtapositions required for this task, Abramovitsh is prepared to stretch and finally shatter Mendele's "psychological essence." Psychological realism is subjugated—and subverted-by the requirements of the narrative.

Abramovitsh, to be sure, does not ignore altogether the dema of conventional realistic characterization. Unlike the "self-conscient novelists of the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, he is not in upon laying bare his technique in order to flaunt the narrative arti-His concerns are sociological, not epistomological, and thus, like n nineteenth-century "readerly" novelists, he attempts to conceal techni and convention, to pass them off as unmediated or "innocent" ("realistic") representations of reality.26 Significantly, however, Abr ovitsh's most direct attempt to anchor Mendele's narrative activity specific identity with a unique personal history appears outside of narrative structures in which he appears. This attempt at naturaliz Mendele takes the form of a biographical sketch which has been inclu in a number of editions of Abramovitsh's collected works.27 In the ske Mendele offers a few scattered details about his childhood and e years, mentions his wife and children, and describes his own phys appearance. Then, after reluctantly revealing these details for his "pry readers," he suggests that those who desire more specific information address him privately. Even the few details that are provided, howe go far beyond anything we get in the works themselves. Such details absent from the works because, as Mendele's reluctance here sugge they are irrelevant. They would serve no function and, indeed, the might undermine Abramovitsh's thematic objectives by invalidating process of defamiliarization, reducing it to the product of a subject and therefore unreliable point of view.

Mendele is a character in pieces or, rather, not a character at all a collection of identities, a "figure," in the Structuralist vernacular, t cannot be analyzed in terms of "biography, psychology, or time."28 S we must account for the fact that more than four generations of read and critics have perceived him as a character and, indeed, one of most vivid and engaging characters in all of Hebrew and Yiddish ficti Should we dismiss this perception as simply a naive response to literary text or, worse, as interpretive tendentiousness? The impulse find human analogies for fictional characters is surely not, as so Structuralist theories seem to suggest, an "incorrect" one. It is fire rooted in the mimetic tradition of fiction; indeed, every fictional charac and every plot would be incomprehensible were we forbidden-as that were possible—to draw upon our knowledge of human experier in order to "name" them.29 But how can we explain the fact that Mende for whom the human analogy breaks down as soon as we pursue it w any consistency, continues to fascinate us?

The answer lies in the very fact that Mendele does not cohere a character, that we cannot understand and categorize him as we can, i example, static characters like Reb Alter and Fishke. When a narrati personage acts strangely and deviates from human experience as a understand it, our first response is to naturalize the apparent deviatic

While Mendele's multiple narrative identities clearly subvert the conventions of psychological realism, they serve the needs of the skaz admirably. Through Mendele Abramovtish can present Jewish society from various angles and diverse postures, exposing its follies from without or subverting its values from within. He can manipulate narrative distance, radically shift point of view, effect sudden modulations of tone and comic juxtapositions, always relying upon Mendele's protean identity, his ability to metamorphose on the spot, to unify the otherwise incompatible stances. Mendele integrates the loose plot (as all first-person narrators tend to do) yet, because he is a series of voices and not a psychological entity, Abramovitsh does not have to face the narrative restrictions imposed by a limited and internally consistent point of view.

Mendele, as we have seen, has a habit of leaping between the extremes of satiric detachment and sentimental identification. In a "character," such violent oscillation might suggest a certain psychological instability, an internal conflict of crucial importance to our understanding of the narrative. In Mendele's case, however, we are not encouraged to probe the psychological depths. On the contrary, whenever Mendele withholds sympathy where it seems called for or deflates his own occasional sentimental outbursts, the reader is encouraged to look outward, to see Jewish society from an unfamiliar perspective and then to reexamine his—not Mendele's—response to it. The violent juxtapositions of cynicism and sentimentality are designed to disorient the reader, to jolt him out of accustomed or conventional attitudes toward Jewish society. Just when he least expects it, the reader's emotions are short-circuited and his perceptions subjected to a radical critique. This dislocation of emotions does more than generate ambivalence; it thoroughly undermines the reader's sense of "familiar reality" and forces him to see and respond to Jewish society in unexpected and at times uncomfortable wavs.

Mendele's narrative function, then, is nothing less than the methodical defamiliarization of Jewish society. In the guise of a trustworthy guide and intermediary, Mendele subverts and frustrates the reader's expectations every step of the way. Even when Mendele refers to "typical" Jewish practice and behavior he is playing his subversive role, for what he introduces as typical and well known he invariably describes in a grotesquely exaggerated manner. Thus, rather than contributing to the "reality effect" by grounding the narrative in a familiar social reality (as in conventional nineteenth-century realistic fiction), Mendele's appeals to the "Cultural Code" have a disorienting effect. Once again, the reader is forced to reexamine his habitual perceptions and see Jewish society in a new light. It is not surprising, then, that readers and critics who come to Abramovitsh's works expecting a "realistic" portrait of Jewish life in the Pale, which is to say a reassuring confirmation of their

own perceptions and attitudes, are invariably disappointed. Nor is surprising that some critics have accused Mendele of arrogance, callo ness, or some inexplicable deficiency in sympathetic understanding. Su readers, one might argue, are Abramovitsh's chief targets.

Whenever Mendele witholds sympathy, engages in cynical commitary, or debunks conventional sentimentality, he is simply performithe task of defamiliarization for which he was created. Consider, example, Mendele's apparently callous response to Fishke's tale innocent suffering. Fishke's tale provides a powerful contrast to Medele's generally satirical view of Jewish society. Beyond its obvious entimental and melodramatic elements, one can discern the genui perplexity of an individual particularly vulnerable to the circumstant of Jewish life in the Pale of Settlement. Fishke is the individual who concealed in Mendele's categories and generalizations; in telling his stoche exposes the pathetic side of Jewish existence that Mendele usua takes great pains to repress. In the light of Fishke's story, Mendel satire is likely to appear painfully inadequate, his cynicism crue frivolous.

How does Mendele respond to the challenge? In the beginning, least, he seems intent upon helping Fishke tell his story. He encourag Fishke to speak out and spurs him on whenever the going gets roug And Mendele is obviously concerned that the reader experience the f impact of Fishke's tale. He is, after all, the one who transmits the tale the reader, and this requires, as Mendele himself points out, translati: Fishke's halting and barely coherent Yiddish with the necessary "corretions and clarifications." Mendele serves, then, as Fishke's faithir representative before the reader, providing him with both a voice as literary medium in which to express his otherwise mute suffering.

At the same time, however, Mendele does his best to subvert the sentimental melodrama that he himself has no small part in creating. In the does with everything else he sees or hears, Mendele uses Fishke tale as a pretext for comic digression and satiric commentary. Thus when Fishke attempts to describe the beggars whom he joined while of the road, Mendele seizes the opportunity to indulge in one of his companatomies of Jewish society. Listing all the categories and subcategori of beggars along with details of their characteristic techniques and att tudes, Mendele seems to forget about Fishke and his sad tale altogethe. The tide is stemmed only when Reb Alter, always anxious to get to the point, interrupts Mendele and unwittingly supplies the generalizatic implicit in Mendele's words. "You might as well have cut things short he complains, "and simply said that every Jew is a beggar." (H115; Y8)

Mendele, however, cannot be stopped for long. Even as Fishke begir to describe his hardships on the road and his wife's cruelty, Mendele mind is still occupied with his lists and categories. When Fishke relates Robert A. Maguire (Princeton, 1974), pp. 269-91; for a specific comparison between Mendele and Gogol, as well as other Russian writers, see Y. ben Yeshurun, "The Influence of Russian Prose Fiction on Mendele" (Hebrew), Orlogin 7 (1953): 216-19.

17. The biblical allusion does not appear in the Yiddish. Rather, Reb Alter appears to get "a bit healthier" at the prospect of doing business: "Men zet, vi es kumt im tsu a shtik gezunt."

- 18. The "modified" allusion does not appear in the Yiddish: "Beyde tsdodim hobn dervayl funem gantsn mase-matn keyn groshn in di oygn nisht gezen un geblibn shtark tsufridn, glat fumem handl aleyn."
- 19. Genesis Rabba 65:20, 21 on Genesis 27:22. The biblical phrases appear in Hebrew in the Yiddish text.
- 20. The biblical allusions are from Song of Songs 2:16, Gen. 41:2, and Ps. 42:4. They do not appear in the Yiddish text.
- 21. Yosef Klausner, Yotsrei tekufah umamshikhei tekufah (The Creators of an Age and the Continuators of an Age) (Tel Aviv, 1956), pp. 47-55.
 - 22. Shaked, Ben sehok ledema, p. 65.
 - 23. Miron, A Traveler Disguised, pp. 203-268.
- 24. Shalom Luria, Halashon hafigurativit bitsirato haduleshonit shel Mendele Mokher Sefarim [Figurative Language in the Bilingual Works of Mendele Mokher Sefarim], Ph. D. dissertation, The Hebrew University, (1977), p. 67.
- 25. This particular phrase, which has the flavor of a rabbinic aphorism, is lacking in the Yiddish.
- 26. For the Russian Formalists, the extent to which a novel "bares the device" was often deemed a measure of its artistic excellence. Viktor Shklovsky, for example, declared Tristram Shandy "the most typical novel in world literature" on this basis. See his "Sterne's Tristram Shandy: Stylistic Commentary," in Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays, eds. Lemon and Reis (Lincoln, 1965). Roland Barthes recognized, on the other hand, that many writers of fiction, especially the "bourgeois novelists" of the nineteenth century, attempt to conceal artifice. Thus, he distinguishes between "readerly" fiction, that is, fiction that attempts to lull the reader into accepting its conventions as natural, and "writerly" fiction that intentionally subverts conventions in order to reveal an essential artificiality of all narrative. See his Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Boston, 1967), pp. 55-61 and S/Z, pp. 3-4. Robert Alter treats some "writerly" texts at length in his Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre (Berkeley, 1975). Alter identifies a distinct tradition of self-conscious novelists intent upon flaunting narrative artifice stretching from Cervantes to Vladimir Nabokov. That tradition, he notes, fell into eclipse during the nineteenth century, in part because interest shifted from the nature of narrative itself to the pressing historical and social issues of the day.
- 27. An English translation of the "autobiographical sketch" appears in Mendele Mocher Sforim, The Parasite, trans. Gerald Stillman (New York, 1956), pp. 19-24.
 - 28. Barthes, S/Z, pp. 67-68.
- 29. The need for a knowledge of "life" in order to engage in what Barthes calls the process of "nomination" is made clear by his inclusion of a "cultural code" in his treatment of Balzac's "Sarrasine" and particularly by his admission that, ultimately, "all codes are cultural." See 5/Z, p. 18.

NOTES AND READINGS

Hopkins' "Windhover" and Tchernichovsky's "Eagle! Eagle!"

In an essay titled "The Kidnapping of Bialik and Tchernichovsk Alter laments a tendency in modern Hebrew literary analysis toward allegorization.1

A prevalent weakness in Hebrew criticism is that it so often ne literary text itself in a search for something beyond the text. To be this means that there has been very little aesthetic criticism of literature, painfully little written on the major Hebrew poets to scisely how they created beautiful forms through the medium of 232).

To illustrate his point Alter cites Tchernichovsky's poem, "Eagle! Eagl 'ayit'al harayikh"—1936), and he summarizes briefly several standard ir tions of the text, all of which attempt to compress its subtle ambiguitie narrow straits of national allegory. Such insistence on reductive symb not only fostered distorted readings of this and other poems, but has the regrettable effect of foisting onto Bialik and Tchernichovsky th national poet. Often perceived as official spokesmen of the Zionist cau two figures have been undervalued for their own personalized vision a expression.

The state of the art of Hebrew criticism has improved considera publication of this essay in 1964.2 Nonetheless, in response to this still 1 call for more close readings of Hebrew lyric-readings sensitive to the t rather than to ideological stances—we might well turn once again to "Eagle! Eagle!" Alter, in The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself, has offered som comments on this text that supplement remarks in his essay.3 The poe additional attention, though, and is particularly suggestive as it invites cor to another with a similar focus: Gerard Manley Hopkins' "The Win Though Hopkins' poem was written many years earlier than Tchernic (1877), in a different language and in an entirely different milieu, the tw share resemblances that correspond to a similarity of concerns. Each debird in flight and depicts a single, simple scene which, packed with port implication, appears more as emblem than event. In each case we feel th bird must represent more than an ordinary (albeit impressive) bird, for we marked discrepancy between the apparent simplicity of the subject at hand the vast significance attached to it by the poet. The two poems reveal a rema number of linguistic features in common, and for this reason a discussi

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Depth psychology, sociology, history, folk wisdom, or even the "enigmatic" nature of Man may all be invoked in this process. But, whatever means we choose, we simply insist that the character be made to conform to our notions about reality and the way real people deal with it. Otherwise, we would be forced to conclude that the character is simply "unrealistic" and that, if it is realism we are looking for, we are wasting our time. Thus, paradoxically, the less sense a character makes, the more interesting and psychologically complex he is likely to appear. Mendele's interest as a character and the fascination he exerts, then, are by-products of his narrative function which, as we have seen, forces him to act "strangely." Because we can never identify Mendele with complete confidence, because all attempts at psychological reconstruction are bound to end in irresolvable contradiction, Mendele seems to conceal depths that continually invite new soundings.

This illusion of depth-for it is an illusion-is what sets Mendele apart from the other characters that populate Abramovitsh's fictional world. Characters like Reb Alter and Fishke make complete sense. They act and think with complete consistency because they are imprisoned by their environment and because Mendele presents them to us as stereotypes. Thoroughly conditioned to respond according to socially determined patterns, they can be pathetic or comic victims of circumstance, but never anything more. Because Mendele refuses to make sense, because his behavior is always unpredictable and often contradictory, he seems to transcend the social and economic circumstances in which the others are trapped. Mendele's narrative multiplicity is a form of liberation, a claim to autonomy in the face of overwhelming circumstances. Like a tightrope walker who constantly shifts his weight in order to defy the force of gravity, Mendele seems to confront and struggle with his environment, constantly shifting his ground to avoid entrapment. Precisely because he cannot be pinned down or categorized, Mendele seems to project a sense of self in a world of social stereotypes. Ironically, the very effort to provide a definitive reconstruction of Mendele's "identity,"—to fit the pieces together—denies this sense of autonomy.

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NOTES

1. Kol kitvei Mendele Mokher Sefarim (Sh. Y. Abramovitsh) [The Complete Workship of the Sefar hakabtantim of Beggars' Book], from which this passage is taken, was originally published in Yiddish.

Fishke der krumer [Fishke the Lame] in 1869 and appeared in a revised and much expanded version in 1888. Like most of his Yiddish works of fiction, Abramovitsh later translated the novel into Hebrew (in the case of The Beggars' Book, the original Hebrew draft of the first eight chapters was prepared by the Hebrew poet Chaim Nacham Bialik under Abramovitsh's supervision). The final version of the Hebrew work appeared in 1909. Because of Abramovitsh's seminal influence on Hebrew prose and his central role in the development of modern Hebrew fiction, his Hebrew translations are generally considered autonomous works of art. It should be noted, however, that many of Abramovitsh's linguistic and stylistic innovations were in fact solutions to problems posed by the rendering of Yiddish idioms into Hebrew. For an instructive comparison of Yiddish and Hebrew passages from The Beggars' Book, see Gershon Shaked, Hasiporet ha'ivrit [Hebrew Fiction] (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 84-89. While the present study is based upon the Hebrew novel, we will note significant departures from the second Yiddish version. Further citations will appear in square brackets, the Hebrew text signified by an 'H' and the Yiddish text signified by a 'Y.' For an English translation (from the Yiddish), see Mendele Mocher Sforim, Fishke the Lame, trans. Gerald Stillman (New York, 1960).

2. Mendele does, however, suffer a similar breakdown in Chapter 5 of "Biymei hara'ash" [In the Days of Fury], Kol kitoei Mendele Mokher Sefarim, pp. 413-414.

3. For Mendele as the "most Jewish of the Jews," see David Frishman, Kol kitvei David Frishman (Warsaw, 1930), 4:75; for Mendele as folk-type or archetypical Jew, see the Yiddish critic B. Rivkin, quoted in Dan Miron, A Traveler Disguised (New York, 1973), p. 171; for Mendele's tragic consciousness, see Gershon Shaked, Ben sehok ledema [Between Laughter and Tears], 2nd ed. (Ramat Gan, 1974), p. 68; for Mendele as alienated humanist and apostate, see Miron, A Traveler Disguised, p. 148; for an attack upon Mendele as an antisemite, see A. Kariv, Adabrah veyirvah li [I Will Speak and Be at Ease] (Tel Aviv, 1951).

4. On the "pseudonym fallacy," see Dan Miron's excellent discussion in A Traveler Disguised, pp. 130-68.

5. Miron, A Traveler Disguised, p. 169.

6. Shaked, Ben sehok ledema, p. 63.

7. Ian Watt, for example, dates the triumph of modern "formal realism" from the works of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding in which the task of conveying the "impression of fidelity to human experience" took precedence over "conformity to traditional practice" and received standards of "literary decorum." A major element of this new realism was, according to Watt, the presentation of characters as "particular people in particular circumstances," which was achieved, in part, by naming them "in exactly the same way as particular individuals are named in ordinary life." See Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (Berkeley, 1965), pp. 13, 18.

8. See, for example, Seymour Chatman, Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction

and Film (Ithaca, 1978), pp. 116-38.

9. Roland Barthes, "Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits," Communications 8 (1966); The essay is reprinted in Roland Barthes, Image-Music-Text, trans. Stephen Heath (New York, 1977), pp. 79-124.

10. V. Propp, Morphology of the Folktale, 2nd edition., trans. Lawrence Scott (Austin, 1968).

- 11. See, for example, A. J. Greimas, Sémantique structurale (Paris, 1966), pp. 176-80; Tzvetan Todorov, Grammaire du Décaméron (The Hague, 1969), pp. 10-29.
 - 12. Roland Barthes, S/Z, trans. Richard Miller (New York, 1974), p. 167.

13. Miron, A Traveler Disguised, p. 178.

- 14. Similar anatomies of Jewish life in the Pale are found on pp. 95, 98, 100, 101, 114, and 122 of the Hebrew text.
 - 15. Reb Alter's consternation is lacking in the Yiddish.
- 16. On the use of skaz and the foregrounding of the narrative in Gogol, see Boris Eichenbaum, "How Gogol's 'Overcoat' is Made," in Gogol from the Twentieth Century, ed.

Cast of Characters

REB MOYSHE DANSKER, a nouveau riche

SERKELE, his wife

FREYDE-ALTELE, their daughter, who calls herself Friederika in German

HINDE, an orphan, Serkele's niece through her brother

REB GAVRIEL HENDLER, a speculator

MARKUS REDLEKH,² a medical student

REB YOYKHENEN, a matchmaker

A STRANGER

A DOCTOR

REB SHMELKE TROYNIKS, a Lithuanian, the owner of "The Spies" guesthouse.

BERL, his servant

CHAVA, a maid

CHAIM, a servant at Reb Moyshe Dansker's

YERAKHMIEL, Reb Gavriel Hendler's servant, a stutterer

BEADLES and POLICEMEN

Prologue

What is itself completely pure And good, the world cannot endure: It surely will not be too long, 'Til it hears evil's siren song. Wise enough to know my place, 'Twill be enough to save my face, If you will, of tonight's affair, Find but a bit of goodness there. Serkele! Come! Reveal yourself! And grace us with your charms a while. One viewer will toast your good health, Another, spew out bile. I beg you, gentles, one thing more, A trifle, that's all, I assure. Say of Serkele what you will Concerning me, though, please keep still.

-The Author

Act 1

A room in Reb Moyshe Dansker's house. Three doors: one stage right, exiting to the rest of the house; one stage left, leading to Serkele's bedroom, and one stage center leading to the street. The room has a few pieces of furniture: a sofa with several small chairs surrounding it, a bookcase, a chest of drawers; a mirror hangs on the wall, and another, larger one stands against the door stage right; a round table is in the middle of the room.

Scene 1

(Chaim stands by the door to the street and closes it. Afterward, he counts some coins, transferring them from one hand to the other.)

Chaim. One, two, three twenty-groschen pieces! Oh-ho, I swear, pure coins every one of them! He's a good man! It's an absolute pleasure to be of service to a householder like Reb Gavriel—completely different from my boss, you hardly have to lift a finger and you've earned yourself some money. Heh? He was here today and Monday—two days, two coins. Ay, Altele is no fool, that's for sure; if I were a woman, I'd fall in love with him too. And why not? He's a

^{1.} Yiddish for "businessman, speculator."

^{2.} German for "honest."

Serkel or, In Mourning for a Brother

An Entirely New Theatrical Piece in Five Acts

by Shloyme Ettinger

realistic device reflecting sociological reality, which includes linguistic code switching and sociologically rooted responses to that actual phenomenon within a lived society.93 but a kind of archetypal a priori division, suggesting to us attitudes we as protoenlightened readers should take toward the particular characters. Miron points out that the characters in Serkele can be divided into three groups: those who "stubbornly stick to the traditional way of life and speak fluent, idiomatic Yiddish"; the "mouthpieces for their creators" who speak "'educated,' bookish, anemic German;"94 and a "smaller, third group who seem to adhere to the ideas of the Haskala but who are mere fellow travelers... frivolous, superficial characters."95 This tripartite division, so similar to the one in Wolfssohn's Silliness and Sanctimony, can be seen as evidence of an antimimetic structure imposed from without. Even Zalmen Reyzen, who argues that "Ettinger also remains an objective depicter of Jewish life, artist, not a publicist of Haskala ideals, in his drama Serkele" notes the "maskilic tendencies here in the exaggerated idealization of the representatives of the new generation in the character of the 'enlightened,' the student Redlekh."96

Similarly, though critics have often praised Ettinger's dialogue for its realistic nature, it is possible to suggest that with the frequent verbal

93. For example, when the stranger returns to town, while he speaks German the inn-keeper flatters him in the most elevated Germanic language he can muster; when it is revealed that the stranger is a Jew, the innkeeper "immediately relaxes his strained rhetoric and switches to the most unceremonial familiarity." Miron, Traveler, 102. This peculiarly Jewish version of familiarity breeding contempt was sufficiently noteworthy for Freud to tell his readers the following joke: "A Galician Jew was travelling in a train. He had made himself really comfortable, had unbuttoned his coat and put his feet up on the seat. Just then a gentleman in modern dress entered the compartment. The Jew promptly pulled himself together and took up a proper pose. The stranger fingered through the pages of a notebook, made some calculations, reflected for a moment and then suddenly asked the Jew: 'Excuse me, when is Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement)?' 'Oho!' said the Jew, and put his feet up on the seat again before answering." Sigmund Freud, Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten (1905), as Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, trans. and ed. James Strachey, Pelican Freud Library, vol. 6 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960; repr. Penguin Books, 1983), 121.

94. Even here, though, as Weinreich points out, Ettinger inserts some ambivalence as to this group's linguistic choices: Hinde says of Markus that "he speaks just like a book," which may be taken as less than flattering, and when Freyde-Altele speaks her (admittedly mangled) German, one of the positive characters, David Gutherz, asks her why she doesn't speak Yiddish.

95. See Miron, *Traveler*, 257–258. Certain of these characters, like Freyde-Altele, try to speak German but make numerous mistakes.

96. Z. Reyzen, quoted in *Leksikon*, 6:580-581. This said, Reyzen's general assessment is that "Serkele is a lively realistic comedy, written in a fluid, for that time truly extraordinary folklike language, and in terms of its construction it stands at the height of the dramatic art of the early nineteenth century."

tics, the stutters, the set speeches and frequent monologues, the elevated Germanicisms, and the highly symbolic names, 97 what we see in Serkele is less a realistic middle-class comedy than a work perched uneasily between a snapshot of the bourgeoisie and a move into stylization. After all, Serkele herself is a wild, horrifying caricature, a woman who consumes scenery as easily as she does the innocents around her: it stands to reason that from a dramatic perspective this unbalances the play—not only in performance, but on the page as well.

Serkele was performed for the first time in 1863 by the students of the Zhitomir Rabbinical Seminary at a Purim celebration (among the students, twenty-two-year-old Avrom Goldfaden, who played the lead role). The first performance of Serkele in a theatre was produced by Y. Y. Lerner in Odessa on August 11, 1888. In 1923, Serkele was performed at the Central Theatre in Warsaw under the direction of Zygmund Turkow. That performance was turned into a celebration of Yiddish theatre and elicited enthusiastic reviews in all the Yiddish press. It was also performed in the Yiddish theatre of Communist Poland. 98 The play's enduring freshness-the best argument of all for bringing it to the attention of new audiences—has been described as follows by one of the leading critics of the Yiddish theatre: "Serkele shows almost no sign of the fact that it was written almost two generations before Goldfaden laid the cornerstone of Yiddish theatre. Hundreds of such plays are performed on the Yiddish stage even to this day. They are cast in the form of Serkele, no more—in Serkele the language is fresher, more lively, more Yiddish. Serkele is written in a pure, modern Yiddish. Serkele was the example for the later Yiddish playwrights, and, to tell the truth, they imitated it poorly."99

Avrom Goldfaden and The Two Kuni-Lemls

Much of the "imitation" of Serkele that critic B. Gorin had in mind was undoubtedly unintentional, a rehashing of comic tropes that had hardened into nearly inescapable tradition by the time the professional Yiddish stage came to life in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The person who initiated all that activity, however, modeled his first full-length comedy directly on Serkele—and in his case, the imitation was quite a skilled one. Avrom Goldfaden (1840–1908) then went on to lay the foundations of the professional repertoire, and in the process brought countless innovations to Yiddish drama, theatre, music, and performance.

^{97.} Such as David Gutherz (or Goodheart), and Markus Redlekh, whose surname means "honest" in German.

^{98.} Leksikon, 6:578.

^{99.} Gorin, 1:95.

a comic 'recognition': a procedure begun by the Middle and New comedy writers of Greece and Rome and revived during the Renaissance in numerous 'comedies of errors.' "87 Aside from these characteristics taken from Plautus, Terence, and others, one might also add the archetypes of the clever servant, dialect humor, and verbal tics. The title character's "Oy, mayne koykhes!" (translated by us as "Oy, I feel faint!" but literally meaning "Oh, my powers!") is a constant refrain by a character who perpetually complains of her ill-health and her misfortune.⁸⁸

But Serkele herself is, as we see, quite physically powerful, as is clear from her ability to knock around the servants (itself a staple of the Old and New Comedy, as well as a precursor of the physical comedy which would become prevalent in Yiddish theatre more generally). In this falsehood, which serves as the mere background for the moral falsehood and hypocrisy that emerges as one of the play's major themes, we can see another pious hypocrite. Serkele's real secret, though, is not that she is healthy, but that she has manufactured a fake will disinheriting her niece. Begin As such, Ettinger is drawing on the somewhat limited history of Yiddish drama so far, as well as what Miron refers to as "the characteristic middle-class comédie larmoyante." Ettinger himself referred to it as a familien gemelde, the same genre as Wolfssohn's Silliness and Sanctimony.

Enlightenment themes are plentiful here, some previously in evidence and some new ones coming to the fore. Certainly much of the play, as in *Silliness and Sanctimony*, revolves around questions of marriage and the fitness or appropriateness of a particular groom for the innocent bride (who can be seen as metonymic for the Jewish populace)—though in *Serkele*, at least, there is no question that the appropriate groom is the enlightened figure, who once more is called Markus. And Markus, who aspires to adoption of Gentile culture as well as language, points the way away from current society, as symbolized by the arranged marriage system and the reliance on both *yikhes*—a word roughly akin to "lineage"—and money. One may, incidentally, suggest that given the vicissitudes of Eastern European Jewish society—a far

less cosmopolitan and integrated society than Prussia's—the kind of ambivalence about the total transformation of Jewish society and the integration of Western culture is less prevalent than in Wolfssohn's work, though we still do have evidence of some ambivalence about foolish and false enlightenment. Given the unhappiness of Ettinger's own arranged marriage, there may have been other reasons for him to foreground such an issue. One might also suggest that Ettinger's own orphanhood finds some reflection in the trope of abandonment that extends throughout the play. Not only is it a narrative device, but the evocations of longing and solitude strike a theme which will be a commonplace of much of Yiddish melodrama in the future. Some of these emotions are also expressed in song, a medium not seen in Silliness and Sanctimony, but an increasingly prevalent part of the Yiddish theatrical scene in Eastern Europe, as local and contemporary modes of dramatic presentation become incorporated into the Yiddish dramatist's repertoire. 92

There are some other surprises and new elements to be found in Serkele as well. Serkele's own power, symbolic as it is of her hypocrisy, also illustrates an early treatment of a theme to be found over and over again in Yiddish literature: the powerful woman and the passive man. Serkele's husband is tormented by guilt and moral ambivalence over what they have done; the goal-oriented and financially rapacious Serkele, only wishing for improved status, a good marriage for her daughter, and never to return to her life as a mill woman, lacks any such scruples. Additionally, in a movement continuous with the archetype of hypocrites like Tartuffe and Reb Yoysefkhe, Serkele is revealed to be sexually rapacious as well, lusting after the young doctor Markus-such a character trait, though, may be seen as significantly more shocking when the gender of the hypocrite in question is switched. One hesitates to ground this simply in a recognition of the conventional Eastern European Jewish social structure involving women as the breadwinners and men as the effete, impotent intellectuals, but certainly this line of criticism was carried forward by S. Y. Abramovitsh and many other writers, sometimes for comic purposes and sometimes to illustrate the pressing unfairness of the treatment of women given their obvious capabilities for social equality.

This allows us to return to a final question: how realistic, indeed, is Serkele? Recall that Eisenbaum's claim to the censors was that Ettinger's works "picture pointedly and comically the entire Jewish way of life;" recall, also, that the censor rejected the works as they stood. The linguistic differentiation of the characters can be seen not simply as a

^{87.} Miron, Traveler, 101.

^{88.} In his memoirs, Peretz claimed, "I had a nasty aunt.... [T]he Yiddish writer Dr. Shloyme Ettinger based his portrait of 'Serkele' on her. She was a tall, thin woman, pale and sickly, forever yelling: 'Give me strength!'" (Oy, mayne koykhes!) Peretz, 276.

^{89.} See Erik, "Etinger," 16, and Dubilet, 39.

^{90.} Miron, *Traveler*, 249. For an extensive comparison of *Di genarte velt* and *Serkele*, see Erik, "Etinger," 16 and 28; for further discussion about the play, see Erik, "Etinger," 28–33.

^{91.} See M. Dubilet, "Vegn etingers dramatishe verk," in Sh. Etinger: geklibene verk, 34-40, esp. 35, where the play's melodramatic elements are also addressed.

^{92.} Additionally, Ettinger's own talents as a poet and balladeer make the addition of rhymed work to his plays unsurprising.

is of a human life, whose refrain is the bell, that rings always—birth, holiday, wedding, celebration, tragedy, funeral...so too in the Yiddishized version of Shloyme Ettinger's *Dos likht* the eternal accompaniment of a Jewish life... At birth a light, at the circumcision a light, holidays—a light, the Sabbath—a light, Sabbath's end—a light, wedding candles and after death a memorial candle."84 One might also add that, in transforming the metaphor, not only is Ettinger engaging in a centuries-old process of Judaization of secular (and in Schiller's case, somewhat Christian) material, but is also engaging in the maskilic trope of privileging an image of light as the most important key to understanding Judaism.

Ettinger uses his poetry not only to get to moral truths, particularly in the epigrams, but also, as in these ballads, to reveal or to characterize certain ethnographic truths as well. It is not surprising that Ettinger is prized by certain critics not only for his Yiddish style, but his ability to render the language and life of the people, of the folk. It is here, then, that we may observe the shifting balance between the Yiddish theatrical work as polemic and as mirror (or site of nostalgia), and the importance that critics (and, perhaps, audience) place on Yiddish theatre not so much as a medium of change for the future but as a reflection of life present or past. Ettinger's comfort with Yiddish may help explain his willingness to and ease in creating neologisms throughout the play, particularly in terms of theatrical vocabulary, which would be used by generations of Yiddish playwrights and actors after him.85

Ettinger's contributions to the field of Yiddish theatre, however, are hardly limited to the technical sphere, for *Serkele* is populated with a vivid array of comic characters, situations, and language. The play opens in the home of Reb Moyshe Dansker, the nouveau riche husband of the title character. It takes only a moment for us to realize that it is Serkele who runs the household, with a combination of physical and verbal intimidation and emotional manipulation, particularly in the form of her hilariously over-the-top hypochondria. Serkele has darker deeds to answer for, however. The play's Yiddish subtitle is "a yortsayt nokh a bruder"—literally, the anniversary of a brother's death. The entire action takes place on the anniversary of the day Serkele's brother Dovid reputedly died at sea. After his ship disappeared when he was on a business trip, Serkele had a fake will drawn up. She and Moyshe were in fact named as guardians for Dovid's

daughter Hinde, and he provided a substantial fortune to see that she would be raised as befit a girl of her station. The fake will, however, redirected those funds into the guardians' own pockets, while Hinde lives a Cinderella-like existence, more overworked servant than adored niece. Hinde even has an unattractive foil in the person of Friederika, Serkele's own daughter, a foolish creature on whom her mother dotes elaborately. Friederika is being courted by a sly young fortune hunter named Gavriel Hendler, who also steals a box of Serkele's jewels and then helps throw the blame on Hinde and her beloved, the enlightened Markus Redlekh. Things look grim for our heroes until a Stranger comes to town, who of course turns out to be none other than the long-lost brother. By the end of the play, the falsely accused have been cleared of wrongdoing and given Dovid's blessing, the true villains have been punished, and Dovid magnanimously forgives the sister who had gone to such great lengths to steal his fortune at his daughter's expense.

Serkele itself illustrates the flexible and virtuosic nature of Ettinger's Yiddish: as in Wolfssohn's Silliness and Sanctimony, characters use various versions of Yiddish both as a means of character differentiation and—in a manner profoundly different from that of the earlier play—as a source of humor. The innkeeper Shmelke Troynik's peculiar dialect⁸⁶ not only marks him as a Litvak, but also allows Ettinger and his characters to engage in fun at the expense of one or another of the subgroups of Jewish Eastern Europe—mockery based on a trait other than the group's tendency to accept or reject the tenets of enlightenment.

Ettinger's dwelling on dialect humor also shows, incidentally, how certain types of humor have not worn particularly well; though presumably Ettinger and nineteenth-century Yiddish audiences found humor based on dialect, stuttering, and mental retardation funny, it seems fair to say that most contemporary audiences would be greatly offended if this were placed in the middle of a play by, say, Neil Simon, or even Neil LaBute. Ettinger, of course, was hardly the first to draw on these sources for humor, and his doing so illustrates once more how Serkele draws directly on both the Western European dramatic tradition and its mediation through the (limited) earlier maskilic drama. As Dan Miron points out, Serkele, as well as Ettinger's dramatic fragment Der feter fun amerike, uses "the conventional comic sequence of errors and misunderstandings following the appearance of an unknown traveler (who is no less than the missing son, relative, lover, husband) and which leads to

^{84.} Melekh Ravitch, quoted in Leksikon, 6:579-580.

^{85.} Zalmen Reyzen writes, "The consciousness in Ettinger's attitude to the Yiddish language is truly remarkable. Knowing German himself, he would nonetheless eliminate every trace of Germanisms in his Yiddish work. If he lacked words for a certain concept in Yiddish, he tried to create them in the spirit of the language, and his neologisms were very often successful." Quoted in Leksikon, 6:580–581; see also Weinreich, "Shloyme Etinger," xxxi.

^{86.} As a *litvak*, Troynik speaks a dialect that lacks the *sh* sound. The litvak dialect acquired the nickname *sabesdike losn*—literally, "Sabbath language," but used to illustrate its peculiar sound, for the same phrase would be rendered *shabesdike loshn* in other dialects. See our discussion of this issue in the Note on Translation.

in print, fittingly enough, was his masterpiece Serkele, published in an

error-filled edition in 1861 in the Prussian city of Johannesburg.74

Ettinger's work in rhyme was better served: beginning in the early 1860s,

many of his fables, poems, and epigrams had been published in the

new explosion of Yiddish newspapers and newspaper supplements, such as Tsederboym's Kol Mevaser, the Varshever yudishe tsaytung, and the Yudisher folksblat, a collection in book form was published by his son Wilhelm in Petersburg in 1889.75 Ettinger's literary and historical importance remained undoubted ever since, attracting some of the most noted scholars in the field: in 1925, Max Weinreich, the dean of twentieth-century Yiddish studies in Europe and America, published a critical edition of the material with a biographical and bibliographic introduction and with notes;76 and when the indefatigable critic and editor Shmuel Rozhansky began his one-hundred-volume edition of the masterworks of Yiddish literature, he placed an anthology of Ettinger's work as the first volume, before Sholem Aleichem or Peretz.⁷⁷ Yet Ettinger never achieved the height of popularity that these two authors did. While one might suggest that some aspect of this has to do with the dynamics of celebrity during one's lifetime as opposed to posthumously, and the significantly greater opportunities that means of production afforded to later authors and dramatists—of which Ettinger had no means of taking advantage-one must agree with Max Weinreich's conclusion that Ettinger

"remained the great-grandfather of Yiddish literature, the less well known,

half-forgotten great-grandfather."78 This being said, historians and critics

of Yiddish literature and drama have pointed out many admirable aspects of Ettinger's work. Most interesting to us, though, is Ettinger's attitude toward Yiddish. As the eminent critic Shmuel Niger memorably put it, "He did not find it necessary to justify his writing in plain Yiddish and not Hebrew or German. He did not need any excuses. He did not feel guilty, just as the bird who sings or the tree that blooms does not feel guilty. And [this was] truly astonishing . . . right in the middle of the flourishing of the Haskala, when Yiddish, or, as it was called, 'jargon,' was, in the best case, a means to civilize the Jewish masses or, as I. M. Dik put it, a *lom*, a battering ram, to break down the walls of the ghetto."⁷⁹

This comfort with Yiddish, this lack of self-defensiveness, may help to explain the unbridled freedom and linguistic virtuosity that characterize Ettinger's Yiddish poetry. Niger himself considers Ettinger's true contribution to be in the poetic sphere, writing that "no one had yet written poems, parables, and epigrams like his in Yiddish... Ettinger had a cultivated sense of sound, of rhythm, of form... If in the longer parables, which are more narrative, we see Ettinger's cleverness, his life-wisdom and life-knowledge, what is revealed to us in the shorter parables and in the even shorter epigrams is his craftsmanship, his mastery of the word."80

Ettinger's few dozen parables, though written in "beautiful, naïve, melodic, picturesque, well-rhymed" Yiddish, owed significant debts to the Aesopian fabulist tradition, with themes taken from classical fables and complete with a moral ending;⁸¹ parables were also, however, a favored genre of the Berlin Haskala, authored by Mendelssohn and Wolfssohn, among others.⁸² Ettinger had also written longer poems and ballads, which revealed the influence of various German writers and balladeers, most notably Schiller; his famous thirty-three-page poem *Dos likht* (The Light) follows Schiller's "Die Glocke" (The Bell) in using the object in question to serve as the leading metaphor in chronicling the events that demarcate the ebbs and flows of a human life.⁸³ "Just as there the poem

^{74.} Published by A. Goncharovski under the title Komedye in 5 aktn fun Serkele oder di falshe yortsayt geshen in lemberg shnas tkts''h. The work was reprinted in Warsaw in 1875. For more information on the editions of Ettinger's work, see M. Dubilet, "Etinger-oysgabes," in Sh. Etinger: geklibene verk, 349-367, and Weinreich, "Shloyme Etinger," xlv-xlvi, xlix-lix.

^{75.} Mesholim, lidlekh, kleyne mayselekh un kesuveslekh eygene un nokhgemakhte (Petersburg, 1889; 2nd ed. 1890). A new edition only of the mesholim was published in Warsaw (Nayer Farlag, 1920).

^{76.} See Weinreich, ed., Ale ksovim. The edition contains previously unpublished material of Ettinger's, including two unfinished plays, Der feter fun amerike (The Uncle from America) and Di freylekhe yungelayt (The Merry Youngsters), some of Ettinger's letters, and a useful bibliography of early sources on Ettinger.

^{77.} Sh. Rozhansky, ed., Oysgeklibene shriftn fun Shloyme Etinger (Buenos Aires: Alveltlekhen Yidishn Kultur-kongres, 1957). Other editions of Ettinger's work are listed in Leksikon, 6:578: Serkele oder di yortsayt nokh a bruder, "an entirely new theatre piece in five acts" (Vilna: Naye Yidishe Folkshul Farlag, 1929); Geklibene verk (Kiev: Farlag fun di Ukrainisher Visnshaftakademye, 1935); and Mesholim (Kiev: Ukrainisher Melukhe-farlag, 1938).

^{78.} Though one might not agree with Weinreich's reasons. He suggests that had Ettinger "possessed the temperament of a revolutionary, he might have become the grandfather of our literature. If he stands behind Mendele in terms of talent, he certainly stands higher than him in the details of formalistic excellence, though he wrote thirty years earlier. But as it turned out, he was not able to transcend his character." Weinreich, "Shloyme Etinger," xlvii-xlviii.

^{79.} Niger, quoted in *Leksikon*, 6:578–579. Miron (*Traveler*, 13) writes that "Etinger's very 'normality' made him exceptional."

^{80.} Niger, quoted in *Leksikon*, 6:578–579. Ettinger, following in Lefin's footsteps, also translated certain psalms and selections from the liturgy, which also serve as testament to his literary virtuosity. See the translations of Psalm 67 and of the prayers *Yigdal* and *Ma Tovu* in Weinreich, 550–551.

^{81.} Other European writers whose fables may have influenced Ettinger included La Fontaine, Schiller, Gellert, Hagedorn, Florian, and others. See Erik, "Etinger," 21–26, for a full discussion of the fables.

^{82.} See Erik, "Etinger," 19.

^{83.} Ettinger considered this poem, written in 1846, to be his best work. See Erik, "Etinger," 26, and Erik, "Parafrases fun shilers 'lid funem glok' in der yidisher haskole-literatur," in Sh. Etinger: Geklibene verk, 370–383, which includes selections from similar works by A. B. Gottlober and Hirsh Reitman.

pose any great demands from life, I want only a bit of familial happiness and that simple thing has not been given me by fortune. I am a husband, a father, a landowner, a farmer, but to me is destined only the sorrow of all of these." One might suggest that, like many known for their cheerful temperament and comic sensibility, there is a significant difference between outside and inside. His family life was also apparently unhappy, though it seems reasonable also to suggest that at least some of his unhappiness had come from his perceived failure at his other love: writing.

Ettinger had begun to write while still a medical student in Lemberg.⁶³ While there, he became acquainted with the Yiddish Bible translations of Mendl Lefin, as well as The Deceived World and a Yiddish adaptation of Robinson Crusoe called Alter Leb. 4 From these two works, Ettinger presumably learned the ideological importance of writing in easily understandable Yiddish, as opposed to the dialectally different Yiddish of the translations Lefin's work came to replace, and became aware of the ideological and dramatic possibilities of writing in Yiddish. Ettinger later wrote, "I saw that the books found favor with a great number of people; that is, they pleased both the connoisseurs and the uneducated. . . . For a number of reasons I would rather not say whether they were well-written or not. In any case, the idea to write in plain Yiddish appealed to me; that everybody can see, for I immediately decided to find out whether I possessed the talent to write in that language and in that literature."65 Though Lefin's first writings seem to have been parables and epigrams along the lines of eighteenth-century German writings, Serkele was almost certainly written at this early stage in Ettinger's life.⁶⁶ We know from a letter Ettinger wrote that by 1836 or 1837 he was already considering publishing his Yiddish work, 67 and was planning several other literary works in Yiddish, including a mythology and a world and natural history.⁶⁸

We also know that on May 24, 1843, his good friend Anthony Eisenbaum, previously the founder and editor of the Warsaw Polish-Yiddish newspaper *Der beobachter an der vaysl*,⁶⁹ submitted a request to the curator of the Warsaw Scholars' Circle for permission to publish Ettinger's *Serkele* and *Fables*. Eisenbaum's arguments for publication—that "these works are accessible to all classes of Jews, they present in living colors their failings and their lacunae, they picture pointedly and comically the entire Jewish way of life and therefore they can have a redeeming effect on the brain"⁷⁰—suggest the role that Ettinger and his circle felt literary materials could play in the role of enlightenment; perhaps even more important, though, they implicitly acknowledge Ettinger's Yiddish as a useful medium for achieving that task, given both the audience's ability to read the language and, most powerfully of all, the possibilities for realistic depiction that Yiddish affords.

In submitting his works to the authorities for publication, Ettinger relied on the support of the then Jewish censor of Warsaw, his friend Yankev Tugendhold (1794–1871). Ettinger's faith was misplaced, however: Tugendhold so bowdlerized his writings that Ettinger refused to allow their publication in that form. Since publication was impossible without the censor's approval, Ettinger engaged in a campaign of self-promotion: he read his works aloud whenever possible and made dozens of manuscript copies of his work, with the result that during his lifetime he became well known (at least in maskilic circles) not only in Zamosc, but throughout Poland. Still, the author never saw a single published line of his own Yiddish work in his lifetime, and though he would certainly have been gratified to see how much of the city of Zhdanov accompanied him to his resting place after his sudden death at home on the last day of 1856, he might well have thought that his only posterity would have been the self-composed Hebrew epigraph on his gravestone.

As it was, however, Ettinger's work would begin to appear in book form less than a decade after his death. The first of his works to appear

^{62.} Cited in Weinreich, "Shloyme Etinger," xlii.

^{63.} Apparently Ettinger also had artistic ambitions; a painting he did from memory of his friend Jacob Aykehnboym is still extant and is reprinted in Erik, "Etinger," 13. See Weinreich, "Shloyme Etinger," xxi, for a discussion of the circumstances.

^{64.} This information appears in a prospectus for potential subscribers to Ettinger's works, presumably written in the 1840s. Ettinger—interestingly, in light of our discussion of Silliness and Sanctimony and its relationship to later maskilic drama—refers to Di genarte velt as "Tartuffe in German." Ettinger's prospectus appears in Geklibene verk, 368–369; translated excerpts appear in Miron, Traveler, 12.

^{65.} Translation taken from Miron, Traveler, 12.

^{66.} See Erik, "Etinger," 15.

^{67.} Excerpts from the letter appear in Weinreich, "Shloyme Etinger," xxx.

^{68.} See Weinreich, "Shloyme Etinger," xxxi.

^{69.} On Eisenbaum and his multiple roles in the Warsaw community—editor, rabbinical school director, informant—see Érik, "Etinger," 10-11.

^{70.} Cited in Weinreich, "Shloyme Etinger," xxxii. See also 588-590 for the original document.

^{71.} Tugendhold was the head of three modern Jewish elementary schools in the Warsaw area. See Erik, "Etinger," 10.

^{72.} For example, the censor refused to allow "king" as an epithet for a lion in one of Ettinger's fables, because it might affect the honor of the czar and bring about republican ideals; he demanded almost 100 changes to *Serkele*. See Erik, "Etinger," 17–18 and Weinreich, "Shloyme Etinger," xxxii–xxxv.

^{73.} The escorts included the traditional bet din, or Jewish court, once more illustrating a closer relationship between enlightenment and tradition than might be thought. For details, as well as the reprinted epigraph, see Weinreich, "Shloyme Etinger," xliii.

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It also began to give him the familiarity with German culture which would influence his later work so greatly.

Ettinger married at fifteen, a marriage his uncle had arranged for him with the daughter of a Zamosc magnate, Yude-Leyb Volf. As was customary at the time for traditional educated males throughout Eastern Europe, Ettinger went to live with his in-laws, and spent his days in the study house. What was, perhaps, less usual was Ettinger's involvement in the gradually increasing enlightenment movement in Zamosc;52 Ettinger regularly visited the house of Reb Yosef Tsederboym, a meeting point for local maskilim, where he read secular literature and developed his understanding of German and Polish.53 Apparently, it was here that Ettinger first received the reputation for good humor and merriment, as well as for rhymed poems and songs, which would last him (rightly or wrongly) for the rest of his life and into literary history. When Ettinger's father-inlaw died, cutting off his support, his wife opened a store specializing in glass work and windowpanes, but Ettinger still needed to find a means of making a living. After a brief and abortive stint in Odessa, his brother-inlaw's home, attempting to take advantage of the city's rising role as a trade center to succeed in business, Ettinger and his family decided that he would go to Lemberg to attend medical school.⁵⁴

Ettinger arrived at the Medicinisch-Chyrurgische Lehranstalt zu
Lemberg in 1825, having divested himself of his traditional Jewish
clothes. 55 He seems to have been a succès d'estime at the university, known
both among colleagues and the Lemberg maskilim as the "merry
Solomon." Ettinger completed his studies in the beginning of 183056
and returned to Zamosc, where, though he was granted the title of
mediker, was unable to practice before passing the official government
examination at Warsaw University. Soon, however, the November Upris-

ing of 1831, which led to the belief that the walled city of Zamosc would be besieged, led Ettinger to settle with his family in the glassworks of his brother in-law, Yaakov Gold, near Yanov.

The Russians who came into Poland to suppress the rebellion brought cholera with them, which developed into a full-fledged epidemic in the summer of 1831. The Polish government, desperate for aid, called on Ettinger to do medical support work; he rose to the task with such dedication that when the revolt ended, the government presented no impediments to his practicing medicine, directed local pharmacists to fill his prescriptions, and even supported his candidacy for the position of ordinator of the Zamosc Municipal Hospital (in the division of venereal diseases).⁵⁷ Ettinger also worked in the Jewish poorhouses and at the same time prepared for the governmental exams, which he had yet to pass. When Ettinger did go to Warsaw to take the exams, however, he became dangerously ill and took them insufficiently prepared, with the result that he received only the title "Doctor of the Second Degree"-without the right to heal internal diseases.58 Despite these obstacles, he managed to maintain a thriving medical practice, though not a highly profitable one.

Over a decade later, the "half-legal" doctor, now a family man with seven children, would attempt to take the exams once more, after a change in local government meant that local pharmacists refused to fill his prescriptions. Around 1847, Ettinger attempted the exams in Kharkov University, but was forced to return home empty-handed because his official papers were not in order. ⁵⁹ After another brief attempt at practice, Ettinger bought a piece of property in Zhdanov, about four kilometers from Zamosc, ⁶⁰ and settled there with his family in 1848, working the land and living there for the rest of his life. ⁶¹ Though his material circumstances improved significantly and he entertained often, he seems to have been unhappy: in a letter from that period, he complains, "I don't

^{52.} On Zamosc as a center of maskilic activity, see Erik, "Etinger," 11, and Weinreich, "Shloyme Etinger," xv. Compare I. L. Peretz's comments on Zamosc and its Enlightenment presence in "My Memoirs," in *The I. L. Peretz Reader*, ed. Ruth Wisse (New York: Schocken Books, 1990), 267–359, esp. 305–330.

^{53.} Yosef Tsederboym's son, Alexander, would become the publisher of the famed Yiddish supplement *Kol mevaser*, where some of Ettinger's work would be posthumously published.

^{54.} Part of this decision seems to have been catalyzed by the economic crisis in Odessa around the time of Ettinger's arrival there in 1825. See Weinreich, xvii, who suggests that Ettinger's stay there lasted about four months.

^{55.} Weinreich ("Shloyme Etinger," xix-xx) seems to present this change of dress, and indeed the study of medicine more generally, as an unwilling concession to necessities rather than modernizing desire. If this is true, then one must once more be reminded of how complex the negotiation between traditional desires and reformist impulses are in the history of the Haskala.

^{56.} Weinreich, however, could find no records at the university indicating Ettinger studied there, though he doesn't doubt that he did so; see "Shloyme Etinger," xxii, n. 9.

^{57.} Perhaps alone among most of the townspeople and later Yiddish literary critics, how-'ever, Ettinger apparently never referred to himself as "doctor," since he had not passed the required examinations. See Weinreich, "Shloyme Etinger," xxv-xxvi.

^{58.} Weinreich ("Shloyme Etinger," xxvi) dates this to around 1833-1834.

^{59.} On the details of this trip, which took almost a year in total, see Weinreich, "Shloyme Etinger," xxxvii-xxxviii.

^{60.} Peretz describes the small village: "Zhdanov, three miles past the Lemberg gate, had been founded some years back as a Jewish farm colony. To attract Jews to agriculture, the Polish government offered certain inducements: long-term credit, and, more important, exemption from the draft. The colony's founder, Dr. Shloyme Ettinger, had worked the land himself, along with his children, but that was before my time." Peretz, "My Memoirs," 279.

^{61.} A brief exception was in July 1855, when Ettinger once more assisted Polish authorities during another cholera epidemic.



A Critical Anthology

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a badkhn, he would be able to draw these disparate strands together in his own work in order to create a play very much in the tradition of Wolfssohn's *Silliness and Sanctimony* and the German tradition from which it sprung, while providing a sensibility that was equally contemporary and local.

Shloyme Ettinger and Serkele

Shloyme Ettinger was born in Warsaw at the beginning of the nineteenth century,48 at a time when the influence of the German Haskala was just beginning to make itself known in this largest of Polish cities. 49 The Ettinger family counted among its members fairly distinguished scholars and merchants: his grandfather, Itche Ettinger, was the rabbi of Chelm, and his father, Yoske Ettinger, had been asked to be the rabbi of Frankfurt am Main, but refused the commission because of his desire to remain in Poland. Yoske Ettinger died young, and Shloyme, an orphan like so many of the foundational figures of modern Yiddish literature, 50 was raised in the house of his father's younger brother, Mendel Ettinger. Mendel, the rabbi of Letshne, in Lublin province, had a reputation for his willingness to incorporate secular learning, particularly German, into his studies. Like Wolfssohn's childhood, then, Ettinger's upbringing involved traditional Jewish study and secular knowledge, thus sparing him from the perceived dichotomy between traditional Judaism and worldly education that was often the case with his maskilic contemporaries.⁵¹

^{48.} Biographical information for Ettinger is taken from Max Erik, "Shloyme Etinger, 1800[01?]–1856," in Sh. Etinger: geklibene verk, ed. Erik (Kiev: Farlag fun der Ukrainisher Visnshaft-akademye, 1935), 7–33; Max Weinreich, "Shloyme Etinger, zayn lebn un zayn perzenlekhkayt," in Ale ksovim [fun Shloyme Etinger], ed. Weinreich, 2 vols (Vilna: B. Kletskin, 1925), xiii–xlvii; and Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur (New York, 1956–81), 6:574–583. A generally accepted date for Ettinger's birth is 1803 (see Weinreich, "Shloyme Etinger," xiii), though Erik dates differently; see Weinreich, "Vegn Etingers geboyrn-yor," in Ale ksovim, 585–588.

^{49.} In 1802, a Jewish banker founded a separate synagogue for Warsaw's maskilic population, and within the decade Warsaw maskilim began petitioning governmental authorities for decrees supporting maskilic ideology. See Erik, "Etinger," 9–10.

^{50.} In Eastern European Jewish society, one who had lost either or both parents was referred to as an orphan. Both S. Y. Abramovitch (Mendele Moykher Seforim) and Sholem Rabinovitch (Sholem Aleichem), two of the three classic Yiddish writers, were orphaned in childhood, See Ken Frieden, Classic Yiddish Fiction: Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, and Peretz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

^{51.} Leksikon, 6:574. Ettinger would, as an adult, employ German for personal correspondence; see Miron, Traveler, 7.

ווי די כלום אויפֿן וועג מים איר צוועם;

דער נעמט אים זײַן כּבֿוד, דער רופֿט אים "זשיד",

דער מיט די פֿיס אים צעטרעט.

און ער האָט שוין פֿאַרלאָרן זײַן מוט און זײַן דרייסט,

פֿאַרלאָרן זײַן קראַפֿט און זײַן מאַכט;

מער ניט די אמונה, דאָס איז נאָך זײַן טרייסט

אין דער לאַנגער, פֿינצטערער נאַכט.

פלאַצט מיר פֿון שמערץ,

דו האָסט דאָך אַ מאָל אויך געכלים!

זוי אַ שיינער צוועט

יעדערער מרעט,

ווי האָט איר עס קיין רחמנות ניט ?...

ווי נאָר דער מלאך הערם איר דאַ דערמאַנען
איר אַלמן ייַחוֹם פֿון ציון,
זעצם ער איר צעווישן אַלע וואַזאַנען,
זי הייבם ווידער שוין אַן צו בליַען.
און ער מרייםם איר מים מימלייד: "וויש אַפּ דײַנע מרערן,
די זון הייבם דיר אַן שוין צו שײַנען;
איך וועל דיר חלילה דײַן אמונה נים שמערן,
איך וועל דיר נאָך פּוצן און פֿײַנען!"
פֿרעגם זי בײַ עם:
הֿואָג מיר דײַן שם,
לאַמיך וויסן דעם נאָמען פֿון זיי;"
ענפפֿערם ער מיר
ענפפֿערם ער מיר
"דער נאָמען פֿון מיר".

It is clear that Gordon was mindful of the larger, more positive, profile of the attitude toward women in Judaism. We know this from his letter to Miriam Markel, in which he writes that Judaism could boast its great heroines and positive role models such as "Miriam, Deborah, Hannah and Abigail...Judith, Esther and Bruriah" and that

in our nation these false views [about the inferiority of women] never struck root and Jewish wives never fell below the level of their husband: our ancestors did not lock up their wives and daughters and they did not imprison their spirits, inasmuch as [this spirit] is a gift from God... and on the [messianic] day that the earth will be filled with wisdom the prophet promises us that our sons and our daughters will prophesy and in those days to come, even upon *maidservants* will God pour out His spirit; because gender differences exist only in human bodies, but the spirit obtains for both male and female alike. ³

Notwithstanding Gordon's awareness of the more balanced appraisal that Judaism deserves on the issue of women, Gordon clearly saw that there were enough serious abuses at least potentially capable of being implemented under rabbinic law and particularly, with the widespread prevalence among Jews of woefully benighted societal attitudes, to merit Gordon's scathing portrait of the plight of his luckless fictional heroine Bat-Shua in *Kotso shel Yud*. Gordon keenly felt the need to dramatize the inequities of Jewish law, and he testified to having written this poem "with blood and tears." He attested that it would be enough for him if this poem

will in the future save one Jewish woman from being doomed forever through the lack of knowledge of grammar and Bible among the Rabbinic authorities, even in matters that school children are familiar with.⁵

In the intensity of his work, Gordon mirrored trends then current among Russian writers, such as the poet N. Nekrasov and the novelist N.G. Chernyshevsky, toward the amelioration of the plight of women.⁶

As Ben-Ami Feingold points out in his masterful study of "Kotso shel Yud," Gordon's very first chapter presents his ideological target as a caricature in a string of intensifying "comic-grotesque" characterizations. Judaism views the "Hebrew woman" "like a menstru-

ant woman," "an idol-worshipper," "a slave," "a hen," "a whore," "an object." He purposely debases his rhetorical-linguistic register to include words such as "nakedness," "monster," "excrement," and "the snake's pollution." Gordon employs a distinctively "satirical-rhetorical strategy." From the very outset, says Feingold, Gordon employs the technique of "demeaning his ideological opponent a priori," thereby subtly introducing a

system of norms...into the vantage-point of the reader. Thus the characterization of the satirical object is accepted as if it were part of an objective description of the world and not the result of tendentious hostility.⁷

Furthermore, by turning to the reader in a familiar way in the second person, Gordon gives the impression of having an intimate conversation with him, inviting him to share in his impressions of his tragic subject.

The hyperbolic second chapter highlight's the aristocratic nature of Gordon's heroine. This, too, is a continuation of Gordon's thrust toward caricature, for Bat-Shua emerges as something of a demigoddess who becomes defiled by contact with the real world—in this instance, the world of Judaism. This epic poem resembles the allegoristic style of writing that typified the earliest works of the Haskalah with an admixture of publicistic militancy.

In spite of its use of stereotypes, Kotso shel Yud contains a certain delicacy of portraiture that invites the reader's empathy. In the words of one critic, it is a "novel in verse." Set against the backdrop of the coming of the railroads, it fleshes out a picture of societal change that helped to sound the death knell of the shtetl. The character of Fabi as the new Jewish man affords a picture of new possibilities for the Jews in European society. But the stultifying baggage of the traditional patriarchal society—with its prejudices and superstitions—threatens to anchor the Jew to his past, just as "the anchored Jewish woman," the agunah, can never escape her fate. Gordon's occasional asides in which he reflects on the broader implications of the miniature "soap opera" taking place before our eyes project his story on to a wider canvas. One aside is during Bat-Shua's wedding ceremony at her arranged marriage:

But what is that gut-wrenching groan
That rivets our ear more than the tumult of the timbrels?

"That is not the sound of a groan but rather the sound of the glass

Being smashed in remembrance of the destruction of Jerusalem."

The city's destruction we remember for thousands of years But to the destruction of our people we harden our hearts, And with the clatter of the ceramics we break on the wedding day We do not hear the screaming of our children who are to come after us.

The second memorable aside is when Bat-Shua and Fabi are waiting for the messenger to bring the get, the bill of divorce, from Hillel. Gordon notes in a somewhat understated, but nonetheless surprising, way: "And as the Eternal People [the Jews] await the Messiah's arrival, / So did the two of them await the day of the courier's coming." In Hebrew the rhymes accentuate the fatalistic pathos of these two asides. The first aside critiques Jewry's addiction to mourning and its proclivity for becoming mired in the past. The second parodies the Jews' quietistic awaiting of the Messiah. Both passages hint at Judaism's chronic resistance to change, an inertia that renders dubious much of the Jewish enterprise on both the personal and national levels. And yet, the dramatic power and prophetic temperament that come through in this epic poem stir the reader to a sense of anger and frustration that are a stimulus to effect change. And that, of course, was Gordon's professed hope in his recourse to satire. In one memorable comment, Gordon made a pun on the words "satirah" (סאטירה), "satire," and "setirah" (סתירה), "demolishing," with the intent of a thoroughgoing rebuilding and restructuring of Jewish societal attitudes.

Even Gordon's harshest critics, such as Reuben Brainin, who felt that Gordon's portraiture was not sensitive or realistic, succumbed to the charm of his character portrayals in "Kotso shel Yud." There is a quality of sincerity and deep caring that comes through in this work, and those who read it in an engaged manner, and also take into account its differences in genre and style from our own day, will enjoy a very special esthetic and ideological literary experience.

A Note on the Translation

The translation of "Kotso shel Yud" offered here is almost entirely literal with only an occasional archaism or alliteration attempted to parallel the highly stylized Hebrew original. By and large, the purpose of the English rendering is to enhance access to this great poem both for potential Hebrew readers and for those English readers interested in getting as close as possible to the content and meaning of the text. I have made no pretense of demonstrating the type of literary virtuosity necessary to do justice to Gordon's poem. It is my hope that with the help of my translation future writers will try their hand at rendering a poetic translation of this gem of the Haskalah period, a literary era, which is, in terms of the amount of material translated, the most neglected of all areas of Hebrew literature.

Notes

1. See the amply referenced article by Ben-Ami Feingold, "Kotso shel Yud - Anatomiyyah shel Satirah," Mehgerei Yerushalayim be-Sifrut 'Ivrit, II (1983), 73-104 and see Michael Stanislawski, For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 127-28.

2. Yosef Klausner, Historiyyah shel ha-Sifrut ha-'Ivrit ha-Hadashah (Jerusalem: Achiasaf, 1963), IV, 344-45. And see Carol B. Balin, To Reveal Our Hearts: Jewish Women Writers in Tsarist Russia (Cincinnati: Hebrew

Union College Press, 2000), p. 13ff.

3. Klausner, Historiyyah, IV, 344-45. Cf. Stanislawski, ibid.

4. Klausner, ibid., p. 363.

5. Ibid.

6. See especially, N.G. Chernyshevsky, What Is to Be Done? [Russian original, 1864] (New York: Random House Vintage Books, 1961).

7. Ben-Ami Feingold, ibid., pp. 83-84.

קוצו של יוד

(N)

(1)

אָשָּה עִבְרָיָה מִי יֵדֵע חַיָּיִדְיִּ בַּחשֶׁךְ בָּאת וּבַחשֶׁךְ תַּלֵכִי, עָּצְבֵּךְ וּמְשׁוֹשֵׁךְ, שִׁבְרַדְ מַאֲנָיִיךְ יִּנְלְדוּ מִרְבַּדְ, יִתַּמּוּ תּוֹכֵכִי. הָאָרֶץ וּמְלֹאָה, כָּל טוּב נָנַחַת לְבְנוֹת עֵם אַחֵר לִסְגֻלָּה נִתָּנָה, אַךְ חַיֵּי הָעִבְרִית עַבְדוּת נְצַחַת, מַחֲנוּתָה לֹא תֵצֵא אָנֶה נָאָנָה; תַּהֲרִי, תִּלְדִי, תִּינִיקִי, תִּגְמוֹלִי, תַּאַפִי וּתְבַשְּלִי וּבְלֹא עֵת תִּבּוֹלִי.

Hebrew woman, who knows your life?
You were born in obscurity and in obscurity will you depart,
Your woes and your joys, your hopes and desires
Are born within you, and inside you they die.
The earth and its fullness, all pleasure and comfort
Are vouchsafed to daughters of other nations.
But the life of a Jewess is perpetual servitude,
Never leaving her store to go one place or another;
You conceive, give birth, you nurse, you wean,
You bake and you cook, and prematurely — you wither.

וּמֶה כִּי חֻנְּנְתְּ לֵב רַגְּשׁ וָיֹפִי,
בִּי חָלֵק הָאֵל לֶךְ כִּשְׁרוֹן וָדַעֵתִּי
בֵּן תּוֹרָה לֶךְ תִּפְלָה, יֹפִי לֶךְ דּפִי,
בָּל כִּשְׁרוֹן לֶךְ תָּפְלָה, יֹפִי לֶךְ דּפִי,
פָל כִּשְׁרוֹן לֶךְ חָסְרוֹן, דַּעַת מִגְרָעַת,
וּמָה אַתְּ כָּלֶּדְיִ חַמַת דָּם וָפֶּרָשׁיִ וּמְה אַתְּ כַּלֶּדְיִ חַמַת דָּם וָפֶּרָשׁיִ וּמְבֹית הַפֶּבָר, מֵהַיכֵל אֱלוֹהַ מְבֵּית הַפֵּבֶר, מֵהִיכֵל אֱלוֹהַ וּמְבֵּית מִשֹּׁוּשׁ לַשְּׁאת רָק נֹהַ.

And so what if you were graced with a feeling heart and beauty, If the Lord gave you talent and intelligence!
For you, knowledge of Torah is a taint, beauty a detriment, For you, all talent is a deficiency, all knowledge a drawback, Your voice is indecency, your hair, a horror; And what are you in your entirety? A vessel of blood and excrement; Ever since Genesis, the snake's pollution rests inside you* And like a menstruant woman, your people expel and banish you From the house of schooling, from the sanctuary of the Lord And from places of rejoicing — to express only lamentation.

(3)

טוב לְדְּ כִּי לֹא תֵּדְעִי שְׁפַת אֲבוֹתֵידְ,
כִּי בִית אֱלִהִידְ בְּפָנִידְ נָעָלוּ,
כִּי עַתָּה לֹא תִשְׁמְעִי בִּרְכַּת מְנָאֲצִידְּ
יְשֶׁלֹא עָשָּׁם אִשָּׁה" יוֹם-יוֹם יִתְפַּלָּלוּ,
כְּעַכּוּ"ם וּכְעָבֶד אַתְּ לָמוֹ נֶחְשֶׁבֶת,
כְּתַרְנְגֹלֶת לְגַדֵּל אֶפְרוֹחִים עוֹמֶדֶת.
לָמָה, עָגְלָה דְּשָׁה, פָּרָה חוֹלֶבֶת,
לָמָה לָדְ אֵפּוֹא הֱיוֹת מְלַמֶּדֶתיִּ
לְמָה עַל חִנּוּכֵדְ יַעַמְלוּ חִנָּם וְהַהוֹלֵדְ בַּעֲצָתַדְ יוֹרֵש נֵּיהַנָם:

It is best for you that you know not your ancestors' language That the house of your God is shut in your face, For now you cannot hear the blessing of your scorners "That he did not make them a woman," daily they pray, Like a heathen or slave are you considered by them, Like a hen always prepared to raise fledglings. Why then, oh stomping heifer, oh milking cow, For what, hence, have you a need to be learned? Why should they invest for naught in your education — When whosoever follows your advice inherits Gehenna?

^{*} According to one tradition Eve had intercourse with the serpent.

(4)

הַמְעַט כִּי פְּרִי-בָטֶן מָנֵע אֱלוּהַ,
כִּי לָקַח בַּנִּעַר מִמֵּךְ הַבָּעַל,
כִּי מִבְחַר יָמֵיִדְ אֲסִירַת נֹהַ,
עוֹד תִּשְׁמְרִי הַיָּבֶם לַחֲלוֹץ לוֹ נָעַל.
על אָבִידְ בָּכִית יוֹתֵר מֵאַחַיִּדְ,
יּבְעִןבוֹנוֹ רַק חֵם בִּלְתֵּדְ נָחָלוּ.
עַּךְ אָבְיוֹ נָקְ חֵם בִּלְתֵּדְ נָחָלוּ.
עַּם טֵל הַשְּׁמִיִם לָדְ לֹא אָצָלוּ!
לָהֶם, צָּרֵי עַיִּן, רְמַ״ח מִצְּוֹת מָנוּ
לָלֶדְ הָעֲלוּבָּה רַק שָׁלשׁ נָתָנוּ.

Is it not enough if God withholds from you offspring,
If in your youth he takes away your husband,
If the best years of your life you're a prisoner of woe,
You have yet to deal with the levirate, to do halitsah* with his shoe.
You may have cried over your father's death more than your brothers,

Yet of his estate only they are the beneficiaries. But not only have they stolen from you the benefits of this earth, They have deprived you even of heaven's dew of blessing! For themselves, these miserly males, have counted out 248 mitzvot, Whereas for you, pathetic female, they have allotted only three.**

* In order to be exempted from marrying her brother-in-law, the childless widow must remove his shoe in a rather humiliating ceremony.

(5)

מָה אֲמֻלָּה לְבָּתֵךְ, אִשָּׁה עִבְּרְיָהּ תִּתְאַוִּי לָדַעַת, לַחַיִּים וָאָיִן, -צְמַח אֲדֹנִי אוֹבֵד בִּמְקוֹם צִיָּה, גַּם שְׁמֶשׁ לֹא יָדַע, לֹא רָאָה לָעִיןּ מַרְקַע עוֹלָם אַתְּ פְּרִי תְנוּבָה מַזְרַעַת, אַדְ נִירַדְ לֹא יָנִירוּ, תְּנַדְּלִי פָּרַע: וֹלְבָּר הָיִית לָאִישׁ וַתְּחַיִּי זָרַע, וּבְטֶרֶם לָמַדְתְּ הֱיוֹת בַּת לְהוֹרַיִךְ נִשְּׂאת וַתִּהְיִי - אֵם לִילָדָיִדְ.

How wretched is your heart, Oh Hebrew woman!
You desire knowledge and life experience,
but you receive nothing. —
A flower of the Lord wasting in the wilderness,
It doesn't even know the sun; light has never illumined it fully;
You are a piece of neglected earth,

a seed of what could have become good fruit,
But they did not cultivate your soil; instead you grow wild;
You had not yet become an intellectually mature, aware individual,
And already you were taken by a man, and you conceived offspring,
Before you learned to be a daughter to your parents,
You were married and became — a mother to your children.

^{**} The three mitzvot assigned specifically to women are hallah, niddah and hadlakat ha-ner (setting aside a portion of the hallah, observing marital purity, and lighting Sabbath and holiday candles).

נשאת - הַיַדעת האיש לו תַנַשְאיי הַאָהַבְתִּוּי הַרָאִיתָו עַיַן בָּעַיָןיִ הָאָהַבְתִּיִּ - אַמְלַלָה, הַטֶּרָם תַּדַעִי כִּי אַהַבָּה בָּלְבָב בַּת יִשְׁרָאֵל אֵיָןיִ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם טֶרֶם אָמֵה חַבְּלַתַּה הכין לַה אַלּוּפַה הַמְּזַנֵּג זְוּוּגִים, וּמָה-יַּמְרִיצָה אָם תַּרְאֵנוּ עַתַּהיִ מָה-תִּתֶּן, מָה-תּוֹסִיף אַהַבֶּת תַּעַנוֹגִים! - אַהַבָּה מָן הַן לא יַדעוּ אַמּוֹתִינוּ ַהַּכָּזוֹנָה נַעֲשֶׂה אֶת אַחוֹתֵנוּיִיּ

Married were you -

Did you know the man to whom you were wed? Did you love him? Did you get to see him up close? Were you in love? — Wretched thing, don't you know yet, That love in the heart of a Jewish girl there cannot be? Forty days before her mother gave birth to her, The Heavenly matchmaker found her a husband, So what good would it do her if she were to see him now? What would a passionate love give her,

what would it add to her life? Love of that sort our mothers did not know — Shall our sister be treated as a whore?*

* In the style of medieval poetry, Gordon has embedded whole a verse from the Bible (Gen 34:31), creating an ironic new context.

(7)

הַבִיאִי רֹאשׁךְ בַּצַעִיף, פַּנֵידְ הַלִּיטִי וּקוַצוֹתַיִּךְ אֵל תַּחַת הַתַּעַר: אַל הַעוֹמֶד עַל יַדֶדְ מָה-זָה תַּבְּיטִייִ אָם גָּבָּן אוֹ דָק הוּא, זָקו אוֹ נַערי אָחַת הִיא לַדִי הָן לא אַתּ הַבּּוֹחֵרָת, הוריד יבתרו, הם בד ימשלו, בַּחֶפֵץ נִמְכֵּר מֶרְשׁוּת לַרְשׁוּת אַתּ עובַרָת. הַאַרָמִים הָם כִּי פִי נַעַרָה יִשְׁאַלוּיִּי יַד אַבִיך מושׁלֵת בַּךְ בִּבְתוּלַיִדְ, וּבְצַאתֶדְ מִבֵּיתוֹ - בַּעַלֶדְ עַלַיִדְ.

Put a kerchief on your head, conceal your face, And consign your locks of hair to the razor; Why should you look at the one standing at your side, To see if he is a hunchback or spindly, an old man or young? It is all the same to you! You are not the one who chooses, Your parents do the choosing, they rule over you, Like an object that is sold from domain to domain do you pass. Are they Arameans that they should ask the opinion of the young daughter?* The hand of your father rules over you in your virginity, And upon departing his house your husband comes to dominate you.

^{*} The sarcastic reference is to Gen 24:57-58

(8)

בַּעֲלֵךְ - גַּם הוּא לֹא גַדֵּל בַּנּעַר, לֹא נָטַע כָּרֶם, לֹא בָנָה לוֹ בַיִּת: כִּכְלוֹת שְׁנוֹת אֲרָחָתוֹ, בַּאֲבוֹד הַמּהַר, וּכְהִשְׂתָּרֵג עָלָיו שְׁתִילִי הַזִּיִת, אָז יָחֵל לְבַקֵּשׁ חַיַּת יָד וּפַּרְנָסָה בְּאִישׁ אֹבֵד עֵצוֹת, חֲסֵר לֵב וּתְבוּנָה, וּבִרְאוֹתוֹ כִּי אֵין כֹּל, כִּי כָל תִּקְנָה נָסָה, יָנוּס בַּאֲשֶׁר יָנוּס, יַעַזְבַךְ עֲגוּנָה... אֵלֶה תּוֹלְדוֹת כָּל אִשָּׁה עִבְּרִיָּה -אֵלֶה תּוֹלְדוֹת בַּת-שׁוּעַ הַיְּכֵּה-פִיָּה.

Your husband, too, was not reared properly in his youth,
He did not plant a vineyard, nor did he build himself a house;
At the end of his stay in your parents' house,
when the dowry runs out,

And when you are overrun with little olive shoots [children], Then he will begin to seek out a profession and a living, Like a man totally at a loss, bereft of intelligence and know-how, And then when he sees that all hope has fled,

He will run away somewhere, deserting you and leaving you an agunah, an anchored woman...

This is the history of all Jewish women — This is the history of the beautiful Bat-Shua.

(1)

(9)

מִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא רָאָה בַּת חֵפֶּר בַּת-שׁוּעַ לֹא רָאָה מִיּמָיו אֵשֶׁת יְפַת תּאַר, לֹא רָאָה בַּהְדְרָהּ, מִבְּלִי צֵעֲצוּעַ, מִבְּלִי מֵעֲשֵׁה חָרָשׁ, הַבְּרִיאָה לָטהַר. אֲבָנִים שְׁלֵמוֹת צֵלֶע זֹאת נִבְנְתָה, לֹא חָלוּ בָהּ אוֹמְנִים בַּעֲלֵי חֲרֹשֶׁת. לֹא חָלוּ בָהּ אוֹמְנִים בַּעֲלֵי חֲרֹשֶׁת. עַל כֵּן כָּל מִדּוֹת בְּנוֹת צִיּוֹן הַמְּצֻיָּנוֹת עַל כָּלוּ נָבֶשׁ בַּת-שׁוּעַ הַיָּפָה בַּבָּנוֹת.

Whoever has not seen Hefer's* daughter, Bat-Shua,
Has never seen a beautiful woman in his life,
Has never seen Creation pristine, unadulterated, unadorned.
This female was constructed of whole stones,
Unsullied by human artisanship or craft.
Her perfection was not marred by their plying hands,
Nor subject to the futile failures of human endeavor.
Therefore did the soul of Bat-Shua —
the most beautiful of women —
Encompass all the excellent qualities of the daughters of Zion.

^{*} The root h-f-r (אמר) has "shame" as one of its possible meanings.

(10)

טָהֲרָה וּפְּרִישׁוּת וַחֲרִיצוּת יָדַיִם,
תֹר אָדָם הַפַּּעֻלֶה עִם שִּפְלוּת רוּחַ,
שָׁלֶם נָטוּי לִסְבּּל, אֹרֶדְ אַפַּיִם,
עַל כָּל כָּבוֹד חוּט חֵן וָחֶסֶד מְתוּחַ.
וּבָשֶׁר נְעוֹר קַרַם מִלְּמַעְלָה עָלֶיהָ
לְשֶׁבֶת בִּדְמוּת אָדָם עֲלֵי אֲדָמוֹת-הָיָה לָהּ תּאַר בַּת-שׁוּעַ וּפָנֶיהָ;
כִּי לֹא כִבְרוֹא כָל אָדָם אִשָּׁה זֹאת נִבְרָאָה כִּי לֹא כִבְרוֹא כָל אָדָם אִשָּׁה זֹאת נִבְרָאָה כִּי לֹא כִבְרוֹא כָל אָדָם הִיּצְיָה.

Purity and modesty and skillful diligence,
The image of a superior person blended with humility,
A readiness to shoulder heavy duties, a slowness to anger,
And enhancing all of these, a quality of grace and kindness.
Were modesty to be given blood and bones
Taking on flesh and skin upon them,
To dwell in human form upon the Earth—
It would have the image and form of Bat-Shua;
For not like other humans was this woman created,
But rather by the Divine's creation-through-a-kiss
did she enter the world.

(11)

שֶׁרֶן אוֹר לָקַח מִנֹּנָהּ לוֹ סְבִיב, אַגְל טַל ארוֹת וּרְסִיס דּק שָׁמִים, וּשְׁחוֹק צַדִּיק תָּמִים וְרֵיחַ הָאָבִיב, וּיָשֶׁם בְּצַלְמוֹ מְמֹרָט שִׁבְעָתִים, וּרְשָׁמָה זַכָּה הוֹצִיא מִן הָאוֹצֶר, וּרְנָע רָצוֹן נָפְחָה בְּאַף הַנּוֹצֶר וֹתְּהִי לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה -- וַיִּשְׁקֶהָ, וּבְנְשִׁיקָה זֹאת אֵשֶׁת חֵן נִבְּרָאָה וּבְנִשִׁיקָה זֹאת אֵשֶׁת הַן נִבְּרָאָה

A ray of light God took from the radiance around Him, With a droplet of luminous dew and a speck of Heaven's ether, The chuckle of a perfectly righteous man and the springtime's fragrance —

These He placed into his Image, which was sevenfold burnished, And a pure soul did He take out from his treasure house, The likes of whose sweetness the world had not yet known, And in a moment of Grace He breathed into this creation's nostrils And when it emerged as a living being — He kissed it, And with this kiss a gracious woman was created And by the human name of Bat-Shua was she called.

בּנְשִׁיקָה נוֹלְדָה, בִּנְשִׁיקָה גְּדֵלָה.
אוֹמְנִים וּמְנִיקוֹת עַרְשָׂהּ לֹא הִקִּיפוּ,
אַדְּ נַפְשָׁהּ בַּּסֵעֶר לִרְקוֹם לֹא חָדֵלָה
וּבְקַרִים וּרְגָעִים יָפְיָהּ הוֹסִיפוּ.
בֵּן בִּצְחִיחַ סָלַע הַגָּפֶן תַּדְּ שֹׁרֶש,
הַשּׁוֹלַחַת אֲרָבּוֹת שָׁמַיִם בַּדָּיהָיִּ
הַשְּׁוֹלַחַת אֲרָבּוֹת שָׁמַיִם בַּדָּיהָיִ
הְשְׁבִּיעָה גַּם אוֹתָהּ חֲלֵב שְׁדָיהָ,
בִּי לִמֵּד לַבְּרִיאָה אָבִיהָ אֱלוֹהַ
הָיוֹת אוֹמֶנֶת טוֹבָה מֵאֵין כָּמוֹהָ.
הָיוֹת אוֹמֶנֶת טוֹבָה מֵאֵין כָּמוֹהָ.

With a kiss was she born, with a kiss was she reared.

Neither governesses nor nursemaids surrounded her cradle, Yet her soul did not cease from developing in secret And each new minute and dawn added to its beauty. Thus in the dryness of rocky terrain a vine will strike root That extends its tendrils toward the portals of heaven! The she-wolf that suckled Romulus and Remus Gave plentifully to her, too, of the milk of its breasts Because her father the Deity gave Creation instructions On being a governess of unparalleled excellence.

(13)

עַתָּרָת הַגָּפֶּן, קוֹמֵת הַתּמֶר,
אַלֶּה הָעִינִים לַלְאוֹת הַתְּכֵלֶת,
וּלְחָיֵי הָרִקְמָה -- תּוֹלֶע וָצֶמֶר,
זֹאת אֵשׁ הַמָּסִים בַּשֶּׁלֶג נוֹזֶלֶת,
זָה מִנְדַל הַשֵּׁן -- לוֹ צַנָּאר יִקְרָאוּ.
גִּבְעַת בְּרָכָה זֹאת מִתְחַבֵּאת מֵעָיִן,
וִיפִי קוֹל בָּהָדָר נוֹזֵל כַּיָּיִן -וִיפִי קוֹל בָּהָדָר נוֹזֵל כַּיָּיִן -וִיפִי קוֹל כָּלָ אֵלֶה עַל הָאָבְנָים:
הַמְּחוֹלֵל כָּל אֵלֶה עַל הָאָבְנָים:

A grapevine's luxuriance, a date palm's stature,
These eyes like loops of light blue,
Her cheeks an embroidery of scarlet and white wool,
Fire melting into thawing snow,
This tower of ivory called her neck.
This aggregate of blessing sequestered from the eye,
Bears itself with Divine stateliness as upon a breeze —
And a beauteous voice trickles majestically like wine —
Who is the craftsman of such deft virtuosity,
Who has forged all of these in his workshop?

(14)

אַשֶּׁת חֵן זֹאת נְצֶבֶת לִקְרָאתֵנוּ בְּקוֹמֶתָהּ וּבְצִבְיוֹנָהּ, בְּצִצְמָהּ וּבְשָׂרָהּ; כָּל נוֹסִיף נַבִּיט לֹא תִשְׁבַּע עֵינֵינוּ שָׁלשׁ וְעֶשְׂרִים פְּעָמִים חִדֵּשׁ הַחֹרֶף הְּקוּפָתוֹ שָׁנָה שָׁל פָּנֶיהָ וּמְאוּם לֹא אָחַז כָּל טָרֶף, כִּי בְעַלַת בַּעַל הִיא לֹא עוֹד בִּבְתוּלֶיהָ יַשׁ לָנוּ רַק עֲדוּת נֶאֲמֶנֶת אַחַת --הַפֵּאָה הַנָּכְרִית עַל הַפַּדְּחַת.

This charming woman stands before us
With her stature, her figure, the full force of her presence;
No matter how much we look at her our eye is not sated
With the loveliness of her face, the perfection of her beauty.
Three and twenty times has the winter renewed
The ravages of its season upon her countenance
And not a whit of the effect of aging has it inflicted upon her.
That she is a married woman no longer in her maidenhood
We have only one bit of reliable evidence —
The wig and head-covering over her forehead.

(15)

חַפֶּר אָבִיהָ נְשׂוּא פָנִים וְקַצִין
בּמְקוֹם מוּשְׁבוֹ, הִיא הָעִיר אַיָּלוֹן
רוֹכְבֵי הָרֶכֶשׁ יַחֲזִיק שָׁם, תָּא הָרָצִין,
נִּם שֻׁלְחָן עָרוּךְ לַנּוֹסְעִים וּמָלוֹן.
וּבְתּוֹ הַיְּחִידָה בְּבִיתוֹ הַעַקֶּרֶת
וּסְנָנִים הַנּוֹסְעִים דָּרֶדְ זֹאת הַקּרֶת
וּסְנָנִים הַנּוֹסְעִים דָּרֶדְ זֹאת הַקּרֶת
כִּלְּהָ בִּי אִמָּה עָלֶיהָ
כִּי אֵין בָּאָרֶץ אֵשֶׁת יְפַת תּאַר
כִּיִּהוּדִיָּה בַּת מַחֲזִיק בִּית-הַדּאַר.

Hefer, her father, a respected citizen and dignitary In the place of his residence, the city of Ayalon,* Holds the lease for the postal station, for riders and horses of the mail,

He also maintains there a restaurant and inn for travelers. His only daughter is the manager and lady of his household, For her mother died while she was still young, And the officers who journey through this town Are unanimous in professing about her That there is not another woman so lovely As the Jewess, the daughter of the postal station manager.

^{*} Probably a play on the word aylonit, a congenitally sterile woman.

(16)

יַעְנוּ בָהּ גִּבְעֹלֵי שׁוֹשַׁנִּים אֵלֶּה אָם לֹא, לוּ לִמְּדוּהָ, נַגֵּן הַיִּטִיבָּה; רֶגֶל אַיָּלָה זֹאת אָם לֹא עָשְׁתָה פֶּלֶא לוּ אוֹתָהּ מִמָּחוֹל לֹא אָחוֹר הַשִּׁיבָה. בִּית-סֵפֶּר לֹא בָאָה, דִּקְדּוּק לֹא לָמָדָה, וּבְלְשׁוֹן עֵם וָעָם צַחוֹת דּוֹבֶרֶת, וּבְלְשׁוֹן עֵם וָעָם צַחוֹת דּוֹבֶרֶת, אוֹרֶגֶת, רוֹקֶמֶת, טָנָה, תּוֹפֶּרֶת. שִׁמְעוּ קוֹלָהּ הָעָרֵב עֵת הְּנָפֵר חֶרֶשׁ וּתְיַשֵּׁן בָּעֶרֶב אֶת בִּתָּה בָּעָרָשׁ.

Let these arms like lily stems give witness That she could have, if taught, played music beautifully; And this leg like that of a doe —

that she might have done wondrously
Had she not been prevented from learning to dance.
To school she never went, nor grammar did she learn,
And yet she speaks fluently in several languages.
And she is able when need be to follow all the latest fashions
In weaving, embroidery, spinning, and sewing.
Listen, too, to her sweet voice when she sings quietly
And puts her daughter to sleep in her cradle.

(17)

וּבְיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת בַּצְלוֹתָהּ בֵּית-הַכְּנֶסֶת,
הַבִּיטוּ וּרְאוּ בָהּ מַה-תִּיף בַּהְדָרָהּ!
על שַׂלְמַת מֶשִׁי סְדִין שֵׁש לוּבֶשֶת,
עִיר זָהָב וּפְנִינִים עַל חֶלְקַת צַנָּארָהּ:
הַּצְּיִף הַשָּׁהוֹר כַּנֵּזֶר עַל ראשָׁהּ,
כַּמֵּלְכָּה קוֹמְמִיּיּת בֵּין רְעוּתֶיהָ צוּעֶדָת.
כִּמִלְכָּה קוֹמְמִיּיּת בֵּין רְעוּתֶיהָ צוּעֶדָת.
כִּי גַם לוֹ בַּסֵתֶר נֶבֶשׁ חוֹמֶדֶת וּשְׁׁכִינַת הָאֵל מִתְעַנֶּגֶת עֻלֶּיהָ

And on the Sabbath day, when she goes to the synagogue, Look and see how lovely she is in her splendid garb;
Over a silk dress she wears a fine linen apron,
A golden brooch and pearls on her smooth neck;
The pure white head covering like a crown on her head,
Like a queen she strides among her fellow women,
Even the ascetic scholar, that dried out piece of wood,
will come stealthily to see her

— Because even he secretly has a lustful spirit — And the Shekhinah of God's presence gets pleasure from her Even as she displaces the Shekhinah with her erect stature.

(2)

(18)

אַךְ כָּל זֶה הָיָה זֶה רַבּוֹת בַּשְׁנִים: עַתָּה בְּקוֹמָה זְקוּכָּה זֹאת הְּלוּיִם רַחַיִם: טְרְדוֹת בַּרְנָסָה, צֵעֵר גִּדּוּל בָּנִים, כּי חֲנוּת לְבַת-שׁוּע וִילָדִים שְׁנָים. וּכְמוֹ עֵל מִשְׁטָרוֹ נִצֶּב אִישׁ-חֵיִל יום-יום בַּחֲנוּתָה בַּת-שׁוּע יושֶׁבֶת, וּמִאָז הַבּקֶר עַד נָכוֹן הַלָּיִל מודָדֶת, שׁוֹקֶלֶת, מוֹנָה, חוֹשֶׁבֶת. כִּי גַם אֵם הִנָּה - גַּם אָב לִילָדֶיהָ.

However, all this occurred many years ago;
Now upon this erect stature millstones are hung;
The stresses of making a living and the woes of raising children,
Because Bat-Shua has a store as well as two children,
And like a soldier staunchly standing at her post,
Day-in and day-out Bat-Shua sits in her store,
From early morning until after nightfall,
Measuring, weighing, counting, computing.
She also oversees her home and she rears her children,
For behold she is a mother — but also a father to her children.

(19)

אָב לִילָדֶיהָ - וַאֲבִיהָם אַיֵּהוּיִ אוֹלֵי בִּדְמִי יָמִיו הַפֶּוֶת כְּרָתוֹיִ אוֹ רוֹכֵל הַפַּחְזִיר בָּעַיָרוֹת הְנֵּהוּיִ אוֹ יוֹשֵׁב אֹהֶל הוּא וְעוֹסֵק בְּתוֹרֶתוֹיִ אוֹ אוּלֵי חֲסַר-לֵב שָׁב בֵּית אָבִיהוּ וּלְאִשָּׁה כָּזֹאת נָתַן סַפֶּר-כְּרִיתוּתיִּ בִּית אָבִיו לֹא רָאָהוּ, שְׁאוֹל יֹאמֵר: "לֹא-בִי הוּא:" וּבִית הַפִּדְרָשׁיִ" עָזָבַנִּי לִצְמִיתוּת״, וּבִית הַפִּדְרָשׁיִ" עָזָבַנִּי לִצְמִיתוּת״,

A father to her children — but where is their father?
Perhaps death cut short his life at a young age?
Or, perhaps he is a peddler selling his wares out in the villages?
Or, one who stays at home, busying himself with the study of Torah?
Or, perhaps he is a man so foolish

that he returned to his father's house,
And to a woman like Bat-Shua, he has given a divorce?
No. His father's house has not seen him,
Sheol would say: "He's not here."
And the house of study: "He has left me in perpetuity."
In the marketplace...don't go looking there, you'll not find him —
For he's wandering in faraway countries without a morsel.

Summer 2006

(20)

בְּחֲמֵשׁ עֶשְׁרֵה שָׁנָה לְחַיֵּי בַּת-שׁוּעַ מָצָא לָהּ אָבִיהָ חָתָן כִּלְבָבוֹ מָצָא לָהּ אָבִיהָ חָתָן כִּלְבָבוֹ יִנְשְׁאוּ, יִחְיּוּ יַחְדָּו, וְסוֹף הָאַהֲבָה לָבוֹא, הַרָאָה אַבְרָהָם פְּנֵי שֶׁרָה אִמֵּנוּ עֵד הִקְּרִיב לָבוֹא אֶל נַחַל מִצְרָיִם! כֵּן חָיוּ אֲבוֹתִינוּ, כֵּן יִחְיוּ בָּנֵינוּ, כִּי שַׁדְכָנֵנוּ הַיּוֹשְׁבִי בַּשָּׁמָיִם: אַף בַּת-שׁוּע לֹא תַמְרָה פִּי אָבִיהָ אם כִּי לִשְׁנוֹת מֵאוּן הָיא כָּבָר הִנִּיעָה.

In the fifteenth year of Bat-Shua's life,
Her father found her a bridegroom after his own heart.
They did not meet face to face — why and for what?
Let them get married, let them live together, and love will eventually come.

Did Abraham see the face of Sarah our matriarch Until he drew close to the river of Egypt? Thus did our forefathers live, so shall our children. For our Matchmaker is the One who dwells in heaven: Hence Bat-Shua was not about to disobey her father, Although she was already the legal age of majority, of refusal. (21)

בֶּל הוֹלְכֵי דֶרֶךְ אֶת עַבְדּוֹן יֵדְעוּ,
מַחָזִיק בִּית-הַפֵּשְׁקִים בִּכְפַר פִּרְעָתוֹן:
מֹחַזִיק בִּית-הַפֵּשְׁקִים בִּכְפַר פִּרְעָתוֹן:
הוּא הַלֵּל בְּנוֹ הַיָּחִיד - הוּא הָחָתֶן.
לוֹ עִינֵי עֵגֶל, לוֹ פֵּאוֹת כִּזְנָבוֹת,
לוֹ פָּנִים כִּפְנֵי גְרוֹגֶרֶת רַבִּי צָדוֹק,
הַבְחַרִיפוּתוֹ יָדוּשׁ הָרִים וְיָדִק:
וּבְחַרִיפוּתוֹ בַּר-מִצְנָה בְּאֵלֶה הַיָּמִים
וּרְבַשׁ בְּסוּגְיַת ״הִדְבִּיק שְׁנֵי רְחָמִים״...

All travelers are acquainted with the man Avdon,
Lease-holder of the saloon in the village of Piraton*:
Undoubtedly they've also seen there a lad scrawny as a wood shaving,

This is Hillel, Avdon's only son — he is the bridegroom.

He has the eyes of a calf and side curls like tails,

And a face as gaunt as one of Rabbi Tzaddok's chewed-up dates,

Nonetheless, he was a "prodigy," proficient in the three "Bavot,"**

And with his acuity he could smash mountains into fine pieces,

And upon becoming a bar mitzvah in recent days,

He had given a drasha on the talmudic subject concerning

"the cleaving of two uteruses"....

^{*} The Hebrew root ברם can denote a calamity brought about as a result of Divine punishment or retribution.

^{**} A short reference to the names of three talmudic tractates.

(30)

נְּם רַב חַפֶּר רָאָה בַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה אֶת הַיָּד הַגְּדוֹלָה הַמַּשְׁפֶּלֶת רָמִים, וּמִי זֶה הָאֲמִין כִּי יֵעֶשֶׁה כֶּלֶא נְם בְּדוֹר לֹא-אֲמוּן זֶה כִּשְׁנוֹת עוֹלָמִים! רָכֶב אֵשׁ וְסוּסֵי אֵשׁ עָפִים בְּקוֹל פְּחָדִים, מִימוֹת אֵלְיָהוּ לֹא נִשְׁמֵע כָּמֹהוּ עַל יָדָם בָּקעָרָה דָּרֶדְ הַקְּדִים; עַל יָדָם בָּרוּחַ נָטוּי קוֹ תֹּהוּ -הַקַּוֹ יוֹלִידְ הַקּוֹל, יָרִיץ מִכְתָּבִים, וֹבְרֶכֶב אֵשׁ יַעַבְרוּ עוֹבְרִים וְשָׁבִים.

Rav Hefer, too, witnessed during these days
The great hand that brings low the mighty,
And who could believe that a miracle would be wrought
Even in this faithless generation, as in days of yore?
A fiery chariot and fiery horses speeding along with terrifying sound,

The likes of which had not been heard since the days of Elijah, Were carried along with hurricane force from the East; Next to them in the air a magical wire was extended—
The wire transmitting a message, sending letters quickly, While in the fiery chariot travelers were passing to and fro.

(31)

אָרְחוֹת אֵיד אֵלֶה הִקּיפוּ הַפֶּלֶךְ אִם כִּי עַד אַיָּלוֹן טֶרָם יִנְּטוּּ וּכְבָּר חָדְלוּ הָרֶכֶשׁ, רָצֵי הַכֶּּלֶךְּ הַנּוֹסְעִים בַּפּוּסִים יוֹם-יוֹם יִמְעָטוּ, יוֹם-יוֹם יִדְּל חֵפֶּר, יֵרָזֶה צְרוֹר כַּסְפּוּ, הַאַרוּוֹת חֲרֵבוֹת, הַפּוּסִים נִמְכָּרוּ, תַם כָּסֶף הַנּוֹסְעִים וּשְׁכֵר הַמִּסְפּוּא הַם יִּתְנוּ לְעֵת זְקְנָה לוֹ לֶחֶם לָחֵץ נָם אוֹתוֹ עִם יְלָדָיו עַל-כָּרְחוֹ יָחַץ.

These woeful innovations encompassed the region,
Although they had not yet been extended to Ayalon;
Already the mail delivery system had ceased, the royal couriers,
Who traveled on horses grew fewer day by day,
Each day Hefer grew poorer, his money purse thin,
The stables in disrepair, the horses having been sold,
Gone was the money of the travelers
and the profit from the horse-feed,
Only four horses remained in the stable,
They were to provide for him in his old age a bare subsistence
But even this he would be compelled to divide with his children.

(32)

אָז יָחֵל הָלֵל לְשַׁחֵר לַשְּׁרֶף... אַדְּ שָׁוְא יִגְזוֹר עַל יָמִין, יַחְתּף עַל שְׁמֹאל, בַּכֵּל הַהַּצְּלָחָה תַּפֶּן לוֹ עֹרֶף, כִּי לֹא נֹאכַל הַיּוֹם אִם לֹא נָכִין מִהְּמוֹל, וּמֵה יַעֲשֶׂה תַּלְמִיד חָכָם שְׁאֵין בּוֹ דֵעָהיּ לִהְיוֹת גּוֹבֶה הַפֵּס -- לֹא יֵדַע לְשׁוֹן הַמְּדִינָה, לְשׁוֹחֵט -- רַדְּ לֵב הוּא, לִמְלַמֵּד - -חֲלוּשׁ רַאָה, לְסוֹחֵר -- אֵין לוֹ כֶּסֶף, לְחַדֶּן -- קוֹל נִגִינָה: עוֹד יֵשׁ פַּרְנָסַת שַׁמָשִׁים, שַׁדְכָנִים, אַדְּ עַל אַחַת מִהַנָּה שִׁבְעָה בַּטְלָנִים.

Then Hillel began looking around for food...
But in vain did he make overtures on the right
and snatch at things on the left,
In everything success turned its back on him.
Because we cannot eat today if we did not prepare yesterday.
And what is a Torah scholar without practical knowledge to do?
To become a collector for taxation,

he does not even know the language of the country. To be a ritual slaughterer — he is too weak-hearted, To be a teacher — he is weak-lunged for screaming, To be a merchant — he has no capital; a cantor — he has no ear, There still are the livelihoods of sextons and matchmakers, But, for each of these, seven idlers are queuing up.

(33)

וּבֵין כּה יוֹם יִרְדּיף יוֹם, יֶרַח יַשִּׁיג יֶרַח,
הַלְּחָיֵים וְהַקַּבָּה חֶלְקָם יִדְרשׁוּ!
הַכְּסֶף הַמְּזֻּמָּן נָמַס כַּקֶּרַח,
נִם מַתְּנוֹת-הַדְּרָשָׁה בָּאוּ בֵּית הַנּשֶׁה.
מָה-אַחֲרִיתֵנוּ, הִלֵּל! - תִּשְׁאֵל בַּת-שׁוּע - הְתִשְׁכֵּח כִּי הִנְּךְ בַּעַל אִשֶּׁה וּבָנִים!
הַתִּשְׁכַּח כִּי הִנְּךְ בַּעַל אִשָּׁה וּבָנִים!
שִׁם, יֹאמְרוּ הַבְּרִיוֹת, הַכֶּסֶף כָּאֲבָנִים.
שִׁנֹי יִקְרָה אֵלִיָּהוּ לִקְרָאתִי
יִּקְרָה אֵלִיָּהוּ לִקְרָאתִי

In the meantime one day follows the next, month follows month, The cheeks and stomach demand their due,
The ready cash has melted like ice,
Even the wedding gifts have been seized by the creditor.
What will befall us, Hillel — asks Bat-Shua —
Have you forgotten that you have a wife and children?
— To distant lands I will attempt to journey:
There, people say, money is like stones,
Perhaps Elijah will appear and come my way
And reveal to me the source of my livelihood.

(34)

הוֹי הַלֵּל, מַה-תִּפְעַל, בַּת-שׁוּע, מַה-תְּחִילִיןיּ מַעַל הַשַּלִּית הָעֲטָרָה הַסַרְתֶּם וּבָתִּי-הַכֶּסֶף מִכִּיס הַתְּפִלִּין, בְּכֶסֶף מְדָשִׁים זֶּה אַחֲרִית קִנְיָנִיוּ לָקַח הַלֵּל לִבְלִי יְנָצֵל אֶת בֵּיתוּ וֹבָת-שׁוּע מָכְרָה תַּכְשִׁיטִיהָ בְּצֵאתוֹ וֹתִּפְתַּח לָהּ חֲנוּת וּבִית מֵרְכּלֶת לִמְכּוֹר פֹּל וַעֲדְשִׁים, גָּרֶש וָסֻלֶת.

Oh, Hillel, what are you capable of doing, Bat-Shua, what can you hope for?

You removed the gilded embroidery from the prayer shawl, And the silver cases from the pouch of the phylacteries. And for a paltry amount you sold them to the jeweler: This holy money, the last of his possessions Hillel took so as not to take his family's last resources, And he went to another country, away from his wife and children. And Bat-Shua, having sold her jewelry upon his departure, Opened for herself a store and grocery For selling peas and lentils, cereals and flour.

(35)

בַּחֲנוּתָה זֹאת עַל מִשְׁמֵרְתָה עוּמֶדֶת יוֹם-יוֹם בַּת-שׁוּעַ מִבּקֶר עַד לָיל, תָּמֹד גַּם תִּשְׁקוֹל גַּם בֵּיתָה פּוֹקֶדֶת, הַם בָּנֶיהָ תְּגַדֵּל, אֵשֶׁת-הֶחָיל. שׁוּרוּ נָא הַיֶּלֶד בֶּן חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים בַּבּקֶר בַּבּקֶר הוֹלֵדְ הַחֶדֶר, רָחָץ לְמִשְׁעִי וּלְחם לוֹ לָבָשׁ שָׁנִים, גַּם פִּתּוֹ אִתּוֹ וּסְפָרָיו בַּפֵּדֶר -הַכָּרַת פָּנִיו תַּעַן בִּסְקִירָה אַחַת כִּי עֵין אֵם רַחֲמָנִיּה עָלָיו מִשְׁגַּחַת.

Inside this store of hers, Bat-Shua stays at her post
Day after day from dawn until dusk,
She would measure and weigh and also manage her household,
She would rear her children, too — this woman of valor!
Just look at this boy of five,
Every morning he goes to the heder,
He is washed thoroughly and to keep him warm
he is dressed in flannel
He also has his loaf of bread along and his books in order,
Just a cursory glance at his demeanor reveals
That the eye of a caring mother is watching over him.

(36)

וַאַחוֹתוֹ הַיַּלְדָּה בֵּיתַה נִשְּאַרַה פָּנֵיתָ מִשְׁנֵח קַלַסְתֵּר פָּנֵי אַחִיהַ, אָמַה תַּלְבִּישׁנַה וּתַסְרֵק שְעַרָה וּבְשָּׁחוֹק נָחַת שׁוֹמֶרֶת אֶת פִּיהַ. כִּי יַדַיהַ הַקּטַנות כְּפוּתִין עַל לְבַּה, עיניה בָּאִמַּה וּבְשַּׁלְמֵתַה הַחַדַשָּה, הַקּטַנַּה בָּקוֹל יוֹנִים קוֹרָאת בַּחַבַּה: "תורה צוה לנו משה - מורשה... אָשָׁמַע מוּסַר אָב, תּוֹרַת אֱם אַקְשִׁיבַה, וּבְעֵינֵי אֱל וְאַדָם דַרְכִּי אֵיטִיבָה״.

And his little sister remaining at home. Whose face is a duplicate image of her brother's, Her mother would dress her and comb her hair While with a gentle smile the young girl is politely quiet. For her little hands are folded on her chest, With her eyes intent upon her mother and upon her new dress The little girl with the voice of a dove recites lovingly: "The Torah did Moses command us, a heritage... [to the community of Jacob]" "I will listen to the instruction of my father; I will pay heed to the teaching of my mother,

And in the eyes of God and man, I shall conduct myself properly."

(37)

מוּסֵר אָב תִּשְׁמֵעִי -- הוֹי יִתוֹמֵה חֵיַה: אָבִיד תּעָה בָּאַרַצות מִבָּקֵשׁ אַת אֵלִיַהוּ. מִי יָדַע מִקוֹמוֹ! לֹא תִשׁוֹרֲנוּ עֵין אַיַּה. אֶתְכֶם שָׁכַח -- גָם קוֹל מִלֵּיו נַחְבַּאוּ. בַּשַּׁנַה הַראשונה עוד הַריץ לִפְעַמִים אָגרוֹת אַהֱבָה וּמְכָתַּבִים נִמְלַצִים, עַתָּה חַדְלוּ אֲמָרָיו זֶה רַבִּים יָמִים: לַשָּׁוֹא תִּצַפֶּה בַּת-שׁוּעַ דָּרָדְ בֵּית הַרָצִים: "שומר מה-מְלַילָה, שומר מה-מְלֵילי:" מַתֵּי יַבוֹא מִכְתַּב וּבְשֹׁרָה מֵהַלֵּל!

To the instruction of your father you shall listen — Oh, living orphan, your father is wandering abroad in search of Elijah.

Who knows where he's located?

Not even the eye of a hawk can spot him.

You he has forgotten —

even the sound of his communications has grown faint.

During the first year he still occasionally dispatched

Loving letters and flowery missives,

Currently, his dispatches have ceased for many days now:

In vain does Bat-Shua anticipate along the route of the couriers' station:

"Watchman, what of the night,

Watchman, what of the night?" [Isaiah 21:11]

When will a letter and some news arrive from Hillel?

(38)

בֵּין כּה יוֹם יִרְדּף יוֹם, יֶרַח יַשִּׁיג יֶרַח,
וּכְבָר פַּצְמֵיִם הָחֶלִיפָה הָאַדָּמָה
בִּגְיָדִי קַיִּץ וּסְתָיו, דָּשֶׁא נָקָרַח,
נְצְנָיָה הַּסּצְרָה עוֹד לֹא נָחָמָה.
וּכְבָר קֹרָא לָהּ שֵׁם חָדָשׁ בַּשָּׁעַר,
יִּכְבָר קֹרָא לָהּ שֵׁם חָדָשׁ בַּשָּׁעַר,
"הָצְגוּנָה" יִקְרְאוּ לָהּ זָּקֵן נָנָעַר,
יְהָעֲגוּנָה" יִקְרְאוּ לָהּ זָקֵן נָנַעַר,
וְתַחַת הֱיוֹתָהּ סַמֶּל הַקּנְאָה בַּצְלוּמֶיהָ
הַיִּתָח לִמְנוֹד רֹאשׁ עַתָּה בֵּין רֵעוֹתֵיהָ.

In the meanwhile, day rushes upon day, month follows month, And already twice has the earth changed From summer to fall garb, from verdure to frosty ice, And the unhappy storm-tossed soul remains unconsoled, Her eyes are still spent with longing, her heart afflicted. And already she is being referred to by a new name, For she is no longer called by her name "Bat-Shua," "The agunah" she is called by old and young alike.

And in place of her being a symbol of envy in her youth She has now become an object of shocked lament among her friends. (39)

וּמְרַדְּפֵי אֲמָרִים יָפִיחוּ קֶרֶת וּשְׁמוּעָה עַל שְׁמוּעָה יוֹלִידְּ הָעוֹף זֶה יֹאמֵר: נָשָׂא הָלֵל אִשָּׁה אַחֶרֶת, זֶה: טָבַע בְּמֵיִם שָׁאֵין לָהֶם סוֹף: זֶה: עָשָׂה עשֶׁר וַיֵּלֶדְ אִי כִתִּים, וֹבְישְׂרָאֵל אֵין אָז כִּתְבֵי-הָעִתִּים לִדְרש אַחֲרֵי הַבְּעָלִים, לְהַכְחִישׁ שׁמוּעוֹת שֶׁקֶר לֹא וִשְׁאַר לַנָּשִׁים עֲזוּבוֹת אַמְלָלוֹת רַק מַחֲלַת-לֵב וִצַּחַת וְעִינִים כָּלוֹת.

And gossip mongers diffused rumor throughout the city
And rumor upon rumor was spread as if by a bird in flight;
This one would say: "Hillel married another woman."
And this one: "He drowned in an abyss of water."
And this one: "He became rich and moved to the isle of Crete."
And this one: "He renounced his religion and became a Christian."
And among Jews, there were not yet periodicals
To advertise a search for runaway husbands, to refute false rumors.
There remained for the wretched abandoned women
Only eternal heartache and eyes wasted from longing.

(40)

נֶם אָח יֵשׁ לַצָּרָה - רֵעַ לַשְּׁעִיר: חַפֶּר מֵת פִּתְאֹם, עֵת אָזְנִיו שָׁמָעוּ פִּי תַּעֲבֹר נָּם דֶּרֶךְ אַיֶּלוֹן הָעִיר מָסְלַּת-הַבַּרְזֶל הַשְּׁבָץ אֲחָזָהוּ נַּלְמוּדָה עוֹמֶדָת, אֵין בָּא לִישׁוּעָתָה! עוֹד תִּתְחַזֵּק אֶל עִין רֹאִים, תַּעְמִיד פָּנֶיהָ, אַף כִּי בַּלֵּילוֹת תַּמְסֶה עַרְשָּׁהּ בְּדִמְעָתָה! וּבְּכֵן-- מַהַרִי, הַיְּשׁוּעָה, מֵאֲשֶׁר תָּבֹאִי,

Done trouble begets another, calamity comes in pairs:
Hefer suddenly died; at the time his ears heard tell
That the route of the railroad was to pass through
The city of Ayalon, as well, he suffered a stroke.
Now Bat-Shua stood all alone on her life's path,
Lonely and abandoned, with no one coming to save her;
She maintained her composure, pretending, before the public eye,
But, at night, she made moist her pillow with tears;
Hence hurry up, salvation, from wheresoever you may come
Lest her affliction grind her down and
render her a terrible sight to see.

(41)

אַדְּ דִּמְעַת עֲשׁוּקִים לֹא מֵיִם מֻנְּרִים,
בָּאוֹצָר תִּנָתוֹ כְּמֵרְנָלִית טוֹבָה:
אָנְקַת אָבְיוֹנִים לֹא שְׁרִיקוֹת עֲדָרִים יֵשׁ אֹזֶן שׁוֹמֵעַת וִישׁוּעָה קְרוֹבָה.
אָם רֹעַ לֵב אָדָם, סְבְלוֹת מְתֵי שָׁוְא,
יְמֵלְאוּ פְנֵי תַבֵל מֻטָּה וּצְעָקָה.עִין אֵל לִבְרוּאָיו וְרַחֲמָיו עַל כָּל מַעְשָׂיו,
עִין אֵל לִבְרוּאָיו וְרַחֲמָיו עַל כָּל מַעְשָׂיו,
הוּא יַצְשָׂה לָעֲשׁוּקִים מִשְׁכָּט וּצְדָקָה:
הַתְּאוֹשְׁשִׁי, בַּת-שׁוּע, קַוִּי נֶכֶשׁ זַכָּה,
הַתְּאוֹשְׁשִׁי, בַּת-שׁוּע, קוֹנִין הָרְפוּאָה לַמֵּכָּה.

Aye, the tear of the oppressed is not merely spilled water,
In a treasure-house is it placed like a precious jewel:
The painful cries of poor people are not the cry of sheep,
There is a listening ear and salvation close by.
If the evil of human hearts, the foolishness of evil lying people,
Fill the earth with corruption and outcry,
The eye of God is upon His creatures
and His mercies over all the works of His hands.
He will effect justice and righteousness for the oppressed:
Regain your strength, Bat-Shua, dare to hope, oh pure soul.
Even for you has a merciful God anticipated a cure
for your affliction.

(n)

(42)

הַסְּתָּו עָבַר וִימֵי הָאָבִיב בָּאוּ, שַּלְמָתָהּ בַּחֹרֶף הָאַדְמָה פָּשָׁטָהּ אִכָּר וִיוֹגֵב לִמְלַאכְתָּם יָצָאוּ, כָּל נַחֲלֵי הַבַּתּוֹת יָהִימוּ עָתָּה. נָם אַיָּלוֹן הַקִּיצָה לְחַיִּים חֲדָשִׁים: הַמְּלָאכָה הַחֵלָּה. מִכָּל צֵד כִּנְשָׁרִים הוֹפְרִים נָם חוֹפְרִים וּבוֹנֵי הַגְּשָׁרִים יֹבַאוּ אֵלֶיהָ סוֹלְלִים, חֲרָשִׁים, וּפַאבִּי הַמְּפַקַּה עַל בִּנְיַן הַמְּסִלָּה לִשְׂכוֹר פוֹעֲלִים לַמְּלָאכָה בָּא בַתְּחִלָּה.

Fall has passed and the days of spring arrived,
The earth has shed its winter garment:
Farmer and husbandman have gone out to their work,
All the rivers of the wasteland are now rushing.
Ayalon, too, has awakened to new life:
The work project is under way. From all sides there come
Flocking toward Ayalon, like eagles, builders, craftsmen,
Clerks, as well as excavators and bridge builders
And Fabi, the supervisor over the building of the railroad track,
Came early on to hire workers for the project.

(43)

וּפַאבִּי אִישׁ יְהוּדִי (פַיְבִּישׁ שְׁמוֹ לְפָנִים) מַשְּכִּיל בְּכָל דְּרָכִיו, לִבּוֹ לֵב מַתָּנָה, אַלְמָן הוֹלֵךְ בְּנָפוֹ (אִשְׁתּוֹ מֵתָה לֹא-בָנִים) וְימֵי חַיָּיו שְׁלֹשִׁים וּשְׁתִּים שָׁנָה. בָּאֲמוּנַת רוּחַ וּבְלְשׁוֹן לִמוּדִים הַפִּיק מֵאֵת כָּל יוֹדְעָיו רָצוֹן וִידִידוּת: הַפְּיק מֵאֵת כָּל יוֹדְעָיו רָצוֹן וִידִידוּת: עַל כֵּן יִתֵּן לַיְּהוּדִים עֲבוֹדָה וּפְּקִדוּת) רָאָה רֹחַב דַּעְתּוֹ, נַפְשׁוֹ נֶפֶשׁ בְּרָכָה, וַיִּתְנַהוּ רֹאשׁ עַל עוֹשֵי הַמְּלָאכָה.

And Fabi was a Jewish man (Faybish being his name beforehand), Enlightened in all his ways with a magnanimous heart, A widower living alone (his wife had died without children), And thirty-two years of age.

With his integrity and cultivated speech
He elicited good will and friendship from all who knew him:
And his employer (a Christian man, not of Jewish nationality
Who, therefore, would give work and administrative responsibility to Jews)

Perceived the breadth of his knowledge and of his soul, which was bounteous,

And so made him chief over all of the workers.

(44)

בֵּית הַחוֹמָה נֹכֵח חֲנוּת בַּת-שׁוּעַ בָּנוּי לְתַלְפִּיּוֹת מִכֶּל בָּתֵּי הָעִיר, שָׁם שָׁם רַבִּי פַאבִּי לוֹ מִשְׁכַּן קָבוּעַ, שָׁם לִשְׁכַּת הַסּוֹפְרִים, עָלֶיהָ יָעִיר. שָׁלְדוֹרְשָׁיו יִמָּצְא עַד עֶשֶׁר שְׁעוֹת, מַאָז עַד הַצְּחֲרָיִם בִּמְעוֹנוֹ אֵינֶנוּ, כִּי יָשׁוּט בָּעִיר בְּגְנְזַכִּים וּבְעֶרְכָּאוֹת, אַחַר יֵצֵא הַשְּׁדֶה לִרְאוֹת בַּמְלֹאכָה, וּבָעֶרֶב יָנוּחַ - יוֹם יוֹם יַעֲשֶּׂה כָּכָה.

A dwelling in the city wall facing Bat-Shua's store,
Built higher than all the houses of the city
Is where Fabi established his permanent residence,
In the same place as the clerk's office, which Fabi supervised.
The dawn would find him at his writing table
And for those wishing to see him, he was available until ten o'clock,
From then until noon he was not at home,
Because he would walk around the city,
in the archives and legal offices
Afterward he would go out to the field to oversee the work,
And at night he would rest—
every day he would follow the same routine.

(45)

וּבְטָחֹה לֹא יְבַלֶּה עִתּוֹ בַּהֶבֶל, כִּי יֶהְגֶּה בַּסְּפָרִים, יִכְתּוֹב וִיחַבֵּר, יִקְרָא כִּתְבִי-הָעֵת, יִפְרֹט עַל גֵבֶל, אוֹ בְּמוֹשֵׁב חַכְמֵי לֵב נְגִידִים יְדַבֵּר: אוֹ בִּי יַחֲלִיץ בַּת-עֵינוֹ בִּשְׁפוֹפֶרֶת, יַשְמֹד עַל יַד הַחַלּוֹן הַפְּתוּח, יִשְמֹד עַל יַד הַחַלּוֹן הַפְּתוּח, יִשְמִד עַל הָעוֹבְרִים בִּרְחוֹב הַקָּרֶת, וּבְקִמְטֵי מֵצַח אִישׁ וּבְנִטְפֵי זֵעַת אַפָּיו יִקְרָא כַּעַס עִנְיָנוֹ, יִרְאֶה רִיב שַּׂרְעַפָּיו.

And while resting he would not spend his time on nonsense, But rather he would peruse books, write letters and essays, He'd read journals and play a musical instrument Or he would speak impressively among fellow intellectuals, Or go out to the garden to stroll, muse, and think; Or he would peer through a telescope, standing next to the open window, Gazing at the passers-by along the street of the city, And in the wrinkles of a man's forehead and the droplets of sweat on his brow, He would read that individual's problems and inner stresses.

(46)

וַיַּרְא אֵשֶׁת יְפַת-מֵּרְאֶה רַכָּה בַּשָּׁנִים נֹכַח פָּתַח בִּיתוֹ בַּחֲנוּת יוֹשֶׁבֶת: וַיַּרְא כִּי בְבוֹא אִישׁ לִקְנוֹת תַּצְהִיל לוֹ פָנִים וֹּרְאֶהָ יוֹשֶׁבֶת שְׁמֹאלָהּ תַּחַת וֹיִּרְאֶהָ יוֹשֶׁבֶת שְׁמֹאלָהּ תַּחַת וֹּרְרֶחֲמִים גְּדוֹלִים אֲלֵיהֶם מֵשְׁגַּחַת וֹּדְמָעוֹת נִגָּרוֹת מֵרִיסִי עֵינֶיהָ: וַיִּשְׁאַל: ״מִי זֹאת הָאִשָּׁה הַהְגוּנָה״. וַיִּשְׁאַל: ״מִי זֹאת הָאִשָּׁה הַהְגוּנָה״.

And he saw a beautiful young woman
Sitting in a store opposite the entranceway of his house:
He saw that when a person came to buy
she would put on a happy face
But when he left, her face would turn gloomy, betray sadness.
And he would see her sitting with her left hand beneath
Her head, while with her right hand
she attended to her small children,
And with great compassion looking after them
While tears poured from her eyelashes;
And Fabi asked: "Who is this decent woman?"
They answered him: "She is Bat-Shua the agunah!"

(47)

רַבִּים לַפָּרוֹם מִכְשׁלִים וּפְגָעִים הַנְּכוֹנִים לִבְחִיר-הַנְּצוּרִים בָּאָרֶץ: מִי יִשְּׁא רֹאשׁ מִשְׁלַחַת מֵלְאֲכֵי רָעִים, יִפְרְצוּהוּ כָּל יָמָיו פֶּרֶץ עֵל פָּרֶץ: כָּל נָגַע, כָּל מַחֲלָה, קַלוֹן וּקְצָבָּה מִסְכֵּנוּת וָחֹסֶר, נִקְיוֹן שִׁנִּים, מִקְנָאָה וּשְׁנִינָה, פַּלָּצוּת, זַלְעָפָה, לֵב רַגִּז, מַר נֶכָּשׁ, כִּלְיוֹן עֵינִים, וֹלְאִשָּׁה עִבְרִיָּה עוֹד נָגַע אַחַד: וֹלְאִשָּׁה עִבְרִיָּה עוֹד נָגַע אַחַד: "הָעָגוּן" - הַכּּל יָכִיל וְכוֹלְלָכָם יָחַד.

Heaven has many obstacles and afflictions
Awaiting Man, the pinnacle of creation;
Who can list the bevy of evil angels
That beleaguer him all his days with affliction upon affliction?
Every plague, disease, disgrace, and source of anguish,
Penury and lack, virtual starvation,
Anxiety of heart, bitterness of soul, devastating longing,
And still for the Hebrew woman there is one additional plague:
"Iggun," "to be made an agunah —
including and exceeding all the above.

(48)

אֶל שַׁמֵע שֵׁם זֶה אָחֲזָה פַאבִּי חַלְּחָלֶה וַיּפֶּמְרוּ רַחֲמָיו לְחַמְלָה אֵלִיהָ, פִּי שָׁעַר בְּנַבְּשׁוֹ נֶפֶשׁ הָאַמְלֶלָה וַיֹּאמֶר לִרְאוֹתָהּ לְדַעַת חַיָּיהָ. וּבְדַבְּרוֹ עִמָּהּ שָׁפֵע אוֹתָהּ בִּדְבָרִים וַיִּשְׂיאָהּ בִּצְדְיָה מֵעְנְיָן לְעִנְיָן, וְהִיא עָנַתְהוּ נְכֹחוֹת בְּפִי יְשָׁרִים, וֹמִמֶּתֶלְ אֲמָרֶיהָ מֵעְצַת נָפֶשׁ וֹמְמֶתֶלְ אֲמָרֶיהָ מֵעְצַת נָפֶשׁ הַבִּין כִּי אָבֶרְה מֵן לְפָנָיו מְגוֹלֶלָה בָּרֶפֶשׁ.

Upon hearing this appellation Fabi was seized by fright
And his mercies were aroused to have pity on her,
Because he imagined the soul of this miserable woman
And he was determined to see her to find out her life story.
Consequently he went to her store for purchasing and buying,
And in speaking with her, he would subtly interrogate her
And shrewdly lead her from subject to subject,
And she would answer him directly and candidly,
And from the sweetness and soundness of her responses,
He understood that here was a precious gem
tossed about in the refuse.

(49)

בַּלַיְלָה הַהוּא שְׁנַת פַאבִּי נָדָּדָה נִּיְתְהַפֵּךְ מִצַּד אֶל צֵד עַל מִשְׁכָּבוּ, כִּי תְמוּנַת הָעֲגוּנָה נֶגְדוֹ עָמָדָה נִתְּגְרֵשׁ שֵׁנָה מֵעִינָיו, מְנוּחָה מִלְּבָבוּ נִם שְׁנַת בַּת-שׁוּעַ נִגְּזְלָה הַפָּעַם: בַּפַּעַם הָרְאשׁוֹנָה בִּימֵי מְרוּדֶיהָ דְּבֵּר אִתָּה טוֹבוֹת אִישׁ תָּם בַּעַל-טַעַם וּבְלֵב דּוֹאֵג לָהּ שָׁאַל עַל אוֹדוֹתֶיהָ. הַנְּכְשׁוֹת הַשְּחוֹרוֹת עוֹד לֹא יָדְעוּ מְאוּמָה מַה-יִגְזֹל בַּלֵּילוֹת מֵעִינָם הְנוּמָה.

That night Fabi was unable to sleep
And he tossed and turned on his bed,
Because the image of the agunah stood starkly in his mind
And banished sleep from his eyes and composure from his heart.
Bat-Shua's sleep was also disturbed on this occasion:
For the first time in these days of her sorrowful existence
A man of integrity and good sense had spoken kindly to her,
And with a genuine concern had inquired about her circumstances.
These ingenuous souls did not yet realize anything
As to what was depriving them of their ability to sleep.

(50)

וּיּוֹסֶף פַּאבִּי לָבוֹא לְעִתִּים מְזָּמָנוֹת בַּחֲנוּת בַּת-שוּע בִּרְאוֹת כִּי אִישׁ אָיִן: יָבוֹא לִקְנוֹת מֶרְקָחִים וּמִגְדָנוֹת וַיִּקְנֶה לִבָּה בְּחִכּוֹ חַטוֹב מִיָּיִן. וַהְּסֵבֵּר לוֹ בַּת-שוּע בְּהִתְגַלּוֹת לִבָּה אֶת רע מַעְמֶדָה זָה כִשְׁנָתִם, כִּי בַעֲלָה אֲשֶׁר נְשָׂאָה בְּעוֹדָה בְּאבָּה עַזֶּבָה בְּחֹסֶר כֹּל וִילָדֶיהָ הַשְּׁנָים. וַתּוֹסֶף לֵאמר כִּי עַל דַּעַת הַשְּׁנָים. נִמְצָא אִישָׁה כָּעֵת בְּעִיר לִיוָוֹרְפָּאל.

Fabi continued to come on frequent occasions

To Bat-Shua's store whenever he saw that there was no one around. He would come to buy spices and delicacies,
But he bought her heart with his palate (words) sweeter than wine. Bat-Shua explained to him, opening her heart,
The severity of her situation these past two years,
That her husband who married her while she was still very young,
Had deserted her and left her without support
and with her two children.
She said furthermore that according to hearsay
Her husband was now located in the city of Liverpool.

(51)

וּלְפַאבִּי מוֹדָע בְּלִינֶוּרְפָּאל וּשְׁמוֹ, ״שְׁשוֹן״ הַמְּשׁלֵּח חִשְׁקֵּי בַּרְזֶל לִמְסְלָתוֹ, וֹיְבַקְשׁׁהוּ לְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת הַלֵּל מִפְּרְעָתוֹן וּכְתָם יָרַח קּבֵּל פַאבִּי אֶת הְּשׁוּבָתוֹ, כִּי נִמְצָא הַלֵּל בֶּן עַבְדוֹן מִפְּרְעָתוֹן בְּלִינָוּרְפָּאל רוֹכֵל הַמַּחֲזִיר בְּעֲיָרוֹת, וְהַנּוֹ יוֹרַד בָּאֲנִיָּה ״נָחָשׁ עֲקַלָּתוֹן״ הַהוֹלֶכֶת בְּעוֹד חֹדָשׁ לְאִיֵּי עֲצָרוֹת, וּלְאִשְׁתֹּוֹ סֵפֶּר-כְּרִיתוּת לִשְׁלוֹחַ יֵאוֹת אִם תִּשְׁקֹל עַל יָדוֹ כֶּסֶף חֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת.

Now Fabi had an acquaintance in Liverpool named "Sasson" Who shipped railroad ties for his tracks, And Fabi asked him to look for Hillel from Piraton, And at the end of a month Fabi received his answer, That Hillel son of Avdon from Piraton was A peddler in Liverpool making the rounds of the villages, And he was set to board ship on "The Crooked Serpent," Which was to depart in a month's time for the Azores, And to his wife he would agree to send a bill of divorce, a get, If she were to pay him 500 silver pieces in cash.

(53)

אֶת כֶּל זֶה לְבַת-שׁוּעַ פַאבִּי לֹא מִלֵּל וְעוֹד בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא נָתַן צָו אֶל מַכָּרוֹ לִשְׁקוֹל אֶת הַכֶּסֶף הַמְתַּכֶּן עַל יַד הַלֵּל וּלְתָפְשׁוֹ בַכֶּף לִבְלִי-יַחֵל דְּבָרוֹ. וְיִדִיעָה נִצַּחַת עַל פִּי ״הַטֵּלִיגְרַף״ וְּבוֹ בַיּוֹם כָּתַב הָלֵל בְּבֵית הָרַב וֹמַסְרָהוּ בִּידִי הַשְּׁלִיחַ לְהוֹלָכָה וַיִּמְסְרֵהוּ בִּידִי הַשְּׁלִיחַ לְהוֹלָכָה.

All of this Fabi did not relate to Bat-Shua

And on that very day he authorized his associate

To pay the assigned sum to Hillel

And to hold him firmly to his commitment lest he back out.

And at the end of a monthFabi received from Liverpool

Conclusive notification by "telegraph"

That his associate had done what he requested,

And that same day Hillel had written in the rabbi's house

A get for his wife in accordance with Jewish legal requirements

And he had transmitted it to a courier for delivery.

לּלַחִילִּי כָּרָאוּי לָךְ אָשְׁרַךְ תִּמְצָאִי״.

כָּל יָמִידְ רַיִּשׁ יִּבְרִים תִּשְׂבָּעִי

הַּתְּחַוֹּלֵ לָהִּי ״בָּת-שִּוּעַ יִּבְעָבְּהְ יִשְׁרָּתְּ הָעֶּלְּהָהּ,

הִּלְחַלִּ יוֹנִים יוֹצֵא מֵעִמְמֵי הַנְּכֶּלְיהִ בְּלְדְּ לִּהִּי יִּשְׁעַרְ הִּלֶּךְ אָשְׁרָהּ וְשְׁמְחָתָהּ הַּלְּבָּעִי הָּנְעָרָהּ וְשְׁמְחָתָהּ הַּלְּבָּעִי הָּנְעָרָהּ וְשִׁמְחָתָהּ הַּלְּבָּעִי הָּנְעָרָהּ וְשְׁמְחָתָהּ הַּלְּבָּעִי הַיְּעָרָהְ בִּישְׁרָהְ בָּלְרְּ הִינִים יוֹצֵא מֵעִמְמֵי מָי זֶה יְשְׁרָהְ הָּלֶּבְּיּ הִּיּבְּעִּי הָּלְּבָּיִי הִּיִּעְ הַּרִּע בָּיִּעִי בִּישׁ וּמְרָרִים הִּשְׂבָּעִי הַנְּעִי בְּישׁיִּ הִיּבְּעִי בִּישׁ וּמְרָרִים הִּשְׁבָּעִי הָּעְבְּיִּהְ בָּיִבְּיִי הָּעְּבְּיִי הָּעְּבְּיִי הָּיִבְּיִי הָּיִּעְ הַבְּיִים יוֹצֵא מִעִּמְמֵי הָבְּיבְּייִ הָּיִ בְּרִבּי יִיִּבְּי הְיִבְּיִי הְיִים יוֹצֵא מִעְמְמֵי הָי זָחִי בְּיִבְּייִ הְיִים יוֹצֵּא מִעְמְמֵי הָּי בָּרוּב יוֹם בְּעִיבְּהְ הָּיְבְּיּבְייִ הְיִים יוֹצֵא מִינְים בְּיִבְּיים בְּיִבְּיים בְּיִבְּיִים יוֹצֵּא מִינְים הְּיִבְּייִ הְיִבְּיִים יוֹבְּיּי הְיִים בְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיִבְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיִּים בְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיִּים בְּיִּים בְּּבְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיִּבְּיִים בְּיִבְּיִּים בְּיִים בְּיִּים בְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיִיבְייִים בְּיִים בְּייִים בְּיִים בְּיִיבְייִים בְּיים בְּיִים בְּיבְּיים בְּיִיבְּיי בְּיִיבְּיים בְּיוּים בְּיִיבְיי בְּיבְייִים בְּייִים בְּיבְּיי בְּיוּבְּיי בְּיבְּייִים בְּיים בְּיִים בְּיבְּיים בְּיבְּיים בְּייִים בְּיִיבְיים בְּיִיבְּיים בְּיִיבְּיים בְּיִיבְייִים בְּיִים בְּיִיבְּיים בְּיִיבְּיי בְּיִיבְּיים בְּיִיבְּיים בְּיִים בְּיִים בְּיבְּיִים בְּיבְּיבְיים בְּיבְּיים בְּיִיבְּיים בְּיִיבְּיים בְּיִים בְּיִיבְּיים בְּ

Now Fabi came to Bat-Shua happily,
And gave her the good news that her day of redemption was near,
And who can relate the heart's delight of the agunah!
All the more, who can imagine the intensity of her happiness and joy
When Fabi suddenly went down on bended knee before her
And with a dovelike voice coming from the depths of his soul
He beseeched her: "Bat-Shua, most precious one,
Be my wife when you go free from wedlock:
All of your days you've had your fill of harsh bitterness,
But in my bosom you shall find your happiness as you deserve."

(54)

הַרֹמוּ מָזֶה, נָשִׁים מַטִּילוֹת אֶרֶס,

בְּנוֹת ״צְאֶינָה וּרְאֶינָה״, בְּנוֹת ״קְרְבֵּן מִנְחָה״,

מְהַדּוּרֵי מִלֵּי וּמְלַחֲכֵי פִינְכָא!

פֶּן הְּמֵלְּאוּ חָצוֹת אֵיָלוֹן רָכִיל וְדָבָּה,

עָת אַחֲרֵי הַדְּלֶת וְהַאֲּלֵוֹן רָכִיל וְדָבָּה,

עָת אַחֲרֵי הַדְּלֶת וְהַאִּלוֹן רָכִיל וְדָבָּה,

עָת אַחֲרֵי הַדְּלֶת וְהַאִּינָה תִּשְׁמָעוּ

״הַמְּנִצְחַ בַּקְּרָב יִשְּׂא שִׁבְיֵהוּ

״הַמְנִצְחַ בָּקְרָב יִשָּׂא שִׁבְיֵהוּ

״הַמְנִבְּה:

מְטִילוֹת אֶּרֶס,

Devout readers of the "Tsena v'Re'ena" and "Korban Minhah,"
Get away from here those who scandalize heaven, who spy in secret, Incessant talkers and obsequious hypocrites.
You do not know the language of the heart, the language of love, Lest you fill the streets of Ayalon with gossip and slander, In the event you might eavesdrop in back of closed doors And hear Bat-Shua answering Fabi lovingly:
"Let the victor in battle carry away his captive —
I am your maidservant, Fabi!" — as she kisses him.

(55)

עוד שָׁבָעִים אַרְבָּעָה, כִּי כֵן יֵלֶדְ הַהוֹלֵדְ מִלִּינְוֹרְפָּאל עֵד אַיָּלוֹן, שְׁנִים בָּאֲנִיָּה וּשְׁנֵיִם בְּדֶרֶדְ הַמֶּלֶדְ, אִם לֹא יִמְצָא עַל דַּרְכּוֹ שְּׁטָן וְכִשָּׁלוֹן: אָת הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶה בְּכִלְיוֹן עֵינֵיִם סִפְּרוּ הַנָּאֲהָבִים כִּימֵי הָעֹמֶר, בִּין כֹּה תַּאֲרוּ לָמוֹ עֲתִידוֹת הַחַיִּים, וּבַת-שׁוּעַ שָׁבָה וַתִּפְרַח כַּתּמֶר, וּכְחַכֵּי עַם עוֹלָם לְבִיאַת מָשִׁיחַ בּן חִכּוּ שְׁנִיהֶם לְיוֹם בּוֹא הַשָּׁלִיחַ.

Another four weeks passed, for that is how long it takes
For one to travel from Liverpool to Ayalon,
Two weeks by boat and two by the main highway,
If he encounters no obstacle or setback along the way:
These days with impatient longing
The lovers counted like the days of the *omer*.
In the meantime they imagined to themselves their future life together,

Bat-Shua would once again blossom like a date palm And as the Eternal People [the Jews] await the Messiah's arrival, So did the two of them await the day of the courier's coming. (56)

וּפַאבִּי הָחֲלִיט בְּנָמְרוֹ אֶת הַמְּלָאכָה לְהָחֵל מֵאלָיו לִבְנוֹת בַּמְּסִלּוֹת וּלְהַעְתִּיק אָהֲלוֹ אֶל עִיר הַמַּמְלֶכָה וּלְכוֹנֵן שָׁם בִּיתוֹ בְּמַעִרְכֵי תְּהַלּוֹת. כָּל זֶה הוֹדָה לָהּ וּבְחֻבּוֹ לֹא טָמָן, אַף הִיא הָיְתָה מִתְכַּנָּנֶת לִגְמוֹר אֶת דַּעְתּוֹ לְתַת יְלָדֶיהָ עַל יַד פַּדְגוֹג אֱמָן וּלְהַכּוֹן לַצְקָרֶת הַבַּיִת בְּשַׁעְתּוֹ, וּלְמֵלֹאת הָסְרוֹן גִּדּוּלָהּ בִּית חַפֵּר לִלְמוֹד נַגֵּן וּכְתוֹב, לָשׁוֹן וָסַבֶּר

And Fabi decided that after completing his assignment,
He would begin to build railroads as an enterpreneur,
Transfer his residence to the country's capital,
And establish his home there in a grand style.
All this he confessed to her and did not keep it to himself.
For her part, she was intending to abide by his wishes
And place her children in the care of a trained governess
And to prepare herself to become a homemaker
at the appropriate time,
But for now, to complement the deficits in her upbringing in her
father's house
And to study music, writing, language arts and literature.

(57)

בֵּין כַּה נִמְצָא כָתוּב בְּכִתְבֵי-הָעַתִּים כִּי אֲנִיַּת הַסּוֹחֲרִים "נָחָשׁ עֲקַלֶּתוֹן" נִשְׁבְּרָה אֶל הַסֶּלֵע עֵל חוֹף אִי כִתִּים וְכָל קְהָלָה אָבֵד בַּיָּם בְּיּוֹם הָאָסוֹן. שְׁמְעָה בַת-שׁוּע וַתֵּרֶד בַּדְּמָעוֹת עַל אִישָׁה הָאָמְלָל כִּי קַמֵּט פָּתַע, וּבְלֵב נָמֵס הוֹדְתָה לְאֵל הַמּוֹשְׁעוֹת, עַל הַחִישׁוֹ בְעִתָּה לָה פְּדוּת וְיֵשַׁע, כִּי עַתָּה הָיְתָה צְרוּרָה עַד בּוֹא חֲלִיפָתָה כִּי עַתָּה הָיְתָה צְרוּרָה עַד בּוֹא חֲלִיפָתָה.

In the meantime a notice appeared in the newspapers
That the merchant ship "The Crooked Serpent"
Had smashed into the rocks on the shores of Cyprus
And all of its passengers had been lost at sea
on the day of the disaster.
When Bat-Shua heard she broke down in tears
For her poor husband, who had so suddenly met his end,
And with a melting heart she offered thanks to the God of salvations,
For His having sped salvation and redemption to her just in time,
Since had He not dispatched Fabi to come her way,
She would have been shackled until the day of her death.

(58)

וּבְיוֹם עֶרֶב שַׁבָּת פַּרְשַׁת כִּי-תָבוֹא
(הָהּ, יוֹם מוּכָן לְפַרְעָנוּת:) אַחַר הַצְּחֲרַיִם
בָּא הַשְּׁלִיחַ וַיָּבֵא מִכְתָּבוֹ אַדְּ הָרַב דְּמָתָא כְּבָר יָצָא הַפִּיִם:
עֻל כֵּן קְבַע יוֹם הָרְאשׁוֹן בַּשְּׁבוּעַ
לִמְסִירַת הַגָּט. בֵּין כֹּה הָמָה הַקָּרָת
לַמְסִירַת הַבָּע. בִּין כֹּה הָמָה הַקּרָת
לַשְׁמוּעָה הַבָּאָה כִּי הָעֲגוּנָה בַת-שׁוּעַ
הְמְשׁוּשׁ לֵב בַּת-שׁוּע וּכְּאבִּי עָתָּה הִמְשׁוּשׁ לֵב בַּת-שׁוּע וּכַּאבִּי עָתָּה -

And on the eve of the Shabbat of *Ki-Tavo*(Alas, a day preordained for calamity): in the afternoon
The messenger arrived and brought his missive —
But the rabbi of the town was already indisposed:
He therefore appointed the following Sunday
For delivery of the divorce document. The town was humming
Over the rumor circulating that Bat-Shua the *agunah*Had received her divorce and was permitted to any man.
Now, my dear reader, if you possess any sensitivity,
Just imagine the jubilation of Bat-Shua and Fabi.

(59)

אַדְּ מַה תִּקְנַת אֲנוֹשׁ, מָה הַתּוֹחֶלֶת,
אַם סָבִיב יְבַעְתָהוּ נַחֲלֵי בְלִיּעֵל:
הַתְּדַע הָרְפָּה בַּדָּשָׁא זוֹהֶלֶת
אַי מִיּה עָלֶיהָ הַמֵּפִיץ יָעַלי:
אַם עִין אַל לִבְרוּאִיו וְרַחֲמָיו עַל כָּל מַעֲשָׂיו
יִּבְּחָכְמָה יָסַד אֶרֶץ וּבִאְדָקָה,
יִּשְׁחִיתוּ רַחֲמָיו וִימֵלְאוּהָ צְעָקָה.
יִשְׁחִיתוּ רַחֲמָיו וִימֵלְאוּהָ צְעָקָה.
אוֹי אוֹי לָדְ, בַּת-שׁוּע, גַּם לָדְ, נֶבֶשׁ זַכָּה,
אוֹי אוֹי לָדְ, בַּת-שׁוּע, גַּם לָרְפוּאָה הַמֵּכָּה.

But what hope has a man, what good is his wishing,
If all around him currents of wickedness are menacing:
Does a worm crawling in the grass know
From whence the crushing boot will rise to stomp upon her?
If God's eye extends over all of his creations
and His mercy over all His works
And if in accordance with wisdom and justice
He established the earth,
Alas, the evil heart of man and the folly of perfidious individuals
Will nullify His mercies and fill the earth with atrocity.
Woe, woe for you, Bat-Shua, in your case, too, pure soul,
Quack doctors have fabricated a new affliction
even before your prior ill's remedy.

וגילויים שברוח. לא רק הקבצנים הימקצועייםי, שעליהם הצביעה כותרת־המשנה היידית, יעמדו כאן במרכז התיאור, אלא גם בעלי־בתים ומוכרי־ספרים, בעלי־מלאכה וסוחרים ביריד, פונדקאים ומחברים בישראל, כלי־קודש ובלני־מרחץ. כולם קבצנים; נישואיהם הם נישואי קבצנים; פרייתם־ורבייתם הן מעשה קבצני; מסחרם ופרנסתם כולם קבצנות; אפילו התפילה שהם שוטחים לפני אלוהיהם יש בה מטעם מעשה החילופין של הקבצן, הנותן משהו מתוך צרורו שלו ומצפה לגמול מתוך צרורו של חברו.

לפי זה, לוזו ועיקרו של הסיפור אינם וידויו של פישקה, המשמש לכל היותר כאילוסטראציה מרכזית (אך בשום פנים ואופן לא יחידה) לכלל הקבצני הגדול, אלא דווקא נסיונו של מנדלי מוכר ספרים לקטוע־ סיפור זה ביאנאטומיהי הקבצנית שהוא מוגיע בה הן את פישקה המספר והן את אלתר יקנה"ז המאזין לו. במניין סאטירי מתמשך זה, שמנדלי מוסיף לו מדי פעם איזו חוליה חדשה שנשמטה, כביכול, מזכרונו – מעין מילון או אנציקלופדיה של הקבצנות היהודית – מתגלמת. לפי זה, הכוונה האידיאית הכוללת והשלמה של הסיפור. ובכל אופן, מניין זה בא להפר את תפיסת המציאות האישית־הפרטית, שמשרה על הסיפור וידויו של פישקה ולהציע במקומה תפיסת מציאות על־אישית, לאומית־קאטיגוריאלית. כמו כן מניין זה בא למתן את הריגוש והפאתוס השליטים בסיפור פישקה ולהדגיש במקומם נימה סאטירית־ביקורתית. בעיקרו, מסיט את דעתנו איפוא השם 'ספר הקבצניםי מתפיסת הסיפור כמערכת נאראטיבית המאורגנת סביב דמות הגיבור התם והפאתיטי, פישקה, לתפיסה הממקדת את המערכת במנדלי, המספר המפוכח והאירוני, אשר נטייתו המהותית היא להפשיט כל דבר מפרטיותו וייחודו ולהעמידו בתכונה כוללת של יהיהודיי ואפילו של האדם באשר הוא.

ב. גלגולי ׳התקבלות׳

כפילוּת או שניוּת קוטביות אלו בקביעת המוקד התימאטי וההגותי של הסיפור יש בהן כדי לחסביר במידת־מה את המבוכה וההתרוצצות הפנימית, האופייניות לכלל הדיון בו מאז הופעתו ועד ימינו.

המבוכה והמעבר מעמדה אחת לעמדה הפוכה איפיינו את תהליך ההתקבלות הממושך של היצירה במשך חמשת עשורי הפעילות הספרותית של המחבר. עם הופעתו לראשונה ב־1869 כמעט לא עורר יפישקהי הדים; ובכל אופן, ההתעניינות בו היתה פחותה בהרבה מאשר ביצירות סאטיריות ואליגוריות מובהקות שפירסם אברמוביץ

היצירה לתת־זיאנר רומאניסטי מוכר (ופופולארי במאה התשע־עשרה) ותוך כדי כך כיוונה את הדעת למיגזר החברתי הספציפי שבו תעסוק היצירה (קבצנים יהודיים); ואילו הכותרת יספר הקבצניםי מכוונת את הדעת מן הז'אנר הרומאניסטי והלאה כשם שהיא מרחיבה הרחבה רבתי את היקף ההוויה היקבצניתי, שבה אמורה היצירה לעסוק. אשר לזיאנר, הכותרת אינה מצביעה, למעשה, על שייכות הסיפור לאחד מסוגיו המוכרים והרווחים של הרומאן. היא מורה, לעומת זאת, על הַקשר עם ז׳אנר אחֵר, שרווח הן בספרות היהודית והן בספרות האירופית במשך ימי־הביניים ותקופת הרנסאנס, הלא הוא הז׳אנר של היאַנאטומיהי או המיקבץ האנציקלופדי. עיקרו של זיאנר זה — מסכת חיבורים שכל אחד מהם מתיימר למצות בלמדנות, שיש בה מטעם הסכולאסטיקה, נושא מוכלל ומקיף זה או אחר בתחומי המעשה, ההגות, המדע וכוי, באמצעות ליקוט החומר הנוגע לו וסידורו לפי קאטיגוריות של סוג, דרגה, היבט או שלב. זיאנר זה עמד לא בסימן ההדגשה של האדם היחיד אלא, להיפך, בסימן הדגשת הנורמה האנושית הכוללת. הוא ביטא תפיסה המתבססת לא על עקרון האינדוקציה או ההליכה מן הפרט אל הכלל אלא על עקרון הדדוקציה, המלמד על היחיד באמצעות קביעת סימני ההיכר של הסוג או הכלל אשר אליו הוא שייך. אמנם, התבנית היאנאטומיתי־הסכולאסטית חדרה אל הרומאן, החל בדוגמאותיו המוקדמות ביותר (יגרגנטואה ופנטגרואלי מאת ראַבּלָה וידון קיחוטי מאת סרוואנטס), עבור לדוגמאות בולטות שלו במאה השמונה־עשרה (יטריסטראם שאַנדיי מאת לורנס סטרן) ובמאה התשע־עשרה (ימובי־דיקי מאת הרמאן מלוויל) וכלה בדוגמאות המופת של הרומאן המודרני־הנסיוני (כגון ייוליססי מאת גייימס גיויס). אלא שבכל חדירותיה אלו משמשת התבנית בהקשר פארודי כמין רקע ניגודי־אנאכרוניסטי למוטיב המודרני האינדיווידואלי העיקרי של הרומאן: האדם היחיד בהווייתו בפני עצמו ובתוך רשת הנסיבות של החברה וההיסטוריה.

והנה, לכאורה, מבקש שייי אברמוביץ ביספר הקבצניםי שלו להפוך את הסדר על פיו. סיפור חייו של האדם היחיד (פישקה) הוא האמור להיות כאן מעין מוטיב משני־אילוסטראטיבי, ואילו התבנית האנאטומית היא הבאה לבטא את עיקר המשמעות של הסיפור. כביכול אין סיפור זה בא להראות אלא שכל עולמו של עם ישראל אינו אלא עולם של קבצנות אריכתא ("כל ישראל קבצן הוא", קובע כאן אלתר יקנה"ז), שיש לעשות בה מעשה אנאטומיה, כלומר, לפצלה לסוגיה ולמדרגותיה, לפענח את מכלול גילוייה — גילויים שבחומר

פישקלונים, טודרוסונים, חיימונים, יוסילונים וחצקלונים [---]. (עמ' 24)

מאלפת היא האנלוגיה הביולוגית הבאה לידי ביטוי בתיאור הקבצ־
נים הפרים ורבים להם יבשפל בקרן חשכהי וביחוד במלים יישרצו להם
כרצונם!י ביטויים אלה ממחישים את הווייתם של היפישקלוניםי
כהוויית דגים או רמשים הנשרצים באלפיהם בנקיקי־סלעים או
בחורי־עפר כדי שיועלו ברשת או יידרסו תחת מדרך כף־רגל. התפקיד
הייצוגי של פישקה הודגש הדגשה נוספת בכותרת המשנה שליוותה את
השם הפרטי: ייאָדער אַ מעשה פון יודישע אָרמעלייטיי (סיפור על אודות
קבצנים יהודיים) — כותרת שבאה לשייך את הרומאן כולו לתת־
הזיאנר של רומאן העניים והמסכנים (יעלובי החייםי של ויקטור הוגו,
יהאנשים הענייםי ויחלכאים ונדכאיםי של דוסטוייבסקי), ולציין את
פישקה כנציגם המטונימי של עניים־קבצנים אלה.

מאידך גיסא, הכותרת מלמדת גם – ובעיקר – שפישקה הוא אדם לעצמו. אישיות מיוחדת, שאין לדון אותו רק על־פי קאטיגוריה זו או אחרת שאליה הוא משתייך (בעלי־מומים, קבצנים וכוי). בכך טעמו של הסיפור כולו. המחבר מרכז סיפור זה בכוונה בגיבור, שהוא לכאורה דגיג־אדם או גם יאבק־אדםי. הוא מניח למספר שלו, מנדלי מוכר ספרים, להתחיל לתארו בדיוק כך - יצור חסר־ערך, ספק־מגוחך ספק־מעורר־רחמים. אלא שבהמשד, משניתו ליצור עלוב ועילג זה לספר את סיפור חייו מנקודת ראוּתו הוא, מתגלה בו בהדרגה האדם המיוחד, שרוחו הטהורה גוברת על עיוותי הגוף, העדר החינוך, העוני המנוון והסביבה האנושית הברוטאלית והמשחיתה; והוא עומד לפנינו במלוא צביונו כאדם שלם יותר מכל האנשים המקיפים אותו, לרבות מנדלי מוכר ספרים הפיקח, שכה הפליג בשנינתו והבריק בניסוחיו שעה שתיאר את פרשת נישואי־הכפייה של פישקה ואת יעלייתו לגדולהי ממעמד של בלן בבית־המרחץ למעמד בעלה של הקבצנית המכובדת בתיה העיוורת. הכותרת באה איפוא לומר לנו – ברוח האתוֹס ההומאניסטי של הרומאן: אכן, פישקה (ולא פישל) ועוד יחיגרי, ובכל זאת אדם ואולי גם אדם המעלה.

לעומת הכותרת יפישקה החיגרי שביידיש, מכוונת הכותרת העברית, יספר הקבצניםי, את דעתנו מן האדם היחיד ואישיותו המוסרית לעבר הכלל החברתי בייצוגו המקיף ביותר. לכאורה, אין כותרת זו אלא המשכה או אפילו תרגומה של כותרת המשנה יסיפור על אודות קבצנים יהודיים מן הנוסחים היידיים הראשונים של היצירה. אך הדבר אינו כך. כותרת המשנה היידית סימנה, כאמור, את שייכות

גבורתם ומשברי חייהם לא נודעו ברשומות ההיסטוריה. אולי היתה הכוונה אף להציגו בגילומו של יהאדם המצויי באשר הוא (כגון במקרה של יתום ג'ונסי). מאידך גיסא באה העמדתה של הכותרת על השם הפרטי הספציפי לקבוע דווקא את חד־פעמיותו של כל אדם, לרבות האדם שאינו אציל ואינו גיבור, לכוון את הדעת לאופיו ולנסיבות חייו החד־פעמיים, לחייו הנפשיים־הפנימיים, שאולי אינם פחותים מבחינת העומק מאלה של גיבור הטראגדיה, ולגורלו היחיד, המיוחד, הסופי והמוחלט מבחינתו. בכפילות זו ביטא הרומאן את האֶתוֹס ההומא־ניסטי החדש, שהצדיק את הופעתו כזיאנר חסר תקדימים היסטוריים ובלא סימוכין שבטיעון פואָטי מסורתי, וכן ביטא את הקשר האמיץ שבינו לבין הבורגנות העולה, זו אשר עד עתה הופיעה ביצירות הספרות (בעיקר במסגרת הקומדיה והסאטירה) כקאטיגוריה אנושית מוכללת, ותר מאשר כקבוצת אנשים פרטיים וייחודיים.

יפישקה החיגרי – כותרת המורכבת משם פרטי בנוסח דיבורי־
לגלגני־פטרוני (השם האמיתי הוא פישל) ומכינוי, המלמד על עליבות
ומסכנות – ממשיך מסורת זו וקובע אותה במרכז היצירה הרומא־
ניסטית בספרות היהודית החדשה. ככותרת עומד גם הוא בסימן
הכפילות של מסורת זו. מחד־גיסא בא גם הוא לייצג מהות אנושית
כללית או קבוצה אנושית רחבה – קבוצת המון ילדי העניים, הבאים
לעולם בלי חשבון ואחריות, גדלים בלי שאיש יתן עליהם את דעתו,
אלא אם כן מבקש הוא לנצלם לתועלתו, וכמוהם כדגיגים (מכאן
השם: פישל – דג; אגב, בתיה, אשתו של פישקה, מגלה בשם גם
בעל־חיים נוסף – פשפש), המוטלים מתוך האפילה של הפרייה והר־
בעל־חיים נוסף – פשפש), המוטלים מתוך האפילה אותם ביחרמוי בעל־
זרוע זה או אחר, בבחינת "ותעשה אדם כדגי הים כרמש לא מושל בו".
תפקיד ייצוגי־כוללני זה של פישקה מצוין בפירוש במקום, שבו מתחיל
מנדלי מוכר ספרים לספר את סיפור חייו:

מי הוא זה פישקא ומאין הוא? — שאלה זו לא עלתה על דעתי ולא על דעת אחרים מעולם. מה בכך! הרי לך עוד בריה אחת בעולמו של הקדוש ברוך הוא ופישקא שמה, כשאר בריות עלובות כמותו, העולות ונוצצות לפנינו ככמהין ופטריות, לקומתן ולצביונן ולדעתן בבת אחת, שלא להרגיש מתחילה בהווייתן ובגידולן. נתקבצו להם קבצנינו יחד ליושבים שם בשפל בקרן חשכה, פרים ורבים בחשאי, ומי נותן דעתו עליהם! ישרצו להם כרצונם! ובמקום חושך וצלמוות זה הטף הולך יודל ועומד על רגליו — ופתאום יציצו מעיר יהודים קטנים:

בהקשר השני מייצגת היא התכוונות לאומית־היסטורית כוללת ורחבה לעומת התכוונות ספציפית ומוגבלת יותר, שבאה לידי ביטוי בכותרת היידית.

לדוגמה. הכותרת יטבעת המופתי לימדה תחילה, עם פרסום נוסח הבכורה של הסיפור (1865), על כוונתו המשכילית־הדידאקטית של המחבר: לגלוג ליביטחוןי היהודי המסורתי, להזיות על היחלצות ממצוקות באמצעות מעשי־ניסים ואמונה פאסיבית, וקריאה להמרת יטבעת המופתי האמונתית־החסידית ביטבעת המופתי של המדע והה־ שכלה. בנוסח היידי השני, המורחב (מ־1888 ואילד), ביטאה אותה כותרת את מגמתו הלאומית של המחבר, אשר ביקש עתה, אחרי פרעות 2 – 1881, להביע את הזדהותו עם הסבל של העם ולהציע פתרון לאומי (אולי ברוח האוטואמאנציפאציה של לי פינסקר, שאברמוביץ עיבדה ותירגמה ליידיש באותן שנים) לבעיות שעורר סבל זה. פתרון זה הוא שצריך היה עתה לשמש מעין יטבעת מופתי, שהאחיזה האקטיבית בה (ולא באמונה המשיחית הפאסיבית) יכולה היתה להביא לאתחלתא דגאולה. אולם בעת עיבוד הסיפור לעברית בשביל יהשילוחי של אחד־ העם (החל ב־1896) כבר העדיף אברמוביץ להציגו לא כהכנה נאראטי־ בית להצעת יפתרוןי משכילי או ציוני למצוקה אלא כאפופיאה היסטו־ רית רחבה ורצופת יסורים, המעלה סביב סיפור חייו של גיבורה, הרשלה, את כל פרשת הסבל, התקוות ומפחי־הנפש של היהדות הרו־ סית, מעצם ימי שלטונו העריץ של ניקולאי הראשון דרך ימי התקווה של אלכסנדר השני והאכזבה ממנו ועד לפוגרומים שבאו בעקבות רצח אלכסנדר ומוטטו את תקוות היהודים לחיים אזרחיים מתוקנים בארץ הצארים. ההסתמכות על כותרות חיבורו של יוסף הכהן, שהפד את פרשת גירוש ספרד למעין מודל היסטורי שעל־פיו פורשו כל תולדות העם מחורבן בית שני ועד למאה השש־עשרה, מלמדת על כוונתו של המחבר להעמיד בסיפורו מעין מקבילה מודרנית לפרשת גירוש ונדו-דים בחיי העם.

הכותרת של הרומאן הביוגראפי במקורו היידי — ישלמה בנו של רב חיים לכותרת זו השתמרה זמן־מה גם בכותרת עברית זמנית: יחיי שלמהי) — לימדה על מרכזיותו של הגיבור, שהוא וחייו בבית הוריו עד היפלטותו ממנו (אחר מות האב) הם עיקר הסיפור. הכותרת אף הצביעה על קירבת הגיבור הבדיוני־למחצה למחבר עצמו (ההבדל בין שלמה לשלום אינו רב, ושם האב, חיים, הוא כשם אביו של המחבר). לעומתה, הציגה הכותרת יבימים ההםי את היצירה לא כווידוי אישי אלא כמין תעודה היסטורית־אתנוגראפית, גלעד אמנותי למציאות אלא כמין תעודה היסטורית־אתנוגראפית, גלעד אמנותי למציאות

תרבות־חברתית שבטלה ועברה מן העולם. חיי הנער שלמה אינם משמשים במסגרת קונצפטואלית חדשה זו, שהמחבר הגדירה במפורש ביפתיחתאי (שנכתבה לראשונה במהלך חיבור הנוסח העברי של הספור), אלא כעין אילוסטראציה או מסגרת, המקילות על מסירת תמונת החיים היהודיים־המסורתיים בעיירות ליטא במחצית הרא־שונה של המאה התשע־עשרה. העיקר האוטוביוגראפי־האישי עומעם כאן ובמקומו הובלט עיקר היסטוריקולקטיבי.

מעין זה אירע גם בהמרת הכותרת יפישקה החיגרי ליספר הקבצניםי. אך דומה כי כאן היה ההיסט של מוקד המשמעות חריף ובולט עוד יותר מאשר במקרים האחרים. הכותרת יפישקה החיגרי שייכת לאחת המסורות המרכזיות, שקבעה את כותרותיהם של מאות (או אלפי) רומאנים אירופיים למן הופעת הרומאן בסוף המאה השבע־עשרה ובמשך המאות השמונה־עשרה והתשע־עשרה. החל בימול פלאנדרסי של דיפוֹ ויתום גיונסי של פילדינג, דרך ידוד קופרפילדי של דיקנס, יאויזיני גראנדהי של באלזאק ויהיינריך הירוקי של גוטפריד קלר ועד ימאדאם בּוֹבארִיי של פלוֹבֶּר, יאנה קארֵנינהי של טולסטוי ויאַפִּי בריסטי של פונטאנה ואף הרבה לאחר־מכן, לימדו כותרות רומאנים מרכזיים ביותר במסורות הספרותיות הלאומיות השונות על צד עקרוני בתפיסת האדם הייחודית לזיאנר הרומאניסטי. השמות הפרטיים שהופיעו עד כה ככותרות של יצירות ספרות – בעיקר במסגרות הזיאנרים היגבו־ הים: הטראגדיה והאפוס – היו שמותיהם של מלכים, נסיכים, גיבורים ודמויות מיתולוגיות. הופעתם בכותרת ביטאה את התרכזות היצירה כולה או רובה באישיותם, אשר – בין שהתעלתה במעשי גבורה וייסוד ממלכות (באפוס) ובין שכרעה־נפלה תחת מהלומות הגורל או בשל איזה יפגםי שבתוכה (בטראגדיה) – גילמה את הניסיון האנושי בתמציתו המזוככת והנעלה ביותר. הרומאן גיבש את זהותו הזיאנרית הייחודית לעומת זיאנרים יגבוהיםי אלה ביו השאר בכד שהעלה אל כן הכותרות שלו שמות אלמוניים ויום־יומיים: נשים שאפשר להסתפק בציון הכינוי הוולגארי שלהן (ימול פלאנדרסי) או ללגלג ליומרות החברתיות שלהן בתיאורן כ'מאדאם בובארי' או גברים, ששמותיהם מחוסרי כל אצילות וייחוד (יתום גיונסי הוא הצירוף של השם הפרטי ושם המשפחה הרווחים ביותר באנגליה), או גם אפשר היה להסתפק בציון שמם הפרטי בצירוף כינוי שאינו מוסיף כבוד (יהיינריך הירוקי). מגמת הכותרות חללו היתה כפולה: מחד־ גיסא היא לימדה על הכוונה להציג את הגיבור כנציגה של הוויה אנושית נרחבת. הוויית אנשים אנונימיים. יום־יומיים, שמעללי

א. בין יפישקה החיגרי ליספר הקבצניםי

שייי אברמוביץ, שכתב את יצירותיו הסיפוריות העיקריות ביידיש (תחילה) ובעברית (על־פי־רוב לאחר מכן) כאחת, נהג להבחין בין הנוסחים שבשתי הלשונות בין השאר גם באמצעות כותרות שונות זו מזו. רק אחת מיצירות אלו, הסאטירה ימסעות בנימין השלישיי, צוינה בכל נוסחיה בכותרת אחת; אלא שזו היתה מלכתחילה כותרת עברית (פארודית), ומשום־כך לא היה מקום ליעיברותהי בעת הופעת הנוסח העברי שלה. יצירה אחרת, הסאטירה־האליגורית ידי קליאטשעי (הסוסה). עברה בעת עיבודה לעברית שינוי כותרת מזערי, לכאורה, שגם הוא הגביה את הסוסה היום־יומית, הדוויה והמרוטה של הכותרת היידית ליסוסתיי המקראית־המטאפורית מן הפסוק יילסוסתי ברכבי פרעה דמיתיך רעייתייי שבשיר־השירים. שלושת הרו־ מאנים הבולטים של אברמוביץ עברו שינויי כותרת הרבה יותר מפלי־ גים. ידאָס ווינטשפינגערלי (טבעת המופת, טבעת המשאלות), הכותרת הכמו־פולקלוריסטית של הרומאן על חיי הנער היהודי בן העיירה המזרח־אירופית שנעשה בגרמניה לסופר ולאיש־מדע, הפכה בנוסח העברי ליבעמק הבכאי, שם שניטל מן הכרוניקה יספר בעמק הבכאי מאת יוסף הכהן, בנם של מגורשי־ספרד, שנכתבה באמצע המאה הששרעשרה. הרומאן האוטוביוגראפי ישלמה רב חיימסי (שלמה בנו של רב חיים) נקרא בנוסחו העברי המגובש בשם יבימים ההםי: והרומאן יפישקע דער קרומערי (פישקה החיגר) הפך עם תרגומו־עיבודו לעברית (תחילה בידי חיינ ביאליק ואחר־כך בידי המחבר עצמו) ליספר הקבצניםי.

בכל מקרה כזה לימד חילוף הכותרות על כוונת המחבר להציג את יצירתו כאילו היתה בעלת שני מוקדים תימאטיים־קונצפטואליים שונים, אשר כל אחד מהם טעון הבלטה לעצמו. כוונה זו יש להבינה הן בהקשר הדיאכרוני של התפתחות אמנותו חסיפורית של אברמוביץ במשך כחמישים שנות יצירה (משנות השישים של המאה התשע־עשרה ועד לעשור השני של המאה העשרים) והן בהקשר הסינכרוני של הספרות היהודית הדו־לשונית בת־הזמן על קהלי הקוראים השונים שלה ועל האידיאולוגיות הלאומיות והספרותיות השונות (המנוגדות לעיתים), שהנחו את אגפיה השונים. בהקשר הראשון מייצגת הכותרת העברית תמיד את הרובד המאוחר או הסופי בהגותו ובהתכוונותו של הסופר לעומת רבדים מוקדמים יותר, אשר קבעו את הכותרת היידית.

״החינוך הסנטימנטאלי״ של מנדלי מוכר ספרים אחרית דבר מאת דן מירון ויספר לכם סיפורי־מעשיות — ואתם תרוו מלוא־חופניים הנאה ונחת.

וכאשר אני משַווה לנגדי מראה אשר כזה, הריני מחייך מרוב חדווה ומודה לך מקרב לב.

המחבר

צרות פג חשקי לכתוב. ואמנם זמן רב דבקה לשוני לחיכי.

ועתה, כאשר אני חוזר ונוטל מחדש בידי את עטי המיובש והמדולדל, ואני יוצא שוב להביע דברים בלשוני, הרי עלי לקום ולהודות לך על כך. לך ורק לך, באשר שהותי בחברתך השיבה את נפשי וחידשה את חיותי. דבריך הנבונים, פועלך המתמיד לטובת עמנו, ריעננו אותי והפיחו בי חשק לרתום את עצמי אל מלאכה כלשהי. מתוך אש הקודש, מאור אשף הבוערת תמיד בליבך היהודי, נתמלט וניתז זיק אחד אל לבבי והדליקו, והנה הוא בוער עתה כאז בימי נעורינו.

כן, שנינו החילונו את פועלנו בספרות באותו הזמן, אלא שאין מזלי כמזלך; אתה העפלת מעלה־מעלה, אל החלונות הגבוהים; ושם אתה סוחר באבני־חן ויהלומים של תולדות ישראל; אתה דולה, מעלה ומציג את התכשיטים היפים ביותר של עמנו מימים עברו. את הטוב ביותר ואת היקר ביותר בחייו. עסקיך נתקשרו עם הלל הזקן, עם רבי מאיר, רבי עקיבא ועם אנשי־המעלה כיוצא בהם, אנשי ייחוס מן הסוג הגבוה ביותר. לי, לעומת זאת, אינה המזל להשפיל ולרדת אל המדרגה התחתונה ביותר בחיי היהודים, אי שם למטה במרתפים. ה"יש־בכאן" שלי הם סמרטוטים וסחורה רקובה. כל הזמן איני עוסק אלא באביונים, בקבצנים, באומללים מסכנים; וגם בברנשים נוכלים, עושי־להטים ועוד נפשות למיניהן, קטנטנים, קטנוניים, יצורים שפלים. בחלומותי בלילה עולים לעומתי מְקַבְּצֵי־ נדבות. לנגד עיני מרחף בלי הרף התרמיל – התרמיל היהודי הישן הגדול. תרמיל זה תלוי בחוטמי, כמוהו כעננה כבדה התלויה באפו של נכהדרוח בעל מרה־שחורה. לכל אשר אסוב ואפנה - אני רואה את התרמיל לעומתי. גם אם אבקש לומר דבר־מה או לספר לתומי יצוף התרמיל ויתייצב לנגדי!

הוי, שוב התרמיל הזה, התרמיל היהודי!

כן, ידיד יקר, בזכותך חזרתי ונדלקתי ושבתי אל מלאכת הכתיבה

והנה כאן לפניך, בעוונותינו הרבים, שוב אמנם התרמיל! הרי
לך פישקה החיגר, אשר עימו אני מופיע ויוצא אל הקהל לאחר זמן
רב כל־כך של שתיקה. יודע אני, שפישקה החיגר שלי אינו בגדר
דורון ראוי, להודות לך באמצעותו על ידידותך. אך ביודעי אל נכון
את טוב ליבך וטיבו, את פתיחותך כלפי בני־אדם למיניהם, הריני
מקווה שגם את פישקה שלי תקבל בברכת "ברוך הבא". ואמנם
ייתכן גם ייתכן, שתזמין אותו אל הטרקלין, ואף תציג אותו לפני
בני־הבית והאורחים. אזי יניח פישקה בצד את תרמילו, יפתח פיו

ידיד יקר!

עצובה נעימתי בּקַפֶּלְיָא של הספרות היהודית. בחיבורַי בא לידי ביטוי יהודי בכל רמ״ח איבריו, שאפילו כאשר הוא שר לפעמים ביטוי יהודי בכל רמ״ח איבריו, שאפילו כאשר הוא שר לפעמים ניגון עליז, הרי גם אז נדמה מרחוק שהוא מקונן ומתייפח בבכיו. מתוך זמירותיו נשמע מעין נוסח עצוב של איכה; אם הוא צוחק — הרי דמעות מתקשרות בעיניו, ואם רצונו לשמוח מעט — הרי אנחה מרה פורצת לה תוך־כדי־כך ממעמקי ליבו, ותמיד זעקת־אוי, וחוזר חלילה אוי־ואבוי!...

איני מתיימר חלילה לומר בזחיחות דעת, שזמיר אנוכי בספרותנו היהודית. ובכל זאת דומה אני מאוד לזמיר, ולו רק בדבר אחד. משורר זה בקרב בעלי־הכנף, האפוף מרה־שחורה, נוהג לפתוח בניגוניו ולהשתפך בנוסחו העצבובי דווקא בתקופת־האביב, עת כל הבריאה כמו נולדת מחדש, כאשר הכול מסביב פורח ומלבלב, ריחות עדנים נודפים מעברים, ממש מחיה־נפשות, הכול זורח ומלא־אור וכל לב ולב מתמלא גיל וחדווה.

שנינו, ידידי היקר, התחלנו את פּועֻלֵנוּ בספרות היהודית ממש בתקופת האביב של חיי היהודים כאן בארצנו. חיים חדשים לחלוטין נכונו ליהודים החל משנות השישים של המאה שלנו, חיים בהלוך־נפש מרומם וקל־קליל, חיים מלאי תקוות לעתיד לבוא. צעירים מאוד היינו בימים ההם ובהתלהבות רבה אחזנו בעט־סופרים. עבדנו בחדוות יצירה, איש איש לפי דרכו והילוכו. קהל־הקוראים נהנה הנאה רבה מכתיבתך, ממש ליקק אצבעותיו והתמוגג כליל בשומעו כיצד אתה מדבר במתיקות על עניינים חשובים רבים בחיי היהודים, כיצד אתה מלמד זכות על היהודים וכיצד אתה מדריך אותם בדרכי נועם ונחת ובידידות גמורה להכיר ולדעת את עצמם, לעמוד על טעם חייהם ולהידמות אל המתוקנים שבבריות. פיך הפיק מרגליות, נוצצות ומאירות, שיישארו לנצח כנופך וקישוט בספרות היהודית. אף אני הוספתי מַהְמְהוּמֵי באותה תקופת־אביב בוהלת ועולזת. כתבתי וניגנתי בנוסח משלי.

ובנגינתי, כרגיל, הימהמה נימה אחת בעצבות והטילה מעין מרה־שחורה בלב המאזינים. מהם שהקשיבו לי ברצון על אף המועקה בלב, מהם שעיקמו את פרצופם והתגרדו בגירודים משונים. הם לא היו מרוצים מכך שאני נוגע בכליותיהם ומייסרן, ואף איני חדל מלהזכיר להם דברים לא שמחים מכול וכול. על כל פנים — אני המשכתי בשלי, לנגן ניגוני ולעשות מעשי.

תקופת־האביב היפה ההיא חלפה. ואוי ואבוי לחיי היהודי! מרוב

הקדשת "פישקה החיגר", מהדורת 1888 תירגם מיידיש: שלום לוריא

> לידידי החביב והיקר מנשה מרגלית מביא את הספר הזה כמתנה מקרב לב המחבר

מסעות בנימין השלישי

אמר מנדלי מוכר-ספרים:

יתברך הבורא וישתבח היוצר, שהוא מנהיג את הגלגלים בעולמות העליונים ואת בריותיו בעולם התחתון ומבין לכל הליכותיהם. אין לך עשב שאין לו מלאך, שמכהו ואומר לו: "גדל!" ואם עשב כך, קל־וחומר בן־אדם, וקל־וחומר בן־בנו של קל־וחומר אדם מישראל. אין הדיוט קופץ בראש, אין שוטה נעשה פלא־יועץ, ואין עם־הארץ — חסיד ובור — משכיל אצלנו. אלא עד שכל אחד ואחד מהם המלאך שלו מכהו וכופאו להיות מה שהוא. אף קבצנינו. ארחי־פרחי שלנו. מלאכי־השרת מכים אותם ואומרים להם: "פרו־ורבו, קבצנים! בית־יעקב, לכו — וחזרו על הפתחים!"...

כל זה לא אמרתי אלא בשביל לספר לכם, רבותי, מעשה באדם מישראל, שהרים רגליו והלך על פי הדיבור למדינות־ הים ואיים רחוקים מעבר להרי־חושך ועשה לו במסעיו שם גדול בכל עמי־הארץ.

כל כתבי־העתים בלשונות בריטניה ואשכנו היו מרבים לספר בשנה שעברה את החדושים והנוראות שנתגלו על ידי בנימין, יהודי פולני, בדרך נסיעתו הנפלאה למדינות המזרח. תמה, תמה! קראו, הנהיה כדבר הזה או הנשמע כמוהו — אחד היהודים, בריה קלה זו, שאין בידו כלום, לא כלי־זין ולא מכונות וכלי־אומנות אלא טליתו ותפליו ותרמילו על שכמו בלבד, יזכה לעלות ברגל לאותם המקומות, שאפילו תיירים בריטניים מהגדולים והמפורסמים שבהם לא הגיעו לשם מימיהם!... וכתבי־העתים בישראל שמחו על השמועה הזו כמוצא שלל רב ומקום היה להם להתגדר בו כל ימות השנה. יצאו ומנו את כל החכמים שקמו בישראל מזמן אדם הראשון עד ימינו אלה, הוציאו במספר צבא הנוסעים, מז

הנוסע בנימין הראשון, בימים ההם, לפני שבע מאות שנה,
ועד בנימין השני עם כל המון הנוסעים עתה בזמן הזה,
ובכדי להפליג גדולתו של בנימין זה, בטלו אגב, כנהוג, את
בל שאר חבריו כעפרא דארעא ואמרו: אין אלו אלא כנופיא
של נודדים בטלנים, שכל עיקר נסיעתם הוא לחזור על
הפתחים, וכקוף בפני אדם בפני בנימין שלנו, בפני בנימין
השלישי, הנוסע האמתי הזה. המליצו עליו ועל הספרים,
הכוללים ספורי מסעותיו, במקרא הידוע: "לא בא כבושם
הזה", ואמרו פה אחד: "ברוך יהא מי שידבנו לבו להעתיק
את האוצר הנחמד של מסעות בנימין, הנמצא בכל לשונות
הגוים, גם ללשון קדשנו. תזכה נא גם נפשם השוקקה של
אחינו היהודים לטעום מעט מיערת־הדבש, ההולך ממקור
ישראל, ותאורנה עיניהם".

ואני מנדלי, שכל כונתי תמיד להועיל לאחינו בני ישראל כפי מעוט כחי, לא יכלתי לכבוש את רוחי ואמרתי: עד שאחינו הסופרים, אשר קטנם עבה ממתני, יתעוררו מתרדמתם להעתיק את כל ספורי מסעות בנימין מתחלתם ועד סופם ולזכות בהם את ישראל, אשתדל להדפיס מהם לפי שעה קצור המסעות. ובכן אזרתי כגבר חלצי ויגעתי, אף על פי שזקנה קפצה עלי ותש כחי, לא עליכם, להוציא מתוך אותו האוצר הגדול ענינים טובים ומועילים לבני ישראל ולספר אותם בלשוני, על פי דרכי. הייתי מרגיש בנפשי כאלו רוח ממרום כופאני, מכה ואומר: "הקיצה, מנדלי, צא צא מאחורי התנור! לך ומלא חפניך בשמים מאוצרות בנימין ועשה מהם מטעמים לאחיך, כאשר אהבה מטעמים, והריני משים אותם פה לפניכם. אכלו, רבותי, ישישו בני־מעיכם!

Sources: Leon Binshtok, "A Celebration of Yiddish Literature," in Voskhod, 1884; S. Y. Abramovitsh, autobiographical essay in Nachum Sokolov's Sefer zikharon, 1889; Zalman Reyzen, Leksikon fun der yidisher literatur, presse un filologie, vol. 1, 1928; YIVO Pamphlet, "Di vikhtikste faktu un dates fun Mendeles lebn un shafn," 1936; Mendele Moykher Sforim: reshimat ketawav veriggrotav le-hatkanat mahaduratam ha-akademit, 1965; Dan Miron, A Traveler Disguised, 1973; Guide to Yiddish Classics on Microfiche, ed. Chone Shmeruk, 1980.

CHAPTER 1

The Grandfather of Yiddish Literature

Modern Yiddish literature has its origins in the life and work of Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh (1836–1917). A follower of Abramovitsh once found him working at his desk and asked what he was writing. "I'm not writing, I'm driving away flies," he answered, and then explained his metaphor: "When I write Hebrew, all the prophets fall upon me: Isaiah, Jeremiah, the writers of the Song of Songs and Psalms, and each one of them proposes that I take a ready-made verse or an established phrase from him alone, for this expression. In order not to write in ready-made clichés, I first have to drive away all those flies." This story illustrates the basic problem that confronted modern Yiddish and Hebrew writers. Abramovitsh required the literary models of the Bible and post-biblical Hebrew writing, but he was also compelled to resist their influence. While he appropriated prophetic and rabbinic modes, he retained a critical distance.

Abramovitsh himself wrote three accounts of his life: an essay in Nachum Sokolov's Memorial Book (Sefer zikharon, 1889); the two-part autobiographical novel Solomon, Son of Chaim (Shloyme reb Khaim's, 1894–1917), also known as In Those Days (In yener tsayt in Yiddish or Ba-yamim ha-hem in Hebrew); and his serialized memoirs entitled "From My Book of Memories" ("Fun mayn seyfer hazikhroynes," 1913–16). While these narratives should not be read as if they contained indisputable facts, they do command a privileged place in Abramovitsh's lifework. Numerous essayists have written about Abramovitsh in Yiddish and Hebrew, and his friend Lev Binshtok printed a significant memoir of his early years in Russian (1884).

Abramovitsh offered advice to those who interpret his work. After he read Y. H. Ravnitzky's introduction to a collection of his

¹Simon Dubnov, Fun "zhargon" tsu yidish un andere artiklen: literarishe zikh-roynes (Vilna: Kletzkin, 1929), p. 113; henceforth cited as "FZ" by page alone.

(74)

וּמְלֶאכֶת הַמְּסִלֶּה כָּלִיל שְׁלֵמָה,
וּמְלֶאכֶת הַמְּסִלֶּה כָּלִיל שְׁלֵמָה,
על מַעְגְּלֵי בַּרְיֶל וּבְהוֹד נַחֲרוֹת אֵימָה
יָנִיעַ יוֹם-יוֹם אַלְפֵי אָדָם בַּכְּבָרָה.
יִנְתָּה בְּבִית-הַמִּדְרָשׁ אֶת הָעֲגוּנָה הִשְׁמִיטוּ וּבְּהַלְכֵת הַמְּסִלֶּה יַעְסִק כָּל תַּלְמִיד-בָּחוּר,
יְאַחֲרֵי שַׁקְלָא וְטַרְיָא פֶּה אֶחָד הָחֱלִיטוּ
יְאַחְר בּוֹ יִשְׁתַּמְשׁוּ לִקְפִיצֵת הַדֶּרָדְ,
אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ יִשְׁתַּמְשׁוּ לִקְפִיצֵת הַדֶּרָדְ,
בַּכָּתוֹב בְּסַבֶּר "בְּרִית מְנוּחָה" בָּארֶךְ.

And the work of laying railroad track had completely been done, And already the fiery chariot with hurricane fury Over iron rails and with majestic and awesome snorting Was magically whisking people by the thousands.

(By now in the study hall they had dropped [the topic of] the agunah And every Yeshivah student was pondering the legalistic theory [halachah] of the railroad.)

And after much learned deliberation they agreed unanimously That the locomotive was none other than the black hound That was used for miraculously swift travel "kefitsat haderech" — As described at length in the book "Berit Menuhah")

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וּבַחָנוֹת הַפְּרְבָּה עַל שַׁעֲרֵי אַיָּלוֹן וְהַנּוֹסְעִים יֵצְאוּ לִסְעוֹד לִבָּם בְּחִפָּזוֹן עְבְרִיּוֹת עֲנִיּוֹת מוֹכְרוֹת כָּל מָזוֹן: וּבְתוֹכָן אִשָּׁה אַחַת עֵינֵים הָּחֲזָינָה: יְפַת הּאַר מְנַנֶּלֶת לוֹבֶשֶׁת סְחָבוֹת, שְׁעֶרָה הָפַוּפָה, עֵינִיה בָּבוֹת, קוֹמְתָה כְּפוּפָה, עֵינִיה צָבוֹת, קוֹמְתָה כְּפוּפָה, עֵינִיה צָבוֹת,

And when the train would stop at the gates of Ayalon
And the passengers would get off to eat a hasty meal
There would come toward them from the hotels
Poor Jewish women selling all kinds of food:
And amongst them they would see one of them
An erstwhile beauty with ruined good looks
wearing ragged clothing,
Whose hair has whitened although she is not an old woman,
Her stature is bent, her eyes swollen,
And naked and barefoot to both sides of her
Her two children holding onto the hem of her garment.

(72)

״לא חָפֵץ הָאֵלײַ״ - אָבִינוּ שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם, כָּל עֲלִילוֹת בְּנֵי הָאָדָם יָגֹלוּ אֵלֶיךּ, וְאַתָּה חֲסִין-יָהּ, אֵל נשֵׁא, אֶרֶךְ-אַפַּיִם, בְּשְׁמְךּ אָבוֹת וְאִמּוֹת רַחֲמֵיהָם הִשְּׁחִיתוּ וּבְנֵיהֶם בִּידֵיהֶם בָּאֵשׁ שִׁלֵּחוּ, בְּשְׁמְךּ כֹּחֲנֵי אָנֶן הַמְּדוּרוֹת הָצִיתוּ וּבְשִׁמְדּ נִאֲלָפִים אָדָם זִבַּחוּ, וּבְשָׁמְדּ, אֵל רַחוּם, בַּעֲלֵי הַדְּרָשׁוֹת בְּקוֹץ יוּד מֻנָּד יַהַרְגוּ כַּמָּה נְבָּשׁוֹת!

"God has not willed it!!"— our Father in heaven,
All libelous human perversities they project upon You,
And you Almighty God, forgiving, long suffering, God,
Have kept silent from Eternity,

restraining and withholding your wrath,
In Your name fathers and mothers have obliterated their mercies
And with their own hands cast their children into the fire,
In Your name wicked priests have ignited the pyres
And offered up human sacrifices by the hundreds and thousands,
And in Your name, compassionate God, the homileticians
Over a displaced tip of a yud, kill so many and so many souls!

(73)

יוֹם אַחַר יוֹם וּשְׁלשָׁה חֲדָשִׁים בָּרֶחוּ: פַאבִּי עָזַב הָעִיר לֹא נוֹדַע אַיֵּהוּ, רַחֲמָנִים בְּנֵי רַחֲמָנִים בַת-שׁוּע שָׁכֶּחוּ, כַּלֶּם לְדַרְכָּם פָּנוּ, אִישׁ לְבִצְעוֹ מִקְּצָהוּ. רַק הַם לֹא שְׁכֵחוּהָ וַתְּהִי לָהֶם לְמִלָּה, רַק הַם עוֹד יָשִׁיחוּ לְעִתִּים מְזֻמָּנוֹת בְּצְגוּיָה אֲשָׁר עָגְּבָה עַל בּוֹנֵה-הַמְּסְלָּה: וּלְכַּר הַמִּירוּ שֵׁם "הָעֲגוּיָה" בְּשֵׁם "אֲשֶׁת-אִישׁ", וּלְכַּאבִּי קַרְאוּ פַיְבִישׁ וּלְפַיְבִישׁ -"וַי בִּישׁ",

Day followed day and already three months had flitted by: Fabi had left the city and no one knew his whereabouts, Our compassionate folk had forgotten Bat-Shua Each going his own way,

each and every one in the grip of self-interest,
Only frequenters of study halls and street-corner idlers
Only they did not forget her, and she became their prime gossip,
Only they would converse frequently
About the agunah that ogled* the railroad builder,
And already for "agunah" they substituted "the married woman,"
And from Fabi they reverted to Fayvish
and from Fayvish to "vay-bish"**

^{*} Literally "that lusted for."

^{**} A pun: (1) vay = woe; vay-bish = luckless, or one with bad luck; (2) "done in by a woman," from the Yiddish word vayb, "woman."

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עַתָּה תְּבַקּשׁ לָהּ בַּת-שׁוּעַ בַּרְנָסָה אַחֶרָת,
כִּי בַּחֲלוֹתָהּ חֲנוּתָהּ מֵאָפֶס יָד נִסְגָּרָהּ
וּבְעוֹדָהּ מְבַקּשֶׁת הַבִּיאוּ לָהּ אִנֶּרָת
כָּתוּב בָּהּ לֵאמר: "אֲהוּבָתִי הַיְּקָרָהּ
אָם לֹא תוּכְלִי לַהְיוֹת לִי וְגַם אֲנִי אֵלִידְ,
אָם לֹא תוּכְלִי לַחֲלוֹק עִפִּי הוֹנִי וּמְעוֹנִי,
הוֹאִילִי נָא אֵפּוֹא וַאֲכַלְכֵּל מַחֲסוֹרֵיִדְּ
וְכָל צְרְכֵּדְ בַּּמַתֶּר יִנָּתֶן עַל חֶשְׁבּוֹנִי
כִּי רַק אָז אַמְצָא אשֶׁר,
כִּי רַק אָז אַמְצָא אשֶׁר,
בְּדַעְתִּי כִּי נִסְתַּרְהְּ אַהְּ מֵענִי וָחַסֶר"

Now Bat-Shua was searching for a different source of livelihood, Because, while sick, her store was closed for lack of an attendant: And as she was still searching, a letter was brought to her In which the following was written: "My dear beloved: If you cannot be mine and I, yours, If you cannot share with me my money and my dwelling, Allow me therefore to assist you in your support, And let all of your needs be secretly provided for at my expense; For only then will my mind be set at ease, only then will I find happiness, In my knowing that you are sheltered from poverty and lack."

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"לא פַאבִּי, לא אֶקַח חוּט וּשְׁרוּדְ נָעַל -הַשִּׁיבָה הָעָנָיָה לוֹ הְשׁוּבָה נִצְּחַתּ-אָשְׁה בִּית אִישָׁהּ - יָרֶב לָהּ הַבָּעַל, אַדְּ אֶתְנָן מִידִי זָר חֶרְפָּה לָקַחַת. אָם לא חָפֵץ הָאֵל כִּי אֶחְיֶה מִמְּקוֹר עִמְּדְּ, אֲדֹנִי הוּא - הַטּוֹב בְּעִינִיו יָעַשׁ! לָהְ-לְדְּ לְדַרְכֶּךְ וַאלֹהִים יְרוֹמִמְדְּ, נִם אוֹתִי לֹא יַעֲזֹב, הָסֵר מִלְבְּדְ כָּעַשׁ: בִּזַעַת אַפִּי אַכַל לֶחֶם כָּל עוֹד בִּי כֹחַ וֹמִידֵי זָר מַתְּנַת חָנָּם לֹא אֶקַח לֶקֹחַ".

"No Fabi, I will not take even a thread or a shoelace" —
The poor woman replied to him decisively —
A wife in the home of her husband has him to fend for her,
But a gift from a stranger is unseemly for her to accept.
If God has not willed that I should be sustained by you,
He is God — let Him do what is best in His eyes:
Go your way and may God help you to prosper
Me, too, He will not abandon, remove distress from your heart;
By the sweat of my brow I will eat bread
while there is yet strength in me,
But from a stranger's hands I will not accept gratuitously."

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אֶבֶן כִּי יַדּוּ בִּנְחַר מִשְׁקַע מַיִם רֶגַע יִתְּנָעֲשׁוּ מֵימָיו, יָהֶמוּ יָחְמָרוּ, הָאֶבֶן תִּשְׁקַע, תַּעָלֵם מֵעִינָים וּכְמִקֶּדֶם מֵי-מְנוּחוֹת יָצוּפוּ יִנְהָרוּ. כֵּן גַּם הַחַיִּים בּשְׁצֶף זִּרְמָתָם. כָּל הַדְּבָרִים בְּאַיָּלוֹן שָׁבוּ אֶל קַדְמָתָם וּנְעוּרֵי בַת-שׁוּע עַל מַחֲלָתָה נָבָרוּ, וֹתְחִי מִקַּדַּחְתָּה וַתִּרֵד מִן הַמִּשָּׁה וְתְּחִי מִלְּתָה עָלֶיהָ בִּיוֹם וִּפְּסֵל גִּשָּה.

If a stone be hurled to a river's sediment-covered bottom
For a moment its water will churn and whirl,
The stone will sink, disappearing from sight,
And as before calm waters will surface and flow.
So, too, is life in the raging current of its flow.
Everything in Ayalon returned to how it was before
And the youthful vigor of Bat-Shua overcame her illness.
She recovered from her fever and descended from the bed,
Which she had entered on the day the divorce writ was nullified.

(69)

מָה רַבּוּ חַסְדֵי בְנֵי עִירָהּ בַּחֲלוֹתָהּ: כָּל הָעֶם מִקּצָה חָרְדוּ אֵלֶיהָ, גַּבַּאי "בִּקוּר-חוֹלִים" יוֹם-יוֹם בָּא לִרְאוֹתָהּ וְנָשִׁים רַחֲמָנִיּוֹת טִפְּחוּ עוֹלֶלֶיהָ. רוֹפְאֵי אֱלִיל! מַה-יּוֹעִילוּ נִטְפֵי רְפוּאוֹת לְשֶׁבֶר גָּדוֹל כַּיָם, לְמַחֲלָה בְּלִי מְצָרִים! רְחֲמִים וּצְדָקוֹת לֹא יַעֲשׁוּ יְשׁוּעוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ עֵיפָתָה צַלְמָוֶת וְלֹא-סְדָרִים: שָׁשַׁר וָטִיחַ לַשְּׁמִיר וָשַׁיִת אָם הַנֶּגַע עוֹמֵד בְּקִירוֹת הַבַּית.

How numerous the mercies of her townsmen during her illness:
All the people from every corner rushed to her side,
The Gabbai of "The Bikkur Cholim society" came daily to see her,
And compassionate women took care of her children.
Quack doctors! Of what use are droplets of medicine
For an affliction as large as the sea, for an illness without bounds?
Compassion and acts of charity will not bring salvation
In a society benighted unto death and without social safeguards.
Vermilion and plaster will not arrest the inroads of thorns and
thistles

If the plague has already spread to the inner walls of the house.*

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^{*} There is no remedy, according to the Bible, but to destroy the house.

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כְּכַדּוּר עוֹפֶּרָת יֻשָּׁל מִכְּלִי קְרָב בַּאֲשֶׁר יִפְּגַע שָׁם הָרָג וְאַבְדָן נָמָוֶת, כֵּן נָגַע דְּבּוּר מְפּוֹצֵץ זֶה מִפִּי הָרָב בִּלְבַב הָאִמְלָלָה שְׁפָּה יוֹשֶׁבָת אֵידְ הָיְתָה כְּרָגַע כָּל תִּקְנְתָה לִשְׁאִיָּה: פִּתְאֹם אֲחָזָהּ הַשְּׁבָץ וַתִּלְפֶּת וֹיִּכְלוֹ לַצִּשְׁמָה הַיּוֹצֵאת מִן הַגְּוִייָּה נִפְלָה לָאָרֶץ-מֵתָה אוֹ מִתְעַלֶּפֶת: וַיִּשְׂאָהָ וַיּּוֹצִיאָהָ עַל כַּפָּיִם.

The way a lead ball shot from a military weapon Wreaks killing, destruction, and death wheresoever it lands, So did this crushing remark from the mouth of the rabbi Impact the heart of the wretched woman sitting there. How had all her hope turned to calamity in an instant: Suddenly she was seized by a paroxysm and she fainted... The rabbi motioned to his two attendants And they lifted her up and carried her out on bodily.

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כָּל הַנִּצְבִים שָׁם הִתְּבּוֹנְנוּ הָאָנֶן,
רְגְזוּ אִישׁ תַּחְתָּיו וַיְּכַפֵּם צֵלְמָנֶת,
כִּי גַּם נַפְּשָׁם הַיְּבַשָּה, לִבָּם הָאָבֶן,
יִדְעוּ כִּי דִין זֶה לָהּ דִין מִשְׁפַּט-מָנֶת.
יְדְעוּ כִּי דִין זֶה לָהּ דִין מִשְׁפַּט-מָנֶת.
יְדְעוּ כִּי דִין זֶה לָהּ בַּבָּרָק:
יְדְעוּ פִי אֵין מוּשִׁיעֵ:
שְׁמַע פַאבִּי וַיִּתְעַבָּר, שִׁנִּיו חָרָק,
שְׁהַ מְצֵרָה,
יּתְמִימֵי-לֵב סְפְדוּ לָהּ: ״הוֹי אִשָּׁה מְצֵרָה,
לֹא נַחְשׁוֹל בַּיָּם טִבְּעֵדְ כִּי אִם יוּד זְעֵירָא"
לֹא נַחְשׁוֹל בַּיָּם טִבְּעֵדְ כִּי אִם יוּד זְעֵירָא"

Everyone in attendance observed the injustice,
They all shook in their tracks and a deathly pallor covered them,
For even their dessicated souls, their hearts of stone,
Knew that this verdict was a death sentence for her.
And within the city the rumor spread like lightning
Each mouth uttering: "The agunah is going to stay an agunah."
When Fabi heard he grew irate, clenched his teeth,
But he kept silent because he knew there was no recourse or savior:
The pure of heart lamented for her: "Alas, oh suffering woman;
Not some huge wave at sea was it that drowned you —
only a tiny yud!"

(64)

הַדָּיָּן הַקּוֹרֵא, מְקַבָּל, יוֹדֵעַ חֵ"ן,
הָחֱלִיט עַל פִּי ״הָאֲרְ"י" כִּי הָלֵּל נִכְתָּב חָסֵר,
גִּם הַשִּׁנִי עַל פִּי ״בָּדֶק הַבַּיִת" אָמַר כֵּן וּשְׁנֵיהֶם גִּלּוּ דַעְתָּם כִּי הַגֵּט כָּשַׁר,
אַדְּ רַב נָפְסִי הָחֱלִיט כִּי הַלֵּל מָלֵא
פְּדַעַת הַזַּ"ם וְהַסַּ"ם עַל פִּי הַשַּׁלְחָן-עָרוּדְּ,
וַיִּגְעַר בָּם וַיּאמֶר כִּי בְעֵינָיו יִפְּלֵא
אֵידְ שָׁכְחוּ גַּם שְׁנֵיהֶם פְּסַק-דִּין עָרוּדְ.
וּבְּכֵן עָמֵד עַל דַּעְתִּוּ כַּדְּרְבָן וּכְעֵץ שָׁתוּל
וַיִּקְרָא בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל יְהוּדִית: ״הַ גַּ ט פָּ ס וּ ל"
וַיִּקְרָא בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל יְהוּדִית: ״הַ גַּ ט פָּ ס וּ ל"

ך Th

The judge who read it aloud,

a man versed in Kabbalah and other esoterica,

Decided on the authority of the "Ari" that

Hillel is indeed to be written defective, without the *yud*, The second judge, too, said the same thing on the authority of the

ond judge, too, said the same thing on the authority of the

"bedek habayit," [a halachic work by Yosef Karo] —

The two of them expressed their opinions that the *get* was valid, But Rav Vofsi decided that Hillel should be written with the *yud*,

As was the opinion of the "Zam" and the "Sam" [two books about

divorce], based on the *Shulḥan Aruch*. And he scolded them saying that he was amazed

How the two of them had forgotten a formalized ruling.

And thus he held to his opinion like an iron spur,

and like a firmly rooted tree [ke'ets shosul],

And he proclaimed in a loud voice in Yiddish:

"The get is posul, invalid!"

(65)

נֶגַע צָרַעַת כִּי תִּהְיֶה בָאָדָם,
כָּל חֹלִי כָּל מַדְנָח כִּי יַשִּׁיגַהוּ,
יַשׁ תּוְפָאִים בָּאָרֶץ וּקְסָמִים בְּיָדָם.
יַשׁ תִּקְנָה לַחוֹלִים כִּי יִנְשְׁעוּ
כִּי יָחֱטָא אִישׁ לָאִישׁ אוֹ אִישׁ לֵאלֹהַ
וּפְלְלוֹ הַשִּׁוֹפֵט מִכְּדֵי רְשְׁעָתוֹ,
יַשׁ שׁוֹפֵט אַחֵר גָּבֹהַ עַל גָּבֹהַ
יִשׁ שׁוֹפֵט אַחַר גָּבֹהַ עַל גָּבֹהַ
וִישַׁנָּה דִּין הַנִּשְׁפָּט כִּי תָבוֹא צַעֻקַתוֹּי
אַדְּ דָּבָר מִפִּי הָרַב - מִי יְשַׁנֵּהוּ,
וּלְמִי יִפְנוּ הָאוֹבְדִים וְישַׁנְּעוּיִיִּ

If a man have the affliction of leprosy, If any illness or disease befall him,

There are doctors in the world with remedies at hand,

There is hope for the ailing that they may be saved.

If a man sin against his fellow man or against God

And the judge sentence him more severely than his crime,

There is another judge and yet another above him

Who will alter the sentence of the condemned man when his appeal is heard:

But a statement from the mouth of the rabbi — who can alter it, And to whom can the doomed ones turn and raise an outcry?

(1)

(60)

לְפָנִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל בִּחְיוֹת חַתּוֹרָה אוֹר,
לא קַרְדִּם לַחְפֹּר בּוֹ, לא חֹטֶר נַּאֲנָה,
הָיוּ הַגְּאוֹנִים מְתֵי מִסְפָּר בְּכָל דּר נְדֹר,
כַּלֶּם אַנְשֵׁי סְדָשׁ וּשְׁמָם לָהֶם נַּאֲנָה:
עַדְּ כִּי בְשֵׁם זֶּה יִתְּקַלְּסוּ הַצְּעִירִים,
אַף יַשׁ לָנוּ גְּאוֹנִים מִגְּאוֹנִים שׁוֹנִים:
גְּאוֹנִים אֲמִתִּים וּגְאוֹנִים אַדִּירִים
וּגְאוֹנִי גְאוֹנִים, שְׁנַיִּם וּשְׁלִישִׁים,
וּגְאוֹנֵי גְאוֹנִים, שְׁנַיִּם וּשְׁלִישִׁים,
וּמְאוֹרוֹת וּנְשָׁרִים, עַמּוּדִים, פַּשִּישִׁים.

Aforetimes when the Torah was a light in Israel,
Not a spade to dig with, not a pedigree of bravado,
Geonim (Torah geniuses) were only very few in number
out of each generation,

All of them were holy individuals whose reputations preceded them;

Now — the number of *geonim* has equaled the number of rabbis So much so, that even our younger rabbis laud themselves with this title.

We even have *geonim* of various and sundry varieties; "True *geonim*" and "formidable *geonim*"

And "the greatest of all *geonim*," to the second and third degree, As well as "luminaries" and "eagles," "pillars," "hammers."

(61)

וּרְאַיָּלוֹן רָב מְמַּדְרֵנָה הַמְּעֻלֶּה,
לֹא נָּאוֹן פָּשׁוּט אַדְּ נָּאוֹן נֶאְדָּרִי
אָחָד הַמְּיוּחָד מִיחִידֵי הַסְּגֻלָּה
וּכְבוֹד שֵׁם תִּפְאַרְתּוֹּ רַב נָפְסִי הַכָּזָרִי,
אַדְּ מַדּוּעַ ״כָּזָרִי״ שַׁם מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹי הַאְמְנָם אָבִיו תַּתַּרִי מִצָּרַע יִשְׁמָעֵאלִי לַחְלִיט אֶת זֹאת לֹא אֶתֵּן חִכִּי לַחֲטוֹא, אֲבָל כְּבָר שָׁמַעְנוּ מִפִּי דֹרְשֵׁי רְשׁוּמוֹת אֲבָל כְּבָר שָׁמַעְנוּ מִפִּי דֹרְשֵׁי רְשׁוּמוֹת

And in Ayalon there is a rabbi of the most superior rank, Not an ordinary gaon but a "gaon par excellence,"
The "one most extraordinary of the chosen few"
And the name of His Excellency is Vofsi the Kuzari.
"Vofsi" he is called because that is his given Jewish name, But why is "Kuzari" his family name?
Is his father really a Tatar of Ishmaelite [Muslim] extraction? I dare not make such an assertion
Although we have indeed heard from antiquarians
That Sennacherib came and intermingled the nationalities.

25

(62)

אַדְּ נִ שְׁ מֵ ת רַב נָפְסִי נַדַּאי תַּתַּרִית,
אַין בָּהּ אַף אַחַת מְן הַמִּדּוֹת הַפְּשָׁבָּחוֹת
שְׁנִּצְטַיְּנוּ בָּהֶן זֶרַע קֹדָשׁ, בְּנֵי בְרִית:
עַל מְמוֹן יִשְׁרָאֵל עֵינוֹ לֹא תָחוֹס,
דֵּרֶךְ שָׁלוֹם לֹא זֵדְע, חֶמְלָה לוֹ זֶרָה:
זִדַע רַק חֲרוֹב וְהַחֲרֵם, הַטְרִיף נָאֱסוֹר:
זִדַע רַק חֲרוֹב וְהַחֲרֵם, הַטְרִיף נָאֱסוֹר:
זִּבְלְאִיּוֹת לִפְסָקִיוֹ לֹא יָדָע מַחֲסוֹר,
בַּיְצֵא לוֹ שֵׁם כְּרֹאשׁ הַמַּחֲמִירִים,
נַיִּצֵא לוֹ שֵׁם כְּרֹאשׁ הַמַּחֲמִירִים,
נַיִּמֵנָה בֵּין הַגָּאוֹנִים הָאַדִּירִים.

Pe that as it may, Rab Vofsi's soul is definitely Tatar,
There is not whithin it even one of the excellent qualities
That distinguished the holy people, the Jews [bnei brit]:
For the money of Jews he has no compassion,
He's unaware of the principle of seeking a harmonious resolution,
pity is alien to him;
He knows only to destroy and confiscate,
to declare food unfit [treif] and forbidden:
And with his erudition in the Talmud and decisors [poskim]
He is never lacking for proof-texts for his decisions.
He acquired a reputation as the foremost strict interpreter
of the Law
And hence was accounted one of the "formidable geonim."

(63)

בַּיּוֹם הָרָאשׁוֹן לְסֵדֶּר ״נִצְּבִים״ קָרָא רַב נָפְסִי אֵלָיו אֶת שְׁנִי דַיָּנָיו, נִיּפְתַּח הָאֶחָד אֶת צְרוֹר הַפִּכְתָּבִים יַהַכּּל כַּהֲלֶכָה, -אָמֵר- כָּל רֵעוּתָא אָיִן: הַשְּלִיחַ יוּכַל לְמָסְרוֹ אֶל הַנִּגְּרָשֶׁת״. אַדְּ כִּמְעֵט שָׁם רַב נָפְסִי בַּגֵּט עֵיִן קַרָא אֶל הַשְּלִיחַ: אַל תִּקְרַב לָגְשֶׁת: הַטֶּרָם תִּרְאוּ כִּי הַגֵּט אֵינֶנּוּ כָּשֵר: הַשֶּם הָלֵל כָּתוּב בּוֹ בְּלִי יוּ״ד, חָסֵר.

On the Sunday preceding the synagogue chanting of "Nitzavim,"
Rav Vofsi summoned to him his two judges,
And one of them opened the bundle of letters
And he took out the get and read it aloud.

"It's precisely according to law," he said.

"There's not a thing wrong with it.
The courier can deliver it to the woman who is being divorced."
However, Rav Vofsi, having only barely glanced at the get,
Declared to the courier: "Don't you even come close!"
Can't you all see that the divorce paper is not valid:
The name Hillel is written without the letter yud, defective.

Summer 2006

באותן שנים, כגון המחזה יהמסי (1869) והאליגוריה יהסוסהי (1872). נראה, שהסיפור נפל אז יבין שני כסאותי: מחד־גיסא הוא נוצר ביידיש, במסגרת של ספרות שעדיין לא יצאה מחיתוליה, היתה נטולת מעמד ציבורי־תרבותי ונועדה לצריכה דידאקטית קצרת־טווח ותו לא. מאידך גיסא, נתגלתה בו, כבר בנוסחו העוּבָּרי, איזו מורכבות, שלא עלתה בקנה אחד לא עם ציפיותיהם של משכילים ולא עם הרגלי הקריאה של הקורא העממי. זה האחרון היה מוכן, למשל, למורכבות האליגורית של יהסוסהי, שגירתה את הסקרנות האינטלקטואלית ואת חוש הפיענוח של חניך בית־המדרש. יפישקהי, לעומתה, העמיד אותו לפני מורכבות, שהרגלי הלמדנות היהודית שלו לא הקלו עליו את ההתמודדות עימה.

הסיפור נחלק באופן ברור וכאילו גם שרירותי לשני חלקים מקבילים. שווים באורכם. הראשוו שבהם עמד בסימו שלטונו של מנדלי מוכר ספרים ובסימן שיחת החולין הלגלגנית־השנונה שלו. הוא הכיל סאטירה קטלנית, שעסקה בנושאים אחדים, אך חשפה בייחוד את עיוותם של חיי האישות בישראל. בחלק השני ניטלה רשות הדיבור ממנדלי הביקורתי והמפוכח ונמסרה לפישקה התם, קורבנה החף מפשע של החברה היהודית הפגומה. פישקה, שהעלה בסיפור תלאותיו תמונת מציאות איומה פי כמה מזו שתוארה בידי מנדלי – תמונה של עולם תחתון יהודי שטוף בפאראזיטיות, זימה ופשע – עורר בסיפורו הזדהות והוליד לעבר יקאתארזיסי רגשי. הסיפור אף הפד את נושא העיוות של חיי האישוּת על פיו והציב במקומו פרשה של אהבה טהורה, מלאת רוך רגשי וכמעט נטולת יסוד מיני. היתה זו כפילות שטפחה על פני כל ציפיותיהם של הקוראים. החלק הראשון, הסאטירי, אולי התאים ליעדים שקבעה ההשכלה לספרות יידיש ולדימוי הרווח של אברמוביץ כמספר סארקאסטי, אשר "דברי חידודיו יורדים חדרי בטן וירנינוּ־לב גם יחדייי. אך איש לא ידע מה לעשות בסיפור האהבה שבחלק השני. כה רחוק היה סיפור זה ממתכונת הרומאנס, ששלטה ברומאני ההשכלה העבריים (לרבות הרומאו העברי של אברמוביץ עצמו, יהאבות והבניםי, שהתפרסם בשלמותו רק שנה אחת לפני פרסומו של יפישקהי). גיבוריו היאוהביםי – קבצן חיגר כמעט מפלצתי בצורתו, וקבצנית גיבנת אומללה – כה רחוקים היו לא רק מן היאוהבים: היפים, הצעירים, הרומאנטיים, האידיאליים של יאהבת

 ראה הדימוי של אברמוביץ בדיווחו של יייל מוזסזון (הוא יייל סמולנסקין, אחי הסופר) על פגישה עימו בעת מסע בערי תחום המושב ברוסיה. השחר, שנה שישית (תרלייה), עמי־585.

ציוןי ויאשמת שומרוןי המקראיים, אלא גם מאלה של יעיט צבועי ויהאבות והבניםי, העוסקים בהווה. קשה היה להלום גם את ההתרוצצות בין סארקאזם לפאתוס, בין תיאורו של פישקה (בחלק ההראשון) כמין דחליל מגוחך לבין התגלותו (בחלק השני) כגיבור פאתיטי של סיפור אהבה. תערובת טונאלית מעין זו עדיין לא נקלטה, כנראה, באוזנו של הקורא היהודי בסוף שנות השישים או בראשית שנות השבעים של המאה התשע־עשרה.

אבל דווקא תערובת זו היא שגרמה להצלחתו של הסיפור כשהופיע מחדש, בנוסח מורחב בהרבה, בשנת 1888. גרמו לכך התמורות העמוקות שהתחוללו במשך שני העשורים שחלפו, ובייחוד בשנים שלאחר יהסופות בנגבי (הפוגרומים של 2—1881), ושינו הן את האקלים האידיאולוגי שבו נוצרה עתה הספרות היהודית והן את התשתית הפואטית־האסתיטית של ספרות זו.

האקלים האידיאולוגי אחרי הפרעות וההיוואשות של האינטליגנציה היהודית מתקוות ההתאזרחות היהודית במדינה רוסית ליבראלית, היה טעון מתח של הלוד־רוח לאומי. האינטליגנציה הסתייגה עתה מן הביקורת הסאטירית הכוללת, שמתחה ספרות ההשכלה על החיים היהודיים העממיים־המסורתיים ועל מוסדותיהם (הרבנות, היקהלי המימסד החסידי־הצדיקי). גם אלה מתוכה שלא הלכו בידרך התשובהי הלאומית עד סופה, ציפו מן הספרות לעיצוב מורכב יותר של חיים אלה, להתרחקות מפשטנות של ישחור־לבוי ולריכוד הנימה הסאטירית באמצעות ההומור והפאתוס. מבחינה אסתיטית עמדה הספרות בעידו של סנטימנטליזם ולעומת הדומינאנטה הראציו־ נאליסטית בספרות ההשכלה שקדמה לה). תערובת של סאטירה וסנטימנט יכלה להתקבל עכשיו כסימן לעושר היצירה, ולא, כמו קודם לכן, כסימו לחוסר אחדותה. תערובת כזאת היתה מקובלת במיוחד בספרות יידיש, שהחלה לקנות לעצמה ראשית הכרה במעמדה כספרות אמנותית וכמוסד בעל ערך לאומי. בעוד ספרות זו צמודה, על־פי עצם המדיום הלשוני שלה, אל חיי היום־יום היהודיים שרבו בהם – לדעת הכול -- הליקויים התובעים הוקעה ותיקוו. הרי יכלה. שוב מתוד זיקתה לאותו מדיום, גם לחדור לינפשי העם ההומה ביסוריה ובתקוותה לעתיד טוב יותר.

אמנם, גם עתה עדיין נשמעו קולות של מסתייגים מיפישקהי (דוד פרישמן), אך קול המחייבים גבר, ומחייבים אלה באו עתה הן מקרב האינטליגנציה הלאומית המודרנית הדוברת והכותבת רוסית (שי דובנוב, מי מרגוליס, אשר לו הקדיש המחבר את הסיפור בנוסחו

המורחב) והן מתוך ספרות יידיש עצמה. שלום־עליכם הצעיר הצביע על יפישקהי כעל מודֶל קלאסי של ירומאן יהודיי אותנטי (לעומת רומאני הישונדי, שזכו אז לתפוצה רבה בקרב קוראי יידיש). עיקר הסיפור לגביו היה דווקא בפרשת האהבה של פישקה וביילה הגיבנת, שהמחבר לגביו היה דווקא בפרשת האהבה של פישקה וביילה הגיבנת, שהמחבר פיתח בה את המוטיב הרומאנטי בלי שיסלף את תיאור המציאות החברתית הלאומית ובלי שייגביהי את דמויות היאוהביםי ויעקור אותן מן הסביבה העממית הריאלית. שלום־עליכם העלה את יפישקהי על מן, הציגו כאתגר ספרותי (אשר לו ניסה להיענות בירומאנים היהודייםי שלו עצמו) וייחס לו ערך ספרותי וחינוכי עצום. בזכותו בעיקר יעד לימנדלי מוכר ספריםי תפקיד של יסבאי ואב־מייסד, דמות המרכז בפנתיאון הספרותי הקטן, שהחל להקים כדי לשוות לספרות יידיש הצעירה הדר וסמכות של מוסד תרבותי בעל מסורת וקלאסיקונים משל עצמו. יפישקה החיגרי תרם עתה תרומה מכרעת לראשיתו של תהליך הקאנוניזאציה של היסבאי מנדלי.

בעשור הראשון של המאה העשרים, כשתהליך זה הגיע לשיאו, הופיע הסיפור מחדש בנוסחיו הסופיים – העברי (לנוסח הסופי שהוא מעשה־ידי אברמוביץ עצמו, קדם, כאמור, נוסח מתורגם בידי חיינ ביאליק) והיידי. התגובות עליו עתה עמדו שוב בסימן של שניות. מחד־גיסא תפס הסיפור מקום ודאי בלב הקורפוס הקאנוני של יצירת אברמוביץ, ובו נתגלתה במלוא זוהרה התכונה האמנותית העיקרית, שייחסה הביקורת עתה ליצירה זו – היכולת המופלאה ילציירי את הנוף והאדם בדרך שיש בה גם דיוק חיצוני־פיסי וגם כאראקטריסטיקה תמציתית של האובייקט המצויר; אך מאידך גיסא, לא עמד הסיפור – ובייחוד חלקו העוסק באהבת פישקה וביילה – בקריטריונים של הסיפורת הפסיכולוגית המתוחכמת, שהמבקרים ציפו עתה למימושם בספרות היהודית בת־הזמן. ממילא לא יכלה הערכתם ליפישקהי להיות נלחבת וחד־משמעית כהערכתו של שלום־עליכם בשעתו. הם גם נרתעו מן הרצף המפותל והמפוצל של הספר, שעמד בסתירה לאידיאל של הרומאן יהמעוגל היטבי, שבו קו העלילה נקבע על־פי אופיו של הגיבור או על־פי ההתנגשות שבין אופי זה לסביבה, ויוצר, מתוך כך, רצף סיבתי ברור בזמן ובמרחב.

מפיצול פנימי זה שבהערכה נמלטו המבקרים לתיזה, שבשיפוט

יצירתו של אברמוביץ – ובייחוד בשיפוט יפישקהי־יספר הקבצניםי יש להשעות את קני־המידה האסתיטיים־היאירופייםי המקובלים לגבי הזיאנר הרומאניסטי, שכן הללו אינם חלים. כביכול, על אמנות סיפור זו שהיא ייהודיתי ימקוריתי ויראשוניתי. כבר ב־1901 הכריז ראובו בריינין: ייבשעה שאנוכי קורא את סיפורי מנדלי הנני מוותר על כל תביעותי הספרותיותיי. ב־1910. בעיצומה של המולת הייובלי של מנדלי, אמר דוד פרישמן על יספר הקבצניםי: יימובן מאליו: אין אנוּ באים כלל לבקש אצל מנדלי סיפור של מעשה לפי כל החוקים והדינים עם מיני אהבה צרופה ועם טיפוסים בולטים, כי הלא עסק[---]לנו עם איש כמנדלי, עם אותו היהודי בעל הזקן הצהוב והחד, שכבר נזרקה בו קצת שיבה. אדם כזה, כשאבוא לדבר עמו על דבר חוקים ודינים מקובלים, ישמע לי ולא ישים אלי לב כלליי. * והרחיק לכת מכולם ביאליה. אשר במאמרו ימנדלי ושלושת הכרכיםי מ־1912 ציווה על קוראו של אברמוביץ יישלא ישכח לשכוח את כללי יתורת הספרותי שהעלה מבית רבויי בשעה שהוא בא ללמוד ידףי בגמרתו של אמן יהודי יראשוןי כמנדלי; סופר אשר ייאין למדים עליו מהיקש וגזרה שווהיי.

כך נקבע ליספר הקבצנים', עם מיצויו של תהליך הקאנוניזאציה של אברמוביץ ויצירתו, מעמד אמביוואלנטי של יצירה קלאסית, 'בירה נהדרה' (ביאליק), אשר אסור, בכל זאת, לבחון אותה בכלים המקובלים בבדיקת יצירות בנות סוגה (רומאנים) ומדרגתה (יצירות מופת).

ג. מחלוקת בפירוש המבנה

בביקורת ובמחקר הספרותיים, שהתפתחו במשך שבעים השנים שחלפו מפטירתו של אברמוביץ (1917), התעורר מדי פעם מחדש הדיון על פיצול פנימי זה, שהוסתר מתחת לפני השטח של הקונסנזוס החגיגי, ועורר שוב גלי פולמוס ומבוכה. יפישקהי־יספר הקבצניםי שרוי עד היום במעמד המוזר של קלאסיקה שנויה בוויכוח. בתחום ההערכה הביקורתית הוא זכה לתגובות מנוגדות זו לזו באורח דראסטי. בצידה של ידעת־רובי, שהפליגה בסופרלאטיבים (י״ח ברנר, יעקב פיכמן, שי ניגר, מאיר ווינר, גרשון שקד), הופיעה גם ידעת־מיעוטי, שהרחיקה ניגר, מאיר ווינר, גרשון שקד), הופיעה גם ידעת־מיעוטי, שהרחיקה

ראה הפרק יפישקע דער קרומערי בסידרת מאמריו של שלום־עליכם ידער יודישער דלות אין די בעסטע ווערקע פון אונזערע פּאָלקס־שרייבערי, פּאָלקסבלאט 1888, התוספת הספרותית, גלי 39, עמי 1076 – 1090.

^{3.} כתבי ראובן בריינין (הוצאת ועד היובל, ניו־יורק. 1922 – 1940) וכרך אי, עמי 174.

בל כתבי דוד פרישמן (חוצאת לילי פרישמן, וארשה – ניו יורק – תל אביב, 1929 – 1935), כרך ו, צג – צד.

^{5.} כתבי ח.נ. ביאליק (הוצאת דביר, תל־אביב תרצייה), כרך ב, עמי של.

ויחידות התיאורים הנופיים. המסגרת הסיפורית הכוללת משמשת רק מעין תירוץ לשזירת האפיזודות הבודדות.

ב) כנגד הגישה האטומיסטית יצאו חוקרים, שנטו לגישה שאפשר לתארה כהיסטורית־זיאנרית. הללו ליגלגו לאטומיסטים, שהפכו, לדבריהם. את יפישקהי מיצירה רצופה ואחדותית לייסתם מין אלמאנאד ספרותייי. הם כפרו בהצגתו של אברמוביץ כאמן יהודי יראשוניי בלתי קשור במסורות הרומאו האירופי, וקבעו שראייה כזו היתה אפשרית רק מכוחו של עיוורון ספרותי־היסטורי. פרישמן, בריינין וביאליק השוו את הרומאנים של אברמוביץ ובתוכם את יספר הקבצניםי לדוגמאות המופת של הרומאן הפסיכולוגי הימעוגלי של המחצית השניה של המאה התשע־עשרה; ומשום כך לא יכלו שלא להגיע להנחה בדבר חוסר סדר סטרוקטוראלי ביצירת אברמוביץ מזה ולהנחה בדבר מקוריותה ויראשוניותהי היהודיות מזה. אבל אברמוביץ הרומאניסטו פעל לפי חוקות הזיאנר הרומאניסטי על פי שלבים מוקדמים יותר שלו ; סיפוריו נוצרו בתוך חברה שונה לחלוטין מזו של ארצות אירופה המפותחות בסוף המאה התשע־עשרה. חברה כמעט פיאודאלית במבנה הכלכלי שלה, שהיתה שרויה לא בעידן הרכבות והתקשורת האלקטרונית אלא בעידן העגלות והתקשורת המסורה עדיין בידי עוברי אורח, נודדים ימקצועייםי כגון רוכלים ומוכרי־ ספרים המסיעים את סחורתם בעגלות כִּילַה ישנות מעיירה לעיירה. בהתאם לכד התבסס אברמוביץ על מבנה הרומאו ומוסכמותיו כפי שגובשו במאה השמונה־עשרה ולא במאה התשע־עשרה. בייחוד התבסס (ביספר הקבצניםי) על שתי תבניות זיאנריות האופייניות בפתיחותו ובאפיזודיות השלטת בהן לרומאן המאה השמונה־עשרה הטרום־פסיכולוגי: מחד גיסא, התבנית של הרומאן הפיקארסקי, או ליתר דיוק, ירומאן הדרךי (ההבדל: אמנס גיבורו של רומאן הדרך, כגיבורו של הרומאן הפיקארסקי, נודד אף הוא ממקום למקום ללא מטרה וכיווו. אד אינו יפיקארוי – נוכל: ואכן, פישקה התם בוודאי אינו יפיקארוי). ומאידד גיסא. התבנית של רומאו הקוזרי (causerie). היפטפוטי האינטימי של מספר. שאינו דבק בסיפור המעשה אלא סוטה ממנו ומשוחח על דא ועל הא ככל העולה על דעתו (דוגמת היסוד:

לכת עד כדי ניסיון לעקור את היצירה מתוך היקאנון' הקלאסי של ספרותנו ולדון אותה להשכחה — הן בגלל יפגמיה' האמנותיים והן בגלל יליקוייה' האידיאיים. קולה של ידעת מיעוט' זו נשמע בעיקר בשנות ה'רביזיה' הספרותית שלאחר מלחמת העולם השניה, שעה שהמשורר היידי יעקב גלאטשטיין יצא בהתקפת־מחץ על יספר הקבצנים' והמבקר העברי אברהם קריב כלל ספר זה בין הנאשמים הספרותיים העיקריים בשנאת ישראל ובעיוות פני המציאות היהודית המסורתית במזרח־אירופה. אולם התייחסות שלילית אל הספר ניתן למצוא גם לפני עונת הרביזיה ואף לאחריה.

בתחום האינטרפרטאציה נתגלעו מחלוקות חריפות בתיאור היצירה, בסימון התשתית המבנית שלה, בקביעת מוקדה הרעיוני והדומינאנטה הפואטית, הקובעת את כלל התיפקוד של המערכת האמנותית שלה. את הבעיות העיקריות שהטרידו את הפרשנים ניתן לסדר לאורכם של כמה צירים, ואלה העיקריים שבהם: ציר התימה, ציר הגיבור, ציר הזיאנר וציר המבנה. נוח ביותר לפתוח בתיאורו של האחרון שבצירים אלה, שכן סביבו הצטברו כמה מן הדיונים המחקריים החשובים והמשפיעים ביותר שעסקו ביפישקהי־יספר הקבצנים', ולא עוד אלא שאף ניתן למיין דיונים אלה לסוגים או ליאסכולות', העומדים זה לעומת זה בסדר ענייני שיש בו גם רצף לכרונולוגי.

חמש גישות או יאסכולותי הסתמנו במשך השנים בדיון במבנה של היצירה:

א) הגישה האטומיסטית. מקורה בביקורת של ראשית המאה העשרים, ובייחוד בזו של דוד פרישמן. גישה זו קבעה, כי בכלל יצירת אברמוביץ, אך בעיקר ביספר הקבצנים׳, אין למבנה הכולל של היחידות הסיפוריות השלמות משמעות וערך. עיקרה האמנותי של יצירה זו הוא, כאמור, ביציור׳ הפרטים, ביחידות התיאוריות הזעירות, ולא במסכת הכוללת. החוקר היידי שי ניגֶר, שהיה המייצג הבולט ביותר של גישה זו בתקופה שבין שתי מלחמות העולם, השתמש ביפישקה׳ כבעדות־המלך לטענותיה של האסכולה האטומיסטית. לדבריו, ניכרים יאילוץ׳ וימלאכותיות׳ לא רק בחיבור שני החלקים העיקריים של הסיפור (סיפור מנדלי וסיפור פישקה) אלא גם בחיבור היחידות בתוך כל אחד משני החלקים ובייחוד בתוך הראשון שבהם. משמע, עיקרו של הסיפור בליטוש וב׳חיטוב׳ של יחידותיו הקבצנים וכו׳) מחידות ההווי (תיאורי המרחץ, הפונדק, היריד, הווי הקבצנים וכו׳)

^{6.} ראה שי ניגָר, מענדעלע מוכר ספרים (הוצאת ליימ שטיין, שיקאגו 1936), עמי 1936 - 153.

^{7.} יי גולדברג, ידער וועג־ראָמאָן און דער אינטימער סטיל – וועגן ייפישקע דער קרומערייי, **שריפטן, ווייסרוסישע מלוכע אוניווערסיטעט**, כרך אי (מינסק 1928), עמי 47.

ד. מחלוקת בפירוש התימה והמשמעות

ציר המבנה בפרשנות המחקרית של יספר הקבצניםי מצטלב איפוא עם הצירים האחרים, ובראש ובראשונה עם ציר התימה. אין אנו יכולים להגיע לשום מסקנה בעניין טיבו ותיפקודו של הסדר המסובך שבעלילת הסיפור קודם שאנו מבררים את המהות והמשמעות של תכניו הסיפוריים והאידיאיים. דא עקא, שגם בתחום הפרשנות התימאטית עומדת הספרות הביקורתית־המחקרית, העוסקת ביספר הקבצניםי, בסימן המחלוקת. גם כאן מתפצלת הביקורת למשהו מעין יאסכולותי מנוגדות, המקבילות ליאסכולותי בפרשנות המבנה, אם כי אינן חופפות להן בהכרח. אף כאן יכולים אנו לדבר על ארבע גישות, שניתן לסדרן זו לעומת זו בסדר ענייני, שהוא, במידה מסוימת, כרונולוגי.

א) נציגי הגישה האטומיסטית בתיאור המבנה היו פטורים. לכאורה, מן הצורך להצביע על איזו דומינאנטה תימאטית אחת. החולשת על כלל המערכת התימאטית של הספור. באורח עקרוני הצטמצמה מבחינתם הרציפות של הסיפור במרכיב אחד ויחיד שלו: אמנות התיאור או היציורי של הסופר. ימנדלי הציירי – המתבונו בעולם שלפניו ומצייר לפיו בדייקנות ריאליסטית עילאית מראות טבע ומחזות הווי, טיפוסי יהודים ובעלי חינם – הוא אותו מנדלי עצמו בכל אשר ילך. העין היא אותה עין ומשיחת המכחול היא אותה משיחת מכחול, ובקביעות זו של העין הרואה והקו המצויר מסתמן המכנה המשותף העיקרי של יצירת האמן. אומנם, נשאלת השאלה, במה, אם כן, נבדל סיפור אחד של אברמוביץ מסיפור אחר! הרי אמנות יהציורי שלו אחת היא בכל יצירותיו הבשלות. על שאלה זו לא השיבה הביקורת האוטומיסטית, וקרוב לוודאי שאף לא ראתה עצמה חייבת בתשובה עליה; שכן באמת היתה סבורה, שההבדלים בין הסיפורים השונים הם משניים בחשיבותם, ושאין להם השפעה על הרבדים האמנותיים העיקריים של יצירת אברמוביץ.

כמובן, גם ביקורת זו הצביעה על כך, שמנדלי היצייר׳ התרכז בסיפוריו בנושא כולל אחד קבוע: החיים היהודיים העממיים־ המסורתיים במזרח אירופה באמצע המאה התשע־עשרה. מאחדותו של האובייקט התחייבה גם רציפות תימאטית מסוימת, שניתן לכנותה בשם הרציפות העיירתית, או הרציפות היהודית־העממית. רציפויות אלו הביאו לא רק להכללות המרובות בדבר טיבו או מנהגו של יהיהודי׳, שמנדלי מנמר בהן את שיחתו, אלא גם ליייהוד׳ הנוף בתיאוריו של מנדלי; אותו יייהוד׳, שדוגמאותיו המפורסמות ביותר

נכללו דווקא בפרקי הפתיחה של יספר הקבצניםי (ראה פרקים ב, ז).
אלא שרציפות תימאטית כוללת ונרחבת זאת איפשרה, לדעת
האטומיסטים, תנועה חופשית ביותר בתוך מסגרתה, ובתנועה זו גילה
אברמוביץ את נטייתו לעקור מנושא לנושא ומתמונה לתמונה. דוד
אברמוביץ את נטייתו לעקור מנושא לנושא ומתמונה לתמונה. דוד
פרישמן, אבי הגישה האטומיסטית, אמנם הודה בקיומו של מכנה־
משותף תימאטי רחב ביספר הקבצניםי: "יהדלות הנוראה של אומה
שלמה". אך הודאה זו לא הניאה אותו מן הטענה, שהספר הוא מעין
אוסף אתני־פולקלוריסטי מקיף, המכיל "מעשיות רבות, אפיזודים
רבים, מאורעות רבים, חזיונות ומחזות רבים", שאף כי כולם משקפים
את תרבות העוני של העיירה היהודית, אין הם מצטרפים זה לזה
במסגרת המלכדת של תימה וסוזיט אמיתיים. הספר, לפיו, הוא "מין
היסטוריה של קולטורה של אומה שלמה במקום ידוע ובזמן ידוע ביחד
עם ציורי טיפוסים רבים ושונים על כל פרטיהם ופרטי פרטיהם"."

ברור, שבמסגרת תפיסה זו אין כל מקום להבלטת מרכזיותו התימאטית של סיפור אהבתם של פישקה וביילה. סיפור זה אינו אלא פריט – ואף פריט תפל – באוסף הגדול. פרישמן ממעיט בחשיבותו עד כדי קביעה כי ייש מקום שיחשוב איש, כי את האהבה הכניס המחבר לתוך מסגרת זו, רק כדי לקיים מצוות עשה של אהבה גם כן"." ב) גישה קרובה, לכאורה, אך באמת שונה לגמרי, הסתמנה בדבריהם של מבקרים, שראו בנושא העוני והקבצנות לא רק תכונה אופיינית לאובייקט (יחיי היהודיםי, ירחוב היהודיםי, יהעיירהי) שאותו יציירי אברמוביץ בסיפורו, אלא גם תימה מארגנת, מכוונת, המבטאת את התכוונותו הסאטירית־הסובייקטיבית של המספר. הללו הציגו את נושא הקבצנות כמטאפורה רחבת משמעות ופירשו את אחיזתו הסיפורית של אברמוביץ בעולמם של הקבצנים פירוש סמלי, למעשה. המטאפורה או הסמל, הם טענו, חלים על מכלול החיים היהודיים־ הלאומיים, וסביבם מתאחדים כל הרצפים הסיפוריים וההגותיים של יספר הקבצניםי, אפילו אלה שאינם נראים בסקירה ראשונה כאילו היו שייכים או נוגעים לנושא הקבצני. מבקרים אלא הסתייעו בהרבה הערות־אגב, המפוזרות לאורך הסיפור והמושמות בפיהם של גיבורים צדדיים, כביכול, כגון הערתו של אלתר יקנהייז: ייכל ישראל קבצן הואיי או הערתו של יונטל, הקבצן הכסלוני שנדד לאודיסה: ייהרבה יהודים מתפרנסים מסמרטוטיםיי (עמוד 129). רבים מהם, בייחוד

^{10.} כל כתבי דוד פרישמן, כרך ו, עמי צו – צז.

^{.11} שם, עמי צב

אלא האמונים על הטקסט היידי של הסיפור, מסתמכים על הקטע הידוע מסיום דברי ההקדשה של אברמוביץ למי מרגוליס, שבו השווה המספר בין יהיהלומים והאבנים הטובותי שבהם עוסק ההיסטוריון מרגוליס (אישים כרבי עקיבא, הילל, רבי מאיר) לבין יהסחורהי המרופטת, סאגת הסמרטוטים, שבה נגזר עליו, על אברמוביץ, לעסוק כל ימיו:

כל הזמן איני עוסק אלא באביונים, בקבצנים, באומללים מסכנים; וגם בברנשים נוכלים, עושי־להטים ועוד נפשות למיניהן, קטנטנים, קטנוניים, יצורים שפלים. בחלומותי בלילה עולים לעומתי מקבצי־נדבות. לנגד עיני מרחף בלי הרף התרמיל – התרמיל היהודי הישן, הגדול. תרמיל זה תלוי בחוטמי, כמוהו כעננה כבדה התלויה באפו של נכה־רוח בעל מרה־שחורה. לכל אשר אסוב ואפנה – אני רואה את התרמיל לעומתי. גם אם אבקש לומר דבר־מה או לספר לתומי – יצוף התרמיל ויתייצב לנגדי!

תוי. שוב התרמיל הזה. התרמיל היהודי!12

אלה הרואים ביתרמילי הקבצני הזה את עיקרו של הסיפור, יחזות הכולי שלו, מדגישים את נקודת המוצא המאטריאליסטית של ביקורת החיים הלאומיים, שפיתח אברמוביץ בסיפור זה. לפיהם תפס האמן, כי ערעור חיי החומר והכלכלה בישראל הוא אבי־אבות החטאים והקלקלות כולן, ובשם הבנה זו יצא ללחום בכל האידיאליזאציות הירוחניותי של הוויית האומה וערכי קיומה. והוא תוחב כנגד פניהם של כל בעלי האפולוגטיקה הלאומית את התרמיל המזוהם, הנצחי. מנקודת־מוצא זו יצאו המבקרים לכיוונים שונים. אלו מהם שהיו קרובים לתנועות הסוציאליסטיות היהודיות או לקומוניזם הייבסקי ראו בימאטריאליזםי של יפישקהי סימן לידמוקראטיותי המהותית של יצירת אברמוביץ, לאופיה החברתי הימתקדםי ופירשו את הספר בעיקר כמחאה חברתית על דיכוים של העניים בישראל (המיוצגים על־ידי פישקה וביילה) וכביקורת על מערכת חברתית נצלנית־ פאראזיטית המבוססת על דיכוי זה. מבקרים אלא פירשו את יפישקהי בהקשר המחאה החברתית, האופיינית ליצירת אברמוביץ בשנות השישים של המאה התשע־עשרה (יצירות כגון יהאיש־הקטןי והמחזה יהמסי).

12. **אלע ווערק פון מענדעלע מוכר ספרים** (הוצאת מענדעלע, קראקא תרע״א), כרך יא, **פישקע דער קרומער**, עמ*י 7*. הדברים מובאים כאן בתירגומו העברי של שלום לוריא. ראה ספרנו, עמי 176.

מבקרים אחרים פנו מנקודת המוצא הימאטריאליסטיתי לפרשנות נרחבת הרבה יותר של המשמעות המוסרית והאמנותית של יספר הקבצניםי. הדוגמה הבולטת ביותר לפרשנות כזו כלולה במסתו הגדולה של יייח ברנר, יהערכת עצמנו בשלושת הכרכיםי (1914). ברנר הגדולה של יייח ברנר, יהערכת עצמנו בשלושת הכרכיםי (1914). ברנר העלה כאן את הסיפור על נס כדוגמה שלמה ראשונה, שבה הגיע הסופר ליהערכת עצמנוי מלאה, בעלת תוקף הגותי, תיאורי ומוסרי טוטאלי. מהעיוות המרכזי של חיי היחומרי היהודיים (קיום ללא מאמץ יצרני, מלא מגע מתמיד עם יעבודת החייםי הגדולה) נובעים, לפי ברנר, לא רק חולשת הקיום הכלכלי והחברתי של עם ישראל, אלא גם כיעור החיים שלו, עליבותו האסתיטית וקהותו המוסרית. מעיוות זה נובע הפגם, המשפיל את המיניות היהודית למדרגת ימסחרי בבני־אדם מחד־גיסא ותאווה ללא קשר רגשי מאידך־גיסא. ממנו נובע חוסר הכבוד העצמי הגברי של בעלי־העגלה, שלגלוגם הדוקר של הגויים, המסייעים ומוציאים את עגלתם מתוך הבוץ, אינו נחשב בעיניהם. ממנו נובעת השפלת החוויה הדתית היהודית למסחר במכשירי בכיה וכוי וכוי

פרשנות תימאטית אופיינית זו של הסיפור, עם כל כוחה, לוקה, בכל אופן, בחסר בולט: היא אינה מותירה מקום בתפיסתה לפיתוחו של מוטיב האהבה בסיפור. יספר הקבצניםי מצטייר, לפיה, כסאטירה רצופה, העומדת כולה בסימן לעגו הקטלני של מנדלי, ולא כסאטירה. המעורבת במלודראמה והמעמתת את לעגו של מנדלי עם תום נפשו של פישקה. הרי אהבתם של פישקה וביילה מתעלה למדרגה של שלמות אסתיטית ומוסרית כאחת למרות הניוון המוסרי והאסתיטי (ולא רק הכלכלי) של העולם שבו נתונים הגיבורים; ובכך כאמור, טעם הסיפור כולו. ביקורתו של מנדלי על עולם זה מוצגת בסיפור כאדיקוואטית ונכונה רק עד לנקודה מסוימת: אותה נקודה שבה היא נתקלת ברגש הטהור של שני הקבצנים, בתחושת האחווה העמוקה שלהם. ושם. בנקודה זו, פוקע כוחה. אף מנדלי עצמו אינו ביקורתי וקטלני לכל אורך הדרך. גם לו יש שעות של השתפכות הנפש, של בקשת רחמים, של חלום על עולם בלתי מנוכר ובלתי פגום (המונולוג הגדול אל הירח בלילה בפונדק). כמה לגימות של יי"ש מפצלות מנדלי זה, כזכור, לשני מנדלים, ולמורכבות זו של שני המנדלים אין הפרשנות התימאטית. שבה אנו עוסקים, נענית. היא פוסחת עליה, משכיחה אותה, מתעלמת מרומאו פישקה־ביילה. מסיבה את עיניה מגילויי הגברות והגבוּרה של אלתר יקנה"ז, משמחתו על הצלת חיי אדם (פישקה), משבועתו לצאת בעקבות הקבצנים כדי לגאול את בתו. ממילא נמצאת יוּמרתה לפרש את מכלול הסיפור על יסוד יהערכת עצמנוי הביקורתית־המנדלאית

מופרכת. התעלמותה של ביקורת זו בדרך כלל (ומאמרו של ברנר הוא במקרה זה דוגמה אופיינית) מן האלמנטים המבניים והעלילתיים של הסיפור, אף היא מעידה על אופיה הסלקטיבי־השרירותי; שהרי התחשבות בתוואי המבני־העלילתי מחייבת את הפרשן להתייחס אל מכלול הגורמים התימאטיים המשתלבים בתוואי זה והמסתדרים באמצעותו במקומותיהם המתאימים להם במסגרת ההירארכיה הסיפורית וההגותית של הרומאן.

ג) אסכולת הפיצול או השניות בפרשנות המבנה של יפישקהי גורסת, כמובן, גם פיצול או שניות בהמשכיות התימאטית שלו. אלה מאפשרים לה יתר התחשבות באלמנטים התימאטיים השונים שברומאן ומגינים עליה מסלקטיביות שרירותית בוטה מעיו זו של ברנר. מאיר ווינר היה מחויב להשקפת עולם מאטריאליסטית־ קומוניסטית ופירש את ירומאן פישקהי בין השאר כסיפור שגיבורו "אינו פישקה אלא העם" על "מצוקתו – היתרמילי שלו". הסיפור, לפיו, יימכוון בפירוש כדי שישמש גם כמשל, למרות עיצובו הריאליסטי". 1 עם זאת, אין ווינר רואה צורך להעלים עין מן הקומפלקס הסנטימנטאלי־הרומאנטי של ירומאו פישקהי כשם שאינו מטאטא אל מתחת לשטיח הביקורתי את חיפוש המתח והאקזוטיות, האינטריגה וההפתעה המנחה את אברמוביץ האמן בפיתוחו של חלק זה שבסיפור. הפיצול מחדד אף ביתר תוקף את רגישותו של המבקר לעושר התימאטי ולמורכבות הטונאלית של החלק הראשון של הרומאן, סיפור המסגרת, העומד בסימן שלטונו של מנדלי. לא רק ביקורת ותובנות מפוכחות מוצא ווינר בחלק זה אלא גם ייהתרככויות פיוטיותיי בשפע. מנדלי כאן הוא לא רק מבקר העם אלא גם ימשורר העםי. הסיפור מתרכז בעולמו הסובייקטיבי, באסוציאציות שלו, בהבזקי המחשבה וההתרשמות שלו, ועם זאת צמוד הוא "לחיי העם, לגורלו ההיסטורי ולמצבו בהווהיי. זאת, משום שמנדלי לא רק רואה את המציאות ומבין אותה אלא גם חווה וחש את לחציה מתוכו. לכן יכול הוא לערב בקוזרי שלו את "תמונותיו הצבעוניות ביותר, את התבוננויותיו הפיכחיות ביותר, את המצאותיו ושנינותיו החריפות ביותר – ותוך כדי כך גם את רגשותיו והגיגיו העמוקים ביותר". 14

חולשת הפרשנות הפצלנית של התימאטיקה, כמו זו של המבנה, כרוכה בעצם תכונתה הפצלנית. ההפרדה החדה של ירומאן פישקהי

מיספור המסגרתי מותירה שאלות רבות מדי ללא תשובה, ושאלות אלו חמורות וקשות בתחום התימאטי אף יותר משהיו בתחום הסטרוקטוראלי. הרי סיפור המסגרת אינו בלתי מושפע מירומאן פישקהי. אדרבה, הוא משתנה ומתפתח על־ידיו. מנדלי ואלתר יקנה"ז של אחרית הסיפור (אחרי שמיעת דברי פישקה) אינם אותם מנדלי ואלתר שכמעט מנחיתים מהלומות זה על זה או מחליפים את סחורתם־ספריהם בראשיתו של הסיפור. את השינוי חולל בהם פישקה בדבריו. משמע, שיסיפור המסגרתי על שנינותיו החריפות ויותר מזה על יהתרככויותיו הפיוטיותי קשור בירומאן פישקהי קשר תימאטי בל יינתק. ההעדפה האסתטית של סיפור המסגרת על פני הסיפור הסנטימנטאלי הבא בעקבותיו (הניכרת בדברי מאיר ווינר על כל צעד ושעל), גם אם היא מוצדקת כשלעצמה, אין היא מפחיתה כהוא זה את התלות התימאטית של שני החלקים זה בזה.

ד) הניסיון לסמן מכנה משותף תימאטי (או כמה מכנים משותפים) ביו ירובד מנדליי לירובד פישקהי שבסיפור היה עד כה מבחנה הקשה ביותר של הביקורת הפרשנית, והיא לא עמדה בו עמידה מלאה ואיתנה. נסיונות בכיוון זה נעשו במשך השנים, אך ההיסוס והעמעום איפיינו אותם בדרך כלל. למשל, במסתו משנת 1947 (ששימשה מבוא למהדורת כתבי מנדלי מוכר ספרים בכרך אחד, שהופיעה אז בהוצאת דביר) טען בתחילה יעקב פיכמן, שחטיבת פישקה־ביילה שימשה עיקר בסיפור רק בנוסחו הראשון, שבו חפץ אברמוביץ כדרך המספרים הרוסיים היעממייםי (ינארודניקיםי) יילעורר רחמים, לתנות גורלה של נערה עלובה שגלתה מעל שולחו אביה. להאיר דמותו של בעל־מום עלוביי וכוי; ואילו בנוסחים המאוחרים, יימשבגר האמן ורחבו גם יריעותיו", נוספו פרקי ההומור והתיאור, פרקי חיפוש הסוס האבוד, יישירת היער הערבייי, תיאור הפונדק ושאר עניינים המצטרפים לייאפוס של כפריי ויימהווים, לכאורה, דבר בפני עצמויי מבחינת המבנה והמשמעות הכוללים של הסיפור. תיאור זה אינו נכון עובדתית (ניכר, שהנוסח של 1869 לא היה לפני עיניו של פיכמן. נוסח זה, כאמור מחולק בשווה לפרקי מנדלי ולפרקי פישקה, ומרבית תיאורי הנוף הידועים, למשל, כבר כלולים בו), ולמעשה אין הוא אלא חזרה על גירסת הפיצול של ווינר בתוספת הסבר יגנטיי (מפוקפק). ואולם בהמשך דיונו ביספר הקבצניםי הגיע פיכמן למסקנה, כי בכל זאת אין כל אפשרות לחדור למשמעותה של היצירה ולטעום את טעמה בלא ייכל סיפור המעשה הזה על שני בעלי מום עשוקים, נטולי נחת, שמצאו זה את זה בעולם שכולו כיעוריי. סיפור זה שופך ייאור לא־צפוייי ומושך ייחוט של חו

^{.43} מאיר ווינֶר, צו דער געשיכטע, כרך בי, עמי 43.

^{.40} שם, עמי 40

בקנה אחד עם ההדגשה של רשת האנאלוגיות הפרוסה עליו מראשיתו

ועד סופו. האנאלוגיות מאותתות לקורא הרגיש –כבר במהלד

הקריאה - כי אי־הסדר העלילתי הוא שטחי ומטעה. קורא כזה אולי

לא ינחש את פרטי ההיוודעות. המשליטים על הסיפור בסופו סדר

גורלי. אבל הוא יחוש בהיווצרותו של סדר ברבדים העמוקים יותר של

הסיפור. שנית, הקורא לא יקבל, שאותו סדר המתמחש מתחת לפני

השטח ההטרוגניים של הסיפור הוא אכן כה אטום ואדיש. כפי שטועו

שקד, ושהוא מושלט על־ידי גורל אכזר, המכלה את התם והטהור בידי

רשעים. הרי הסדר המתגלה הן בסיום והן לפניו הוא בעל משמעות

מוסרית ואף בעל כוח התנעה והפעלה מוסריות. אלתר בכל זאת הציל

את חייו של פישקה, נלחם בקבצנים השודדים, הבין שימזלו הרעי איננו

אלא עונש על חטא שחטא לבתו, ונשבע להציל את הבת. בכלל קשה

להבין את הניגוד המסתמו בדברי שקד בין ישרירותיותי עלילתית

מחד־גיסא לביו ייד הגורל הכבדהי מאידד גיסא. אם הגורל איננו אלא

פאַטום חסר תוכן מוסרי – הריהו גילומה המובהק של השרירותיות.

ולא היפוכה. מה גם שאברמוביץ, איש המחאח המוסרית, אינו מעמיד

בשום סיפור מסיפוריו תמונת מציאות שהפאטום השרירותי הוא

שליט יחיד בה. תכופות הוא אמנם שואל אם ארץ לא ניתנה ביד רשע,

אך אף פעם אין תשובתו על שאלה זו חיובית־פסקנית. והיא אינה כזו

גם ביספר הקבצניםי. אילמלא כן, מה היה הטעם להעתקת קוראו של

הספר מעמדת הריחוק חלגלגנית לעמדת האמפאתיה כלפי הגיבורים!

הסיפור על כל מרכיביו, על מכלול יחסי הגומליו שביניהם. מתוך כד

היא גם מתקשה להכריע בבירור בשאלת זהותו הזיאנרית. כל מי שאינו

מבחין בחשיבותו ובמרכזיותו של סיפור פישקה־ביילה אינו יכול

לזהות את יספר הקבצניםי כרומאו. לכל היותר הוא מזהה אותו

כסיפור יחופשיי, מפורר (הגירסה האטומיסטית) או מחובר חיבורים

אסוציאטיביים, הנתון בתוך מסגרת של מעין רומאן דרך או רומאן

פיקארסקי, אלא שהמסגרת פתוחה עד כדי התפוגגות הזהות הז׳אנרית

מן הסיפור כולו או מחלקו. יש הרואים בסיפור בעיקר סאטירה, שיש

בה כמה סממני רומאן בלתי מפותחים (כך סבור ברנר, המעמת את

השלמות והעומק של יהערכת עצמנוי הסאטירית שביספר הקבצניםי

עם דלות יכולתו של אברמוביץ ב"אינדיבידואליזאציה של גיבוריו"י").

הביקורת הפרשנית עדייו רחוקה איפוא מפירוש ממצה של תוכו

רומאנטייי גם על פרקיו האחרים של הספר, שאף בהם היה יימנדלייי ייבעל אגדה", יימשורר [—] ולא ריאליסטן". דרך החיבור בין הסיפור הסנטימנטאלי ליאפוסי הכפרי החומוריסטי נמצא למבקר בדוחק בקביעה, שסיפור פישקה־ביילה הוא, למעשה, אגדת־עם, משהו מעין סיפור הַנזל וגרטל על אב שהפקיר את בתו וכו; ו־Märchen מעין זו יכולה להשתלב בפרקי יער ושדה כפריים, בהווי פונדקים וירידים, שהם יישירה מקורית בתחומי ריאליזם מצומצם, המתרחב מתוכו ומתנגן מתוכוי.

נסיון איחוי תימאטי רציני יותר נעשה בידי גרשון שקד, שפירש את התימה המרכזית של יספר הקבצניםי במסגרת מיטאפיסית, שהיתה חידוש ברור לעומת השגותיה של הביקורת שקדמה לו. שקד סבר, שעלילת הסיפור הורכבה מייסידרת פעולות אירלוואנטיותיי והועמדה, לכאורה, בסימן אי־הסדר והמקריות, רק כדי שיתגלה בסיום (בשעת ההיוודעות) כי ייהמקריות, השרירותיות והתוהו ובוהו קיימים בעולם רק לכאורה; למעשה ניכרת יד הגורל הכבדה בכל אתר ואתריי. לפי זה, אין סיפור יסוריהם ואהבתם של פישקה וביילה (שאינה באה לכלל מיצוי) בבחינת שריד סנטימנטאלי מן הרובד המוקדם של יצירת המספר, או רומאן אינטריגה מותח שלו, אלא הוא ליבו של הרומאן: בו, בגרעינו הטראגי, גלום עיקר הְמֶסֶר (יייד הגורל הכבדהיי) של הרומאן. תבנית־העל הקומית, שבה ראו מרבית המבקרים את עיקרו האמנותי של הסיפור, איננה אלא יתבנית עלי, המתנפצת בסופו של דבר אל התשתית הפאתיטית, שהיא היסוד והעיקר שבו.

התנפצותה באה להעתיק את הקורא מעמדת ריחוק של מתבונן מבודח לעמדה של הזדהות עם הסובל, להעבירו מתחום השחוק אל תחום הדמע, מן הביקורת אל האמפאתיה. לצורך זה עימת המספר את הקומי והפאתיטי, החדירם זה לתוך זה ואף הביאם לכלל התנגשות וערבוביה.

דברים אלה, אף כי הם מכילים הארות פוריות (ביחוד פוריה, לדעתי, ההערה בדבר העתקתו של הקורא מן העמדה הביקורתית־הקומית אל ההיווכחות באמת הגורלית והאנושית של הפאתוס והאמפאתיה), עדיין מעוררים שאלות מרובות יותר מאלו שעליהן הם משיבים. ראשית, ההנחה, שהסיפור עומד לכאורה בסימן אי־הסדר והמקריות ואלה הם תנאי לתיפקוד של סיומו המפתיע, אינה עולה

^{17.} כל כתבי י.ח. ברנר (הוצאות הקיבוץ המאוחד – דביר, תל־אביב 1956 – 1967), כרך גי עמי 63.

יעקב פיכמן, אמת הבניין (הוצאת מוסד ביאליק, ירושלים תשי"א), עמי 77 – 81.
 ג. שקד, בין שחוק לדמע, עמי 122.

ומשלחם בצירוף לסטים מזוין, עם זאב ועם דוב ועם חיות רעות כיוצא בהם. (עמי 37)

מאלפות המטאפורות המשמשות בתשתיתו של יהסברי זה של פעולת הדמיון. כולן שאובות מן התחום הכלכלי־העסקי. אחת משתי הבולטות שבהן משווה את הדמיון לסרסור רמאי; האחרת משווה את מוחו של מנדלי לבית־חרושת, הקולט חומר גלם, מעבד אותו ומחזיר אותו בלוויית יערך מוסףי; שתי המטאפורות מבטאות את מאמציו של מנדלי להתגבר על הדמיון, לרדד אותו למדרגה של פעילות מרקאנטילית ראציונאלית או כמו־ראציונאלית, להשפיל אותו (סרסור העוסק ביאחיזת עינייםי). אבל מאמצים אלה אינם נושאים פרי. בהמשך נסחף מנדלי נפשית לתוך איזו סטיכיה פרימיטיבית שאין לו שליטה עליה. מתחיל בתוכו איזה תהליך הרסני המאיים על שלמות היאניי שלו, שנראתה קודם לכן כה מוצקה ובטוחה. מנדלי עצמו תולה תהליד זה בלגימה יתרה שלגם על לב ריקו מבקבוק יין השרף שבאמתחתו, אבל השיכרון הקל אינו משמש אלא ככוח משחרר, מסיר בלמים. התחושה שהוא מעורר במנדלי – תחושת התפוררות, אנתרופיה גופנית ונפשית כאחת – נובעת מבפנים. המדובר הוא לא רק בהתפצלות אישיותו של מנדלי ליישני מנדלונים מתרוצצים יחדיי. התפצלות זו היא כבר בבחינת ניסיון מצידו של מנדלי לעצור את ההתפוררות, לנקז את שטפי ההתמוססות של היאניי לאַפיקה של דרמה, שבה יכולה האנרגיה הנפשית האנארכית להתעבות ולהתארגן סביב יתפקידיםי דרמאטיים. תפקידיו של מנדלי הבוגר ומנדלי הילד. מנדלי המפוכח ומנדלי השיכור. חשובה יותר היא התחושה המבהילה הקודמת לניסיון זה: ייבשעה זו גופי מתפשט ונעשה קלוש כדבר שאין בו ממש. מנדלי מתפזר לחלקים דקים, והחלקים סובבים ומרפרפים באוויר העולם, שלא להרגיש היכן הנקודה הפנימית והעיקר שבהם" (עמי 39). זוהי התחושה **המהותית**, המבטאת איזו הרגשה מצד מנדלי בפער או בריקנות, המפרידים בין הרובד העליון, הדעתני הראציונאלי והסרקאסטי שבתודעתו, לבין רבדים אחרים, עמוקים ושכוחים. מנדלי נוחת ונופל לנגד עינינו (ועיניו – הרי אין אנו יודעים דבר שהוא אינו מספרו לנו) מן הרובד העליון ואינו נתקל בקרקעית מוצקה כלשהי עד שהוא רואה עצמו מוקף מכל צד באויבים ובסכנות. לפתע הוא מתמלא רחמים עצמיים ומתחיל להזיל דמעות: "...מכאובות לי, פגעים לי, אוי ואבוי, תמיד... בן הייתי אף אני לאמי... מגפפת היתה אותי, מנשקת לי... אויה לי, יתום אני, אין אב, אין אם, יתום אני!... ספוד ובכה, מנדלי!... (עמי 40).

אלא שמנדלי מסוגל לקיים עמדה נפשית זו – ליתר דיוק, הוא מסוגל לקיים את עצמו כשהוא צמוד לרובד זה שבאישיותו – רק בשעה שיש לו שליטה מסוימת על הנעשה סביבו ובתוכו. כל עוד העולם נוהג כמנהגו. כל עוד בני האדם שמסביב נוהגים כצפוי (גם אם התנהגותם מכוערת), יכול הוא להביט בכול ממרומי הדעתנות הביקורתית ולשלוט בכול (לפחות מבחינה פנימית־סובייקטיבית) באמצעות הדיבור השנון והמלוטש שלו. לא כן הדבר מרגע, שחל איזה שינוי פתאומי והדברים נראים לפתע מצידם המוזר, הבלתי צפוי־ מראש, או שהם נעשים ברוטאליים, מאיימים וקרובים משאפשר יהיה ילהשתלטי עליהם באמצעות הערת יאין־זה־מענייניי סארקאסטית. במצב כזה שוקע מנדלי פתאום מרובד הפיכחון והראציונאליות לרובד פרימיטיבי־ילדותי המצוי בתוכו בסתר. כך הדבר, למשל, בעת התעייה ביער, בחיפושים אחר אלתר, כשהחשיכה הגוברת מחזירה את מנדלי לכל פחדי ילדותו. זוהי שעה של מעבר אופייני ממודוס קיומי אחד למודוס קיומי אחר: האור הבהיר, חיוקד, של היום הקיצי והמייצג כמטונימיה מרחבית גדולה את תשוקתו של מנדלי ליבהירות אכזריתי. לפיכחון בכל מחיר) נחלף בלילה מלא הירזיםי, הנותו מקום להַלוצינאציות, לטשטושים, לטעויות; השדה הפתוח, הפורש לעין כל את סודותיו, נחלף ביער הסבוד, מלא המהמורות, השיחים השורטניים, המחבואים המסוכנים; תוכנית הפעולה הפשוטה והברורה, שעליה סמך מנדלי עד כה (נסיעה עם צינת הערב לכסלון לשם מכירת ימכשירי בכיהי לימי ביו־המצרים) התמוטטה עם היעלמותם של הסוסים ואלתר. הכול נעשה לפתע מלא סכנה ואי־ ודאות. מנדלי עושה נסיונות רפים אחדים להיאחז בפיכחוו המורגל שלו. למשל, הוא מנסה לבאר לעצמו את מנגנון הפעולה של יכוח הדםי (כוח הדמיוו) ועל־ידי הבהרה של המהות הבלתי־ברורה הזו להרחיק מעליו את הפחדים והמועקות, שהדמיוו משליט עליו:

הדמיון, חובר חבר וקוסם זה, נעשה סרסור ומכניסני על־ידי אחיזת־עיניים בעסק של שותפות עם העמק, שאני עומד ומסתכל בו. אני מקבל תמונות משונות, העולות ובאות אלי סיעות־סיעות מגיא צלמוות זה, ולאחר שנעשה בהן שינוי בבית־היוצר שבמוחי ונוספו עליהן עוד דברים הרבה, חוזרות ויוצאות למקום שבאו משם. בסיעה אחת מגיע אלי משם גופו של מת בדמות אלתר יקנה"ז, ופגריהם של שני סוסינו, והדמיון נוטל אותם ומוסיף עליהם נופך משלו, על פי דרכו, וחוזר

מנדלי נעצר איפוא על הקרקע הנפשית של הילדות. לכאן הוא נמלט פעמים אחדות לאורך הסיפור, כגון כשהוא סופג מהלומות מידי שומר המקשאה על אכילת מלפפונים שלא ברשות, וביתר שאת בשעת גזירת פיאתו בידי הזיאנדארם בתחנת המשטרה הכפרית. מנדלי רואה את פיאתו הגזורה מוטלת על רצפת החדר ועיניו זולגות דמעות. הוא פותח באפוסטרופה גדולה אל הפיאה, שבה מופיעה בעיקר דמות האם המתה, סמל ההגנה והאהבה שחפפו על ימי הילדות:

אָי פֶּאָה פֶּאָה, פְּאַת שיבתי, שגדלה עמי מילדותי [...] אמי הרי היתה חופפת אותה ומסלסלתה כשאני עדיין ילד. לא שבעה עינה מראות את תלתליה השחורים והיפים, והיתה זהירה מאוד שלא לתלוש ולחסר ממנה, חס ושלום, אפילו שערה אחת. (עמי42)

בלילה ללא שינה, שמבלה מנדלי בפונדקה של חייה־טריינא, כשהוא נרדף על־ידי הפשפשים המוצצים את דמו, הופך הוא את דמות הלבנה ברדף על־ידי הפשפשים המוצצים את דמו, הופך הוא את דמות הלבנה – לדמות אמו (אנו חשים שזוהי אצלו פעולה נפשית־אסוציאטיבית קבועה) ומתחיל לשפוך לפניה את ליבו ושוטח לפניה את קובלנתו על צער חייו, שאינם אלא יגסיסה ארוכהי. הוא מביט בפני הלבנה. מגלה בהם את פני אמו העגומה, מייחס להם הרהורים, משמיע לעצמו באמצעותם דברי פיוסים; הוא מציג לפני הלבנה את פאת זקנו שנגזזה, כילד המגלה לפני אמו את מקום החבורה; הוא שופך ידמעות רותחותי הוא ימתחטאי ומתפנק, מחפש אהבה וניחומים.

עתה ברור לנו, כי מנדלי, המציג עצמו כאדם מפוכח ולגלגן, מבוגר ובקי בהוויית השקר של העולם, הוא באותה שעה עצמה גם ילד פגוע ונעלב, הרואה עצמו אומלל וחסר־הגנה והצמא נואשות לאהבת־האם שניטלה ממנו. אנו מבחינים בשלב זה, שמנדלי כמעט אינו נזכר — לאורך הסיפור כולו — באנשים, שהיו יכולים, לכאורה, להעניק לו תמיכה נפשית בשעת צער ומצוקה: למשל, אשתו וילדיו — הן הוא בעל משפחה. פעם אחת בלבד מזכיר הוא את אשתו, ואף זאת אך ורק במסגרת מאמציו להתחמק מהצעת השידוכין שאוכפת עליו חייה־במסגרת מאמציו להתחמק מהצעת השידוכין שאוכפת עליו חייה־טריינא הפונדקית. בתירוצים, שהוא משמיע באזני חיים חנא, במכתב שהוא שולח באמצעותו לחייה־טריינא, אשתו (הבעל היה אמור להחזיר את מנדלי אל הפונדק כדי שעניין השידוכין יגיע לכלל סיכום), להחזיר את מנדלי אל הפונדק כדי שעניין השידוכין יוכלו אולי לצאת לפועל, אלא "הרי יש לי זוגתי. וחכמה כמותך הלא תבין למה אני מתכוון. בעניינים כמו אלה, שומעת הפונדק בלי שיפגע בהם למעלה מן הצורך, אבל אותה יזוגתיי, את, מה הוא הבעל בלא זוגתו?" (עמי 64). כך חומק מנדלי מידי בעלי הפונדק בלי שיפגע בהם למעלה מן הצורך, אבל אותה יזוגתיי, אדם אותה יזוגתיי, אבל אותה יזוגתיי, אהפונדק בלי שיפגע בהם למעלה מן הצורך, אבל אותה יזוגתיי, אהפונדק בלי שיפגע בהם למעלה מן הצורך, אבל אותה יזוגתיי, אהפונדק בלי שיפגע בהם למעלה מן הצורך, אבל אותה יזוגתיי,

שסיפקה לו את התירוץ הנחוץ, אין הוא נזכר בה בשום שעה אחרת משעות הסיפור. ניכר שנתק זה אינו נובע אך ורק מריחוקו של מנדלי מבני משפחתו במשך מרבית ימות השנה לרגל מלאכתו, אלא בעיקר מאיזה יובש השורר ביחסו לבני משפחתו. כשמדבר מנדלי בהמשך הסיפור על מנהגם של יהודים יבינוניים להתייחס אל נשיהם הכשרות, שאותן נשאו כדת משה וישראל, כאילו היו חפץ או מכשיר שניתן להחליפו (יימתה אשתו של אחד מאלה. יקברנה ונוהג בה שבעה ימי אבלות כדת ישראל, ומקדים פעמים ונושא אשה אחרת עד שלא עברו שלושים יום למיתתה של הראשונה", עמי 119), על עצמו הוא מדבר. הרי אותן אנפילאות צמר (ה'וואָלענע פוזמקאות שליי) יישאינן פוסקות מעל רגלי אפילו בימות החמה", קרובות לליבו וזכורות לו יותר מאשתו ובניו, וכשהוא שוכח אותן מחמת הבהילות בפונדקה של חיים־חנא.

ברור, מנדלי הבוגר לא בנה סביבו מערכת קשרים אנושיים־רגשיים שיש בה כדי לתמוד בו וכדי להפקיעו מו הבדידות הימזהירהי שלתוכה הוא מכניס עצמו באמצעות הדימוי העצמי של האדם המפוכח והדעתן, הרואה רק רמייה וטיפשות מסביבו. כשהוא נזקק לתמיכה רגשית עליו לחזור במחשבותיו אל ילדותו ואל הדמות הנשית האחת התופסת מקום בעולמו, דמות אמו. הוא עושה זאת מדי פעם, כפי שראינו. עם זאת. הוא גם חושש ונרתע מנטייה זו שלו לחזור אל הרובד הנפשי הילדותי המצוי בתוכו. היא כרוכה לגביו במצב של אומללות ושל חוסר מגו ובתחושת יהתפוררותי או גם בסכנה של שקיעה לתוד תמימות ואומו ילדותיים, העלולה להיות לו לרועץ בנדודיו בדרכי העולם מלאות המלכודות והמהמורות של השקר והרשעות. בסיפור מופיעה רמיניסנציה ארוכה וחשובה, המעידה עדות מאלפת ביותר על הימשכותו של מנדלי אל עולם ילדותו ואל דמות אמו, העומדת במרכזו, ועל חששו מהימשכות זו ונסיונו להפקיע עצמו מקסמיה – קסמי הדמיון והרגש. רמיניסנציה זו (שהופיעה כבר בנוסח הבכורה של הסיפור משנת 1869) מופיעה בנוסח הסופי לקראת הסיום, שעה שמנדלי ופישקה קרבים והולכים לעת לילה (הקשר בינה לשעת הערבית האפלולית אינו מקרי) אל מבואות העיר כסלוו. בדרכם עוברים הם על פני יההר הירוקי הגבעה המתנשאת בעיבּוּרה של העיר היהודית הגדולה (ברדיציב), ומנדלי נוכר בומר העממי הידוע על דבר ההר הירוק של ברדיציב; אותו זמר שהאימהות והאומנות מיישנות בו את התינוקות, ואף ייאמי, נוחה עדן, אף היא היתה אומרת לי בקטנותי : שיר זה

גבי חטיבה זו צריכה היתה לקום חטיבה אחרת, שבה יישבר המודוס המנדלאי באמצעות מודוס פישקאי, מנוגד לו בכל מהותו (כאן, בחטיבה שנייה זו, משמשים סיפוריו של מנדלי להרפיה ולניגוד). כפילות זו התחייבה מעצם האסטראטגיה האמנותית הבסיסית של הסיפור כשם שהיא התחייבה מן ההנחות האידיאיות המשמשות בבסיסו. מנדלי חייב היה להיות מוצג כתיזה חריפה ועזה, שלעומתה תופיע בהמשך אנטי־תיזה — רַכָּה אך עזה גם היא — פישקה, כדי שהרומאן יוכל להסתיים ברמז של סינתיזה.

דיאלקטיקה זו חייבה גם ויתור מוחלט על שימוש בשירותיו של מספר כל־יודע ביספר הקבצניםי. לעומת ימסעות בנימין השלישיי, יבעמק הבכאי ויצירות אחרות, שבהן ניתנת למנדלי המעבד והמספר הסמכות לדעת את המתרחש בלב הגיבורים ומשום כך הוא מסוגל לדבר עליהם בגוף שלישי (אמנם. גם בסיפורים האחרים משלב הוא סטעי ציטטים מכתבי הגיבורים וכמובן גם משיחתם, המאפשרים יתר הפנמה של דמותם), הרי ביספר הקבצניםי יכול מנדלי לדבר רק בשם הסובייקטיביות המוגבלת שלו, וכשהוא מספר סיפור בגוף שלישי (כגון סיפור לידתו, גידולו וחייו של פישקה כאחד מדגיגי־האדם היהודיים של כסלון), באה המציאות – בדמות פישקה עצמו ובצורת סיפור חייו מפיו הוא, כמונולוג המושמע בגוף הראשון – וטופחת על פני הגירסה המנדלאית, עד שאין היא מותירה ממנה אלא את קליפתה העובדתית החיצונית. יספר הקבצניםי חייב היה להיווצר כסיפור בשני קולות של מספרים סובייקטיביים מוגבלים. אברמוביץ עצמו, שעמד, כמובן, על הכרח אסתיטי־טכני זה. אף נתן לו ביטוי מפורש ושנון מאוד בקטע הקוזרי של מנדלי (המוצב, לא במקרה, בנקודת התווך, בין חטיבת הפרקים שלו לחטיבת פרקי פישקה), העוסק בבעיות של העיצוב הספרותי. מנדלי מתאר כאן בלגלוג את הסצינה הפאסטוראלית, שבאה לאחר הצלת פישקה והסוסים בידי אלתר, כסצינה שהיה בה, כביכול, כדי לספק חומר־רב ליבעל לשווי כלומר לסופר מליץ. הנה עומדים כאן לרשותו לא רק ארבעה ייהודים נשוייםי המתפרקדים עלי־דשא, אלא גם "זוהרי חמה, שמים בהירים, אילנות ותבואת שדה, רסיסי טל, ציפורים עפות, גילת ורגן וארבעה סוסים, זה נאה מזה". אפשר איפוא ליצור רומאנס אַ־לא־מאפו, לשיר שירת רוֹעָה ורועָה, לפרוס פרשיית אהבה ואף לחתור בליבם של הרועים־בשושנים הללו, לייחס להם רגשות ומחשבות כדרכו של המספר הרומאנסי הכל־יודע. אלא שבנקודה זו יוצא מנדלי חוצץ וקובע:

רבי יהודי, אין לך עסק עמי אלא בדברים חיצונים, במה שהורשית

התבונן ודבר את כל העולה על רוחך, ובמופלא ממך, בנשמתי, אל תחקור. להכניס בי מחשבות שלא חשבתי, וכוונות שלא כיוונתי ושאינן בי אלה על פיך — אינך רשאי. כלך לך אצל דורשי נגעים ואוהלות ושם מקום לפניך להתגדר בזה. ואני מה שבמצפּוּנֵי לבי אגיד בעצמי.(עמי 61)

זו אינה הכרזה נגד הסיפורת הפסיכולוגיסטית אלא בעד סיפורת המוטבעת בחותם האמינות של הדיבור בגוף הראשון. ואכן, לאורך כל יספר הקבצניםי מוצאים אנו רמזים המצטרפים למעין פואטיקה של סיפורת וידוי. בייחוד מתרבים רמזים אלה בפרקי פישקה, שעה שמנדלי תוהה וחוזר ותוהה מהיכן נוטל המספר הבור את כוח הסיפר שלו העולה וגובר. וסופו שהוא קובע כי להט הדברים, חום החוויה והיחס האישי אליה, הם המביאים אותו לידי כך שישפוך ייאת נפשו בדברים שלא לפי שכלו, מסיח דעתו מכל דבר והעולם כולו כלא היה לפניו באותה שעה. נשמת אלוה היתה דוברת בויי (עמי 93). וכן: יימי מאיתנו, בני אדם, שאין לו בחייו, לכל הפחות שעה אחת של השראת הרוח, שעה שהפה נפתח לו ורחשי־קודש תמימים וטהורים מבצבצים ויוצאים ממעמקי לבו בזרם של קיטור רותח מזנק ועולה בלהבות אש מתוך הר־שרפה?יי (שם). הפואטיקה של יספר הקבצניםי היא, אכן, פואטיקת הרגע האקספרסיבי; ניתן כמעט לומר, פואטיקה אקספרסיו.

אמנם, הזיקה לפואטיקה כזו העמידה את אברמוביץ בסיפורו זה לפני בעיה אמנותית מיוחדת בקשייה: בעיה שכמותה לא עמדה לפניו אולי בשום סיפור גדול אחר שלו. מנדלי, כאמור, פועל כאן כגיבור בדיוני חי ומשתנה. אבל באותה שעה הוא עדיין פועל כאן גם כינאראטורי, כמוציא־וכמביא הסיפורי, העושה את עבודתו הטכנית של מפעיל מכונת הסיפור על כל חלקיה. יתר על כן, הוא עושה זאת באותה מתכונת מיוחדת של יקונפראנסיהי, האופיינית להופעתו במרבית ספורי אברמוביץ. כלומר, בעוד הוא מעלה לפנינו פרשת חיים, אשר גם הוא עצמו נוטל בה חלק חשוב, הריהו גם עומד כאילו מן הצד סמוך לשפת הבימה, משוחח עם קהל הצופים, משמיע הערות שנונות על חשבון האירועים המתארעים במרכז הבימה וכן על חשבון אלה הנוטלים בהם חלק ברצינות כה רבה, ומהווה בכלל מין רשות מתווכת, רשות שלישית, בין הקורא מזה והגיבורים וחייהם מזה. מרבית קטעי הקוזרי. שלו נאמרים ישירות אל הקורא במסגרת תפקידו המתווד הזה. למעלה מזה, היות שמדובר כאן לא במחזה אלא בסיפור. ברור שמנדלי הימספרי עומד בעת שהוא משמיע את דבריו בזמן סיפר מאוחר

יותר מן הזמן המסופר, שבו התרחשה אותה פגישה משולשת של פישקה־אלתר־מנדלי. אם כך, הרי כל התהליך שבו אנו דנים, תהליך ההשתנות שלו עצמו בעקבות פגישתו עם פישקה, כבר התחולל בעבר, והיאך זה הוא משחזר לפנינו את שלבי התהליך כאילו ללא פרספקטיבה מאוחרת, ללא ידיעת העתיד, שגם הוא – מבחינת זמן הסיפר – כבר נעשה לעבר.

הפתרון שקבע אברמוביץ לבעיה (למעשה, מסכת בעיות) אמנותית זו היה כרוך בהפרדה עדינה מאוד, אבל באותה שעה גם מבוּקרת מאוד, בין מנדלי המספר למנדלי הגיבור. דהיינו, אברמוביץ מניח למנדלי הפרשן, הדרשן והמספר להגיב ולגלות את ליבו – בכל נקודה לאורד התפתחותו של הסיפור – אך ורק באותה מידה שלא יהיה בה משום גילוי סודו הפסיכולוגי של המשך הסיפור. כשם שאין מנדלי יודע־העתיד רשאי לגלות מראש את הפתרון העלילתי המפתיע של הסיפור, כך אין הוא רשאי לגלות את פתרונו הנפשי־הרוחני. תגובותיו של מנדלי הפרשו בראשית הסיפור תתאמנה לנוקשות הביקורתית וללגלגנות האופיינית למנדלי הגיבור באותו שלב. התגובות בהמשך הדברים יתאימו לשינויים שעברו על מנדלי בינתיים. כמו כן לא יניח אברמוביץ למנדלי הפרשן לגלות דברים שהיו לגמרי בלתי־מודעים למנדלי הגיבור – כגון, כפי שנראה, הסיבות האמיתיות להתערבויותיו הגסות בסיפורו של פישקה. בעזרת הימחבר המשתמעי (שאיננו זהה עם מנדלי) יניח אברמוביץ לקורא לנחש את מניעיו של מנדלי הגיבור בלי שיהרוס את עיצוב הדמות המתפתחת והמשתנה על־ידי גילוי יתר. אמנם. בצורה זו אף רומז אברמוביץ על כך, שאחרי ככלות הכול לא השתנה מנדלי במידה שהיינו סבורים שהוא השתנה, ושהזעזוע החינוכי שעבר עליו עם ההיחשפות לפישקה לא עקר אותו משורשו כאדם וכפרשו ההתנהגות האנושית.

מכל מקום, התימה של שינוי מנדלי באמצעות פישקה קובעת את התוואי המבני־העלילתי ואת תכונת המארג הדרמאטי־הריטורי של הסיפור בכללותו. אבל לא רק התוואים הכוללים של יספר הקבצניםי מוסברים היטב במסגרת תפיסת הספר כסיפור חינוכו של מנדלי לרגש. במסגרת זו משתלבים, כאמור, גם התוואים הקטנים יותר: משתחזרות בו תימות המשנה על סעיפיהן וסעיפי־סעיפיהן עד ליחידות המוטיביות הקטנות ביותר. כך, למשל, סצינת הפתיחה המפורסמת — סצינת ההיתקלות של שתי העגלות היהודיות באמצעה של דרך העפר האוקראינית בעיצומו של יום קיץ מזהיר ופגישתם של שני מוכרי־הספרים היהודיים — תחילה כאויבים נכונים למהלומות ואחר־כך

כמוֹדַעים ומתחרים, הנכונים לחילופי סחורה ולשיחת־חוּלין. סצינה זו נוצרה לראשונה לא במסגרת יפישקהי אלא, במסגרת הקדמת יאמר מנדליי לגירסה הראשונה של סיפור יטבעת המופתי (1865). כאו היא שימשה כהסבר להופעת סיפורו האוטוביוגראפי של הגיבור. הירש ראַטמאַן, שמנדלי רכש את נוסחו הגרמני המקורי מידיו של סנדריל מוכר ספרים, אחרי שהמריבה ביניהם בגלל הסתבכות עגלותיהם הפכה לסחר־חליפין שוקק, שבו ניסה כל אחד משני המוייסים להוציא מידי חברו את העידית שבעגלתו ולתת לו תמורתה את הזיבורית שבעגלתו שלו. ב־1869, עם כתיבת הנוסח הראשון של יפישקהי עדיין לא עקר אברמוביץ את הסצינה המבדחת מן ההקשר הסיפורי הקודם שלה על־מנת שישלב אותה בפתיחת סיפורו החדש. כאן נפגשים שני המוייסים פגישה שלווה, ללא הפתעה, ללא דראמה. ההעברה של סצינת הייקרביי המבדחת וכן של השקיעה בבוץ הדרך אל יפישקהי נעשתה רק בנוסח המורחב מאוד של 1888, והיא חלק ממעשה ההרחבה והמילוי של הסיפור, האופייני לנוסח זה. מכל מקום. לא היתה זו הרחבה סיפורית־הומוריסטית גרידא. עקירת הידראמהי של פגישת שני המו״סים (לרבות פרשת חילופי הספרים) מסיפור מוקדם שהוזנח ושתילתה בסיפור המאוחר לא באה רק כדי למלא ולהעשיר את זה האחרון, אלא גם כדי להפיק את מלוא המשמעות הרוחנית הגלומה בה. במסגרת הפתיחה של יטבעת המופתי המקורית אין ההיתקלות של מנדלי ברב סנדריל מוכר ספרים אלא בבחינת ויניטה הומוריסטית חיננית, ואילו ביפישקהי, החל בנוסח 1888, הופכת ההיתקלות הזאת (עם אלתר מוכר ספרים), בלי שתאבד מן ההומור שבה, לאקספוזיציה סיפורית עמוסת משמעות, מלאת רצינות נסתרת. רק עתה, במסגרת הסיפורית החדשה, מגלה היחומרי את מלוא העושר והכובד הגנוזים בו.

גילוי זה כרוך בהוספת אלמנט מכריע אחד לסצינה: האלמנט הפולחני־ההיסטורי. בפתיחת יטבעת המופתי מתרחשת פגישתם של מוכרי הספרים בסתם יום של קיץ (יום שני שלאחר שבת־נחמו. מנדלי מקפיד לציין תאריכים על פי הלוח היהודי), ואילו ביפישקהי (כבר בנוסח 1869) נעתקו הדברים ליום י"ז בתמוז, הוא יום הצום לזכר פריצת חילות נבוכדנאצר לירושלים ותחילת ג' שבועות יבין המצריםי, הנמשכים עד לתשעה באב, יום חורבן הבית. לכאורה, אין הנושא החיסטורי־הפולחני (צום י"ז בתמוז וגינוני האבלות הנוהגים בו ובשבועות שלאחריו) עולה בסיפור אלא כדי שיוכל מנדלי לעמת את ובשבועות היהודים עם הטבע בשיפעת פריחתו הקיצית. כך יפתח הסיפור

שבו הוא בעל עוצמה שאין לעמוד בפניה, והוא נעשה אינטנסיבי עוד יותר ברגע שפישקח מגיע במחלך סיפורו אל היריבהי, ביילה, ואל יחסו אליה. שני השומעים דוחקים ומבקשים שירחיב ויעמיק את סיפורו בנקודה מכרעת זו וישמיע דברים מפורטים בעניין הריבה וקורותיה מילדותה. פישקה נענה להם, משמיע את סיפור חייה של ביילה ומסיים אותו בקריאה פאתיטית אדירה, המותירה את אלתר ומנדלי כאחד המומים במקצת: יידמי רותחים בקרבי כשאני מהרהר בה. את נפשי הייתי נותן עליה ברצון כדי לפדותה מצרותיה. שמעו, יהודים, אין בכל העולם יונת־אלם טובה, נפש יקרה תמימה וטהורה כמותה!..." (עמי 88). לשמע הצהרת אהבה גראנדיוזית זו מפלבל אלתר במבוכה, ימחכך את מצחו כאילו צרעה עוקצתו, מחכך ואומר בינו לבין עצמו: עט, עט!יי (שם). אלתר מתחיל לחוש, שהסיפור מלא התוגה והיסורים קרב והולך אליו, אישית. אף כי עדיין אין הוא מנחש במה תסתיים קירבה זו, הוא אינו מנסה לברוח מפניה. הוא הולך לקראתה צעד־צעד כמין אדיפוס־הפוך, אב העתיד לגלות שירצחי את בתו. מנדלי, לעומתו, עושה ניסיון כמעט נואש לשבור את זיקת הקירבה והאמפאתיה ההולכת ונשזרת בינו לבין פישקה וסיפורו; להתנער מן הקשר, לברוח ממנו אל ההתבדחות הזוֹלָה ואל הלגלוג העלוב. נסיונו מלא כיעור וקטנוניות, שרק הנוסח היידי של הסיפור מוסר אותם במלואם:

הערט איר, רב אלטער — רוף איד מיד אָן מיט אַ שמייכעלע – פישקע, כילעבען, איז טאַקע פארליאפעט אין דעם האָרבאַטע מיידל.
 סיאיז, כילעבען, עפעס נישט גלאט.

תרגומו העברי של אברמוביץ ("שומע אתה — אמרתי לאלתר — חייך! שפישקא חשקה נפשו בריבה הגיבנת. אין הדברים כפשוטם.") אינו מעביר אף חלק קטן מן הקטנוניות והתפלות שבדברים. ראשית חסרה הרפליקה בנוסחה העברי אותו חיוך קטן (אַ שמייכעלע) שבו מלַווה מנדלי את פנייתו אל אלתר, הוא הגיחוך הנצחי העולה על שפתיהם של יושבי קרנות וגסי־רוח בשעה שהם מזכירים עניינים שבינו לבינה, ומה גם עניין התאהבות. אבל חשובה עוד יותר היא המלה 'פאַרליאַפּיעט', שקשה לתרגמה. זהו שיבוש זלזלני של המלח 'פאַרליבּט' (מאוהב), הבא להעמיס על מלה זו כיעור וזולות. יכול להיות, שגסותו המיוחדת של השיבוש כרוכה בפירושו המיטאפורי לאיות, שגסותו המיוחדת של השיבוש לרוכה, לשטוף (פועל מתאים לאילו נגזר מן השורש יליאַפּען', שפירושו לזרום, לשטוף (פועל מתאים לתיאור גשם עז) וגם למרוֹח. על פי פירוש זה נראה האדם המאוהב כיצור מדובלל ורטוב, שנשפך עליו נוזל רב, או גם כיצור מימי ומרוֹח, המשפיע רטיבוּת ודביקוּת על סביבותיו, ובכל מקרה הוא איש שאיבד

את היינובשיי והנקיון של אדם מן הישוב. המלה יליאפי פירושה גם סטירת־לחי והפועל יליאפעןי משמש גם במובן לסטור. לפי זה האדם המאוהב כמוהו כמי שסטרו לו על פניו. בכל מקרה הוא עלוב ומגוחך. ברור שמנדלי, האדם האַ־סקסואלי, מנסה כאן להתנער מן המשמעות האנושית העמוקה של הניסיון שעליו מספר פישקה. פישקה המאוהב הוא בעיניו עלוב ומגוחך אף יותר משהיה בתור בעל־מום עלוב־נפש. ההתעלות שהתעלה פישקה באהבתו אינה מוכרת לו כלל, או שהוא חש בה ומנסה בכוח (כוח המלה הזולה והמזלזלת) להסיח את דעתו ממנה. כמה אצילית היא, דווקא משום כך, תשובתו של פישקה, שגם היא

נמסרת במלואה רק במקור היידי: "למאי זאָל איך לייקענען [– – –] איך האָבּן זין טאקע אנגעהויבן שטארק ליבּ צו האָבּן זין הארצן פאר גרויס רחמנות". התרגום העברי: "מה לי לשקר – מרוב חמלתי עליה הרי התחלתי חומד אותה בלבי" אינו אומר כמעט כלום. עיקרו של המשפט היידי הוא בתיקון שמתקן פישקה: במקום היפארליאפעטי המזוהם של מנדלי הוגה הוא את הפועל התקני, הטהור, יליב צו האָבוִי, ולא עוד אלא שהוא מוסיף עליו את תואר הפועל ישטאַרקי (מאוד), בלי כל בושה; אף כי בהמשך הוא מנסה להתחמק משהו, ולטעון שאהבתו כל בושה; אף כי בהמשך הוא מנסה להתחמק משהו, ולטעון שאהבתו החזקה לביילה באה ממקור הרחמנות וממנו בלבד. בתשובה זו מעמיד פישקה את מנדלי יבמקומוי – בשקט, באצילות, ללא התרסה – מכאן ואילך יהיה פישקה גבוה ממנדלי בראש ויותר. כמה רחוק מנדלי, כמה נמוך הוא, מן המקום שבו עומד פישקה וממנו יכול הוא לומר בפשטות, ללא התחמקות וכמעט בלי בושה: "למה אכחיש – באמת התחלתי לאהוב אותה מאוד".

בנקודה זו מתחיל תהליך התבוסה של מנדלי. פישקה מספר את סיפור יחסיו עם ביילה בהתרגשות עצומה, ומנדלי נאלץ להודות כי האיש העילג נהפך לפתע למשורר. ובכן, גם בתחום המלים נעשה פישקה גדול ממנו. אמנם, מנדלי מנסה בקוֹזֶרִי ארוך, שהפעם אין הוא משמיעו באוזני פישקה ואלתר, לצמצם את ממדי התופעה, המאיימת על מבצרו האחרון, מבצר השפה, ולתארה כאירוע מקרי וחד־פעמי. "ינשמת אלוח היתה דוברת בו", בפישקה, הוא מודה, ולכאורה באים הדברים לרומם ולפאר את הווידוי, אלא שבאמת הם באים לומר כי פישקה לא היה אלא כלי, שהעביר דרכו חומר שאינו ממנו ובו, שהרי הדברים שאמר היו, כביכול, "שלא לפי שכלו". אחר־כך מערים מנדלי סידרה של משלים ואנלוגיות, הבאים, כל אחד מכיוונו שלו, להמעיט בערך ההתנשאות הפיוטית שהתנשא פישקה בדבריו על אהבתו: בערך ההתנשאות הפיוטית שהתנשא פישקה לה ונפתח פיה; פישקה כמוהו כאתונו של בלעם, שהשעה שיחקה לה ונפתח פיה;

כמוהו כדרשן טח תפל, שפעם אחת נחה עליו הרוח; כמוהו כחזן ישזמרת סוסים זמרתוייי ופתאום רוח השירה התעוררה בו והפיקה מתוכו צליל נקי; ולבסוף כמוהו כשני פועלי דפוס שהכיר מנדלי והיה מתוכו צליל נקי; ולבסוף כמוהו כשני פועלי דפוס שהכיר מנדלי והיה רגיל בעבודתם המוּכָנית ובקהוּת פניהם, שעה שהיו עומדים כגלמים ומגלגלים את אופן מכונת הדפוס, "ופתאום נתרגשו והתחילו מגלגלים את האופן בזריזות ובנחת רוח, ועיניהם מתלהטות ופניהם להבים את האופן בזריזות ובנחת רוח, ועיניהם מתלהטות ופניהם לחבים כדרכם תמיד ומראיהם מראה גולם" (עמי 94). כך רוצה מנדלי לחשוב על פישקה, וכך, מקווה הוא, יימשך סיפורו – היינו, הסיפור ישקע וידעך ורושמו העז יימחה.

אך הדברים אינם נמשכים לפי רצון מנדלי. משיושבים כל השלושה של מנדלי, מתחיל סיפורו של – על עגלתו שלו, של מנדלי, מתחיל סיפורו של פישקה לצבור תאוצה מחדש. אחר השיא שאליו הגיע הסיפור (בסיום פרק יז) הכרחית הרפיה מסוימת. הטוֹן הפאתיטי מפנה את מקומו לרצף סיפורי יום־יומי יותר. פישקה שב לגמגומו ומנדלי "מתקן דיבורו כדרכו ולשונו". אבל הורדת המתח והרמה לא באה אלא כדי לאפשר פיתוחה של תנופה גדולה אף יותר מזו שהיתה קודם לכן. פישקה . מתאר את ארוחת השבת האידיאלית שאליה זכה להסב, את טיולו עם ביילה בליל הירח, את שירת הַיגונים של ביילה ("אבא שחטני/אמא אכלתני...י). הדברים נעשים רצף של יגון ופיוט, ומנדלי מנסה להפר שוב את רושמם בשאלות ובהערות של גנאי (ייעדיין הרי לא אמרת לנו, פישקא, אם הגיבנת שלך יפה היא", עמי 100). אבל אין בכוחו לעצור בעד השטף הגואה, ולו גם לרגע. הסיפור נישא לעבר אקט שבועת האמונים הרומאנסית של פישקה וביילה ולאחריו אל המאבק הנורא עם הממזר האדמוני במרתף. האהבה מפיחה בפישקה רוח גבורה וגברות שלא היתה בו קודם לכן. הוא נעשה עתה למקבילו של אלתר, המעז לצאת למלחמה גלויה על יריבו־אויבו. מנדלי עדיין מנסה לשסע ולקטוע את סיפורו. כך, למשל, הוא מנצל שאלה ששואל אלתר (מה זכות ראתה לעצמה בתיה העיוורת, שנתחברה לממזר האדמוני, לכעוס

הדברים מזכירים, כמובן, את יזירמת סוסים זירמתםי מספר יחזקאל (כג, כ) ומוסיפים להמשלותיו של מנדלי מימד של גסות מדהימה. אם היה מקום לחשוב, שאברמוביץ ריכֶּךְ את תרגום היפארליאפעטי של מנדלי משום שרצה לעדן את הסיפור בנושא העברי, הרי בא איזכור מקראי פורנוגראפי־למחצה זה ומבטל סברה כזאת. מתברר שאברמוביץ נהג כאן לפי שיטת הייפיצוייםיי הידועה. אותה גסות, שאי אפשר היה להקנותה למנדלי העברי מחמת הספרותיות של הלשון, הוקנתה לו בדרך האיזפור המקראי. ביידיש היתה גסותו ייעממיתיי יותר, הוקנתה לו בדרך האיזפור חכם מנבל פיו.

על פישקה, שהתקרב לביילה הגיבנת), לשם קוֹזַרִי ארוך על השאלה אם אנשים, הפוסלים את זולתם במוּמֵם הם, אינם יודעים שהם לוקים באותו מום עצמו או שהם יודעים זאת וסבורים שלהם מותר מה שאסור לאחרים. ובכן, שוב ניסיון להטות את הספור מגורל הפרט אל הסאטירה על הכלל. הפעם גוער אלתר במנדלי גערה חריפה ביותר: "פיו כשק נקוב, רחמנא ליצלן! תשעה קבין של שיחה יוצאין ממנו. כלום יש צורך בסיפורי מעשיות שלו! שמא יודעים אתם למה הם!..." (עמי 110). אבל גם בלא גערה זו כבר מוטל מנדלי על ארבעתיו. פישקה כבר הכריעו, למעשה. וכשהלה מסיים את הפרק הטראגי ביותר בסיפורו – פרשת השתמטותם ובריחתם של הקבצנים יחד עם אשתו ואהובתו והיוותרותו לבדו בעולם – מודה מנדלי בפירוש ובמלים טעונות רוב משמעות: "בשביל שהדברים יצאו מלבו זעזעו את לבנו. כהמיית נבל והגיון בכינור. כל תוכחתם של מוכיחים וספרי מוסר אינה מזעזעת את נפשי ומביאה לידי חסד ורחמים כאנחה מלב נשבר וכהגה וקול הברה של כינור" (עמי 119). בדברים אלה מודה מנדלי לא רק בעוצמתם המשעבדת של דברי פישקה, שמקורה בכנותם ובישירות הרגשית שלהם, אלא אף בסגולתם האמנותית החד־פעמית. פישקה מעלה בדבריו יהמיית נבל והגיון בכינורי; הדברים בצירופם לביטוי ילב נשברי (על־פי יילב נשבר ונדכה אלוהים לא תבוַהיי, תהילים נא, יש מעמידים את פישקה כממשיכו של משורר התהילים, המשמיע ייתפילה לעני כי יעטוףיי. ובכן, הוא, ולא מנדלי, זוכה לעמוד במקום שבו עומדים תלמידי דוד המלך. ואילו מנדלי, המוכיח, הסאטיריקן, עומד במקום נמוך מזה בהרבה; שהרי כוחה של התוכחה הנמרצת ביותר בטל בפני כוחה של היאנחה מלב נשברי, הנעשית ליהגה וקול הברה של כינורי. מנדלי עצמו מסמן עתה את מקומו הנמוד – לעומת פישקה – לא רק בהירארכיה אנושית־מוסרית, אלא גם בהירארכיה ספרותית־אסתיטית.

על רקע זה שוקע מנדלי מחדש בקוֹזֶרִי ארוך — רצף הרהורים הנֶהגה בינפש מרהי וכמעט מתוך יטירוףי. זהו הקוֹזֶרִי הראשון של מנדלי במהלך סיפורו של פישקה, היוצא לא נגד הסיפור ומתוך מטרה לקטוע אותו ולבטל את רושמו, אלא, להיפך, הוא נובע מתוד הסיפור, ובא כאילו להמשיכו. מנדלי הוגה אותו לא רק בהלוך־רוח של מרירות, שהוא המשך הלוך־הרוח של פישקה, אלא גם מתוך מבוכה ובלבול (יטירוףי). בפעם הראשונה אין האיש הפיקח, השנון והדעתני יודע מה הן התשובות לשאלותיו; שכן השאלות נובעות לא מתחום נסיונו הוא, אלא מתחום הניסיון הייחודי של פישקה, שלמנדלי לא היה חלק בו.

בקצרה. מנדלי שואל מהי האהבה. מה טיבו של הרגש הזה. שכמעט אינו מוכר לו. ומה פעולתו של האדם האוהב: ״רבונו של עולם! אהבה זו שפלוני שוגה בפלונית. ופלונית שוגה בפלוני – מה טיבה!יי ועמי 117). מנדלי יודע על סיומו של הרגש – מפי השמועה – אד אינו מסוגל להביו את מקורו ואת תכליתו. הוא מונה כרוכל את כל הטעמים שייחס הפולקלור לאהבה: מקורה במעשה־כשפים. או שמא באיזה סממו שהושם במאכלו של האיש האוהב. ואולי אין זו אלא מחלת־ נפש. משהו מעין ידיבוק ורוח רעהי, ושמא זוהי יחולאתי סתם. כמו סדחת וחולי־הנפילה. כל התשובות העממיות הללו אינן מספקות את מנדלי. אחרי שראה לפניו את פעולת האהבה בפישקה ושמע את פלא עוצמתה מדיבורו. הוא מפתח עתה מעין תיאוריה סוציולוגית. המסבירה מדוע נמצאת האהבה בעיקר אצל העשירים והקבצנים, אד לא בקרב יהודים יבינונייםי מסוגו. העשירים ביותר והעניים ביותר פנויים. כביכול. לידברי אהביםי: עיסוקיהם אינם גוזלים מהם את הכוח לשהוד על יאהבה ואישיותי: ואילו היבינונייםי, יהודים סוחרים ובעלי־בתים. טרודים כל ימיהם בפרנסתם ואין ליבם פנוי לאחבה ולנוי שבאשה: ייאין לנו פנאי להסתכל בנוי וכיוצא בזה דברי הבליי. הם אומרים. יייהודים אנו, סוחרים אנו, חנוונים וסרסורים אנו, טרודים בפרנסה...י (עמי 118). לכאורה, חוזר מנדלי לדרכו והופך כל עניין פרטי ואישי להכללה חברתית. אבל באמת חזרה זו אינה באה הפעם לשם בריחה ממצוקת האינטימיות אל רווחת ההפשטה. אדרבה, הפעם מנסה מנדלי בעצם להשיב לעצמו על השאלה הקשה והמכאיבה מכול: מדוע אני. מנדלי, לא זכיתי לאהוב אשה, כפי שזכה פישקה! מהו החסר שבי, אשר מנע ממני את ההתנשאות אל גובהי הרגש, שיש עימו שירה וקשר־נשמות ואחריות מוסרית ומגע עם העולם כולו! התשובה י הסוציולוגית או הפסבדו־סוציולוגית באה לסמו את מקורו הלאומי־ החברתי של הליקוי. מנדלי, כאמור, מייצג את הנפש הלאומית המשוסעת והמעוכבת, שאינה מסוגלת לחבר חומר עם רוח. משום כך אין הוא מסוגל לאהבה. כפי שכלל החברה היהודית אינה מסוגלת להתיר לעצמה את האהבה. אלא שמנדלי מסוגל עתה לחדור לקלקלותיה של הנפש הלאומית, לראותן בפירוט ובבירור, והוא מביע עתה את הבנתו החדשה בהצגת דיכוטומיה גדולה, שמצידה האחד עומדת ההתנהגות הלאומית כולה ואילו מצידה האחר עומדת התנהגותו של פישקה: סתם ייהודיםי מתיימרים בקיום של רוחניות. של מצוות, של היגיון צרוף, ובתוך כד הם נושאים נשים, שהם מתייחסים אליהן כאל חפצים, אוכלים אכילה (לשם קיום מצוות

ישלוש סעודותי, כביכול), שותים יין (לשם קיום מצוות יארבע כוסותי) וכוי וכוי. ייהודי משלנו אוכל ושותה ונושא אשה והכל לשם יחוד קודשא בריך־הוא ושכינתיה. אבל לא כן פישקא. כל הדברים האמורים לא נאמרו בו. לו היתה הגיבנת שלו נחמתו בעוניו, אורו וישעו ומעוז חייויי (עמי 119).

בנקודה זו מיצה. למעשה, הסיפור את עצמו, יחינוכו הסנטימנטאליי של מנדלי כמעט שנשלם. עתה באים פרקי ההרפיה הקומית על שהותו של פישקה באודיסה (פרקים כד־כו). שאיו אנו צריכים לנתחם בפירוט. עיקרם של פרקים אלה העלאת תמונת היהדות הימודרניתי־העירונית. אברמוביץ נסוג, כביכול, מן העולם המסופר של יצירתו (עולם העיירה היהודית המסורתית) ומפנה את מבטו אל החברה שבשבילה נוצרת אותה יצירה. הוא עורך – בעד עיניו התמימות של פישקה – השוואה ביו שני העולמות. בעוד שפישקה רואה כמעט רק את ההבדלים שבין הישן לחדש בחיי ישראל, מראה לנו אברמוביץ, כאילו באקראי, גם את הדומה שביניהם. ורומז שחיי ישראל לא השתנו שינוי עקרוני בגילגולם החדש והימגוהץי הזה. ההשוואה מתרכזת בדמותו של הקבצן היהודי החדש - הסופר, איש־הרוח - המחזר על פתחי נדיבים עירוניים ממש כפי שפישקה ובתיה העיוורת חזרו על פתחי בעלי־הבתים, אניירתיים, ואף גרוע מזה: בעלי־הבתים מן הנוסח הישן היו נענים לקבצו היענות כלשהי. ואילו היהודי המודרני מגרש את הסופד היהודי מעל פתחו בזעף ובלגלוג. בתוד כד מפגיש אברמוביץ את פישקה שלו סוף-סוף – לא רק עם מנדלי מוכר ספרים אלא גם עימו, עם אברמוביץ עצמו. הסופר המכובד, שהוא גם מנהל תלמוד־התורה המקומי. הולד ברחוב עם ידידו (הכוונה לעסקו ולהיסטוריוו מי מרגוליס, אשר לו הוקדש יספר הקבצניםי), ומתרחשת הפגישה בין שני האדונים ימדור החדשי, אשכנזים או יפראנצויזיםי, כפי שמכנה אותם פישקה, לבין שני הקבצנים הכסלונים שהתגלגלו לאודיסה: יונטל מחוסר הרגליים ופישקה החיגר. פישקה שופד את לעגו על מנהל תלמוד התורה שאינו נראה כבן־ברית כלל. אברמוביץ מנצל הרף־עין סיפורי זה כדי לתת ביטוי למודעותו לפער הרחב בין המציאות שאליה הוא פונה כסופר לבין המציאות שאותה הוא מעצב בסיפור; אבל פער זה אינו מבטל את עיקרי הביקורת הלאומית, שפיתח בסיפור. העולם היהודי עודנו לוקה בניכור, בהתכחשות לרגש, בהפרדה בין הגוף לנפש. אדרבה, בעיני פישקה, שאודיסה זרה לו מכול וכול, מגלה המציאות היהודית רק עתה, בגלגולה המודרני, את נטייתה לניכור ולצינה בכל אימתה. החברה היהודית המסורתית היתה מדכאה ואומללה למדי

בקשיחותה האוניפורמית, בהתבצרותה סביב הנורמה של הרוחניות המדומה ובשקיעתה לתוך הגופניות חסרת הנפש. אבל החברה היהודית המודרנית, האטומיסטית והמפוררת, נראית מדכאה ואומללה וחסרת רוחניות־אמת (ראה גורל הסופר) אף יותר ממקבילתה. פישקה בורח בחזרה לעבר כסלון שלו.

בכד מגיע הסיפור לסיומו ולרגע היהיוודעותי הגדול שלו. היוודעות זו הוכנה היטב מתחת לפני השטח. אלתר כבר מודע לכך, שבסיפורו של פישקה טמון סוד, הנוגע לו ישירות (יינראה שהוא מבולבל, ולא לחינם הוא מבולבל ודברים בגויי, עמי 117). עתה דרושה עוד לחיצה אחת, עוד הבקעה אחת של פני השטח, כדי שהסוד יפרוץ ויתגלה לעין כול. וכמובן, מנדלי מוכר ספרים הוא הלוחץ והמבקיע. למרות הכול, החקרנות הביקורתית שלו לא נעלמה. אלא שעתה היא מתגלה מצידה החיובי והבונה. רק בה יש כדי להביא למהפך, שיסיר את מעטה העמימות מעל המציאות הקשה, ויאפשר תגובה אמיתית על מציאות זו – תגובתו של אלתר, הנשבע לוותר על האגואיזם הסקסואלי שלו ולהימנע מחזרה אל אשתו עד שימצא את בתו ויגאל אותה מידי שוביה. חקרנותו של מנדלי עומדת הפעם מראש בסימן המטרה המוסרית המעשית. אין זו עוד חקרנות לשמה, לשם שנינה והכללה. מנדלי שואל לשמה של הנערה הגיבנת וכשחושש פישקה שמא פרסום השם יביא לה בושה, גוער בו מנדלי: יישוטה שבעולם! [...] אם אדע את שמה אפשר שתגיע לה טובה. אני הלא תמיד מהלֶך בדרך ואפשר יתגלגל הדבר על ידי למצוא את אבדתד. שומע אתה!יי (עמי 140). כד נודע, שהנערה היא בתו של אלתר. הגבר המגודל והאדום מחוויר כסיד, משתטח מלוא קומתו בעגלה, בוכה, מכה על ליבו ומודה: "אמנם חטאתי! אני אני השימותי את חייה. כדבריה כן הוא: יאבא שחט אותהייי (עמי 141). ההיוודעות היא היוודעותו של אדיפוס המהופד. מנדלי מנסה לרכך אותה במשל קדמוני אחר - אלתר כמוהו כאברהם אבינו, ששילח את הגר וישמעאל מביתו על פי מצוותה של שרה, וחטא שחַטַא צדיק כאברהם יכול כל אדם לחטוא. הלמדנות והשנינות של מנדלי עומדות עתה לרשות הנחמה ושיכוך הכאבים ולא לרשות ההלקאה והגברתם של הכאבים.

בתוך כך מפנה מנדלי את מבטו פעם נוספת אחת אל המרחב, אל יהטבעי. המראה שהוא רואה מתפקד כסמל גדול אחרון, שבו נחתמת היצירה. אור היום הבהיר והעז נחלף שוב באפילה ובטשטוש של הלילה. במקום השמש המאירה והצורבת מופיעים הלבנה והכוכבים: הכוכבים נוצצים וסוקרים לנו משמי מרום בפנים מאירים, ובקצה הכוכבים נוצצים וסוקרים לנו משמי מרום בפנים מאירים, ובקצה

השמים הלבנה עולה כמו מארץ ופני להבים פניה. דומה, שהיא אינה מבטת אלא עלינו, כי לכך נוצרה וניתנה ברקיע, היא וכל צבא השמים העליונים, להאיר לארץ ולדרים עליה בעיירות ולהולכי דרכים. (עמ' 142)

מצטיירת כאן תמונת קוסמוס ידידותי, מכוּון לצורכי האדם ושוקד על טובתם. במרכזו עומדת לבנה גדולה ואדומה של אמצע החודש. אנו נזכרים בכל הלבנות החיוורות־הכסופות שליווּ אותנו בסצינות הלילה של הסיפור, ביחוד בלבנה העגומה־החיוורת שאליה פנה מנדלי בווידויו ובבכיו בלילה בפונדק, ובלבנות הכסף, שליוו את פישקה וביילה בלילות ההתייחדות שלהם. הלבנה, כפי שראינו, מילאה אז תפקיד סמלי כמייצגת האימהיות ברובד הנפשי־הילדותי של מנדלי, וכן היא היתה המאור הצנוע, שלנגדו יכלו פישקה וביילה לגלות את סוד אהבתם האסורה. אבל הלבנה בתמונה גדולה אחרונה זו שבסיפור אינה דומה לקודמותיה. היא אינה חיוורת ואינה עגומה ואימהית אלא פניה יפני להביםי ומבטה העז מרוכז בבני האדם שעל האדמה. אנו נוכחים, שלבנה זו קרובה אל השמש היוקדת של ימי הקיץ, המתוארים בסיפור, לא פחות משהיא קרובה אל לבנות הכסף של לילותיהם. ליתר דיוק: זוהי הסינתיזה של שני הסמלים – השמש העזה, הגברית, הביקורתית, הצורבת, והלבנה הרכה, האימהית, המנחמת. בסמל זה, שבו ניטלה מן השמש צריבתה ומן הלבנה ניטלו עגמומיותה הפאסיבית וחולשתה, מגיע הסיפור אל רגע הסינתיזה הסופי שלו. מנדלי־השמש אינו צריד לחדול מאורו, מלהטו, מביקורתו, אך הוא חייב להמשיך ולתפקד כשמש־ירח, הממזגת דין עם רחמים. כמו כן חייב הוא, ואולי גם יוכל. לחבר את הילדותיות הפאסיבית שלו עם הגבריות האקטיבית־הביקורתית שלו, את הדמיון עם השכל, את הפאתוס עם הסאטירה. מן החיבור ייוולד מנדלי חדש, בוגר ושלם יותר, שהרוד לא ימוטט את כוחו, הרגש לא יעמעם את שכלו, החלום לא ישכיח ממנו

עוד לרגע נשקפים אל תוך הסיפור פני הלילה, וכבר הם שונים:
ייהירח והכוכבים מהלכים בגובה שמים רחוק רחוק מאיתנו בני אדם
ופניהם אינם עוד אלי כבתחילה. מה אנו כי ידעונו, ילודי אשה כי
יחשבונוי...י (עמי 142). האם הקוסמוס הוא, ככלות הכול, אדיש וחסר
התייחסות לאדם: האם יש, לפי זה, סיכוי לקיום משמעותי — כלומר,
מוסרי — בקוסמוס זה: האם עין אלוהים צופה אל האדם, רואה
רשעים וצדיקים, יודעת דין, מבטיחה גמול! ואם הקוסמוס ריק
מרחמים ומהתחשבות באדם, האם יוכל האדם עצמו, באמצעיו

המעטים — בשכלו, ברגשותיו, בתחושת הצדק ואי־הצדק שלו, לברוא לעצמו קוסמוס אנושי משל עצמו!

בהעמדת שאלה זו מסתיים סיפורו של אברמוביץ.

מסקנות

לסיכום נעלה בקצרה — סעיפים־סעיפים — את המשתמע מדיוננו זה:

א) כל הגישות המרכזיות שהסתמנו בביקורת הפרשנית של יספר הקבצניםי נאחזו בהיבטים אמיתיים וחשובים של היצירה. אפילו הגישה היאטומיסטיתי, שטעויותיה מרובות משל כל האחרות (יש לזכור, שהיא היתה ראשונה בזמן ולא עמד לרשות מייצגיה הניסיון המצטבר, שעמד לרשותם של המבקרים שחלקו עליה), נגעה בעניין חשוב ביותר, אלא שהיא הציגה עניין זה בהקשר מוטעה. הרצף של יספר הקבצנים׳ אכן נראה מקוטע וכאילו מתפורר. המדובר הוא לא רק בהתפצלות הספר לשתי חטיבותיו העיקריות, אלא גם בהתפוררות האופיינית, כביכול, למבנה בתוך כל אחת מן החטיבות, ובעיקר בראשונה שבהן. אלא שהתפוררות זו מייצגת לא את סגולתה היאמנותיתי של יצירת אברמוביץ, העוסקת כביכול בשכלול הפרט התיאורי והמזניחה את המסגרת הכוללת, אלא היא מייצגת את הנתק הפנימי, הפסיכי, האופייני לאישיותו של מנדלי. משום כך מתגלה הנטייה להתפוררות בעיקר בחטיבה הראשונה של הסיפור: הרי חטיבה זו עומדת כולה בסימן שיחתו הסובייקטיבית של מנדלי, ושיחה זו. בקפיצותיה, בינפילותיהי ממודוס נפשי ודיבורי ברמה אחת למודוס ברמה אחרת, היא היוצרת גם את הפערים והבקיעים העיקריים, המסתמנים לאורך פני השטח של הסיפור בחלקו זה. בחטיבה השניה שוב אחראי מנדלי, ורק הוא, לריסוק המבנה. אילו הונח לפישקה לספר את סיפורו באין מפריע היתה חטיבה זו מצטיינת ביתר רציפות. גם כך היא מצטיינת ברציפות של ממש, למרות נסיונותיו של מנדלי לקטוע את סיפורו של פישקה; וזאת משום שנסיונות אלה אינם עולים יפה, כפי שראינו, וסיפור גורלו המר של הנכה שוטף ומבליע אותם בתוכו. בקצרה, האסכולה היאטומיסטיתי היטיבה להבחין בתופעה סטרוקטוראלית קיימת, אלא שלא היו בידיה הכלים להבין את משמעותה ותיפקודה; וזאת בעיקר משום שזיהתה את ימנדלי האמןי (כלומר, את אברמוביץ עצמו) עם מנדלי הגיבור.

ב) הגישה הז'אנרית־ההיסטורית אל 'ספר הקבצנים' שיבצה את הסיפור בהקשר היסטורי־ספרותי נכון ותרמה בצורה זו תרומה

מכרעת לקביעת מקומה של היצירה במסורת של ספרות אירופה כולה ושל הספרות הרומאניסטית בפרט. אין לדחות את קביעותיה בעניין זה, כשם שאין לדחות את קביעתה, שהסיפור עומד – מבחינת זיקותיו למסורות הרומאו – בסימו השפעתו של ירומאן הדרךי וכן גם בסימן ההשפעה של סיגנון הקוֹזָרִי היאינטימיי נוסח לורנס סטרן וממשיכיו בגרמניה וברוסיה. אלא שגם גישה זו התבססה על הבנה בלתי נכונה של דמות מנדלי. מייצגי גישה זו לא הבינו שמנדלי איננו ינאראטורי בלבד אלא גם ובעיקר גיבור בדיוני מתפתח ומשתנה. משום שלא עמדו על כך, לא הבחינו מייצגיה בעובדה, שיספר הקבצניםי הוא גם רומאן פסיכולוגי־התפתחותי, ושאופקיו האסתיטיים מכילים, בצורה זו, לא רק את פואטיקת הרומאן של המאה השמונה־עשרה אלא גם את הפואטיקה של רומאן המאה התשע־עשרה. כל הדיבורים על דלות יכולתו של אברמוביץ באינדיווידואציה פסיכולוגית של גיבוריו ובפיתוח תהליד נפשי המביא עליהם שינוי מתבטלים ברגע שאנו נותנים דעתנו על מנדלי מוכר ספרים כגיבור, שאנו שרויים (באמצעות המונולוגים שלו) בלב הווייתו הפסיכית. זהו אחד הגיבורים המומחשים והמעניינים ביותר בספרות העברית לדורותיה. הדקויות בפיתוחו, הניואנסים בשיחתו, התפניות הפתאומיות בהתנהגותו, הם כה מפתיעים ועשירי־תוכן עד כי יש בהם כדי לשים ללעג כל מי שטען או יטען נגד אברמוביץ היפסיכולוגי, או גם כל מי שיטפח על שכמו בפטרונות וישחרר אותו מחובת האינדיווידואציה הפסיכולוגית בתור אמן השייד לתולדות הרומאן בראשיתן, כשהזיאנר היה עדיין פרימיטיבי ועיצובו לא תבע קשר בין נפש הגיבור לבין גורלו.

ג) הגישה, שהניחה קיומם של פיצול ושניות ביספר הקבצנים', אף היא צדקה צדק סטאטי, היינו, צדק שמקורו בזיהוי התופעה ובתיאורה הנכון — פחות או יותר — אך תיאור זה נמצא נפגם משום חוסר דינאמיות בגישה, כלומר: מאי־הבנת מקור התופעה ותיפקודה. הפיצול, כפי שראינו, הכרחי הוא לשם מימוש המטרה האמנותית והחינוכית־ההומאניסטית של יספר הקבצנים'. הכרח הוא, שייווצר בספר ירצף מנדליי כדי שיבוא ירצף פישקה' וישברו. בכפילות זו תלוי תהליך יחינוכו' הרגשי של מנדלי, שהוא עיקרה התימאטי של היצירה כולה. כאמור, דיאלקטיקה תובעת עימותן של תיזה ואנטי־תיזה המנוגדות זו לזו בחריפות. רק מתוך עימות כזה יצמח רמז הסינתיזה. כדי להציג לפנינו מבנה עלילתי רצוף משמעות חייב היה אברמוביץ להקים מבנה עלילתי מפוצל.

ד) הגישה הפוליפונית־האנאלוגית נגעה בדייקנות בהרבה מן הרבדים

העדינים והעמוקים יותר של היצירה. טענותיה בדבר הקשרים הגלויים והסמויים בין ירובד מנדליי הקומי לירובד פישקהי הפאתיטי בוודאי נכונות הן, אלא שגם הן, בעיקרן הן טענות יסטאטיותי. הערתו הפוריה ביותר של שקד היא זו, המזהה את מטרת התפנית הגלומה במבנה הדיאלקטי עם העתקתו של הקורא מעמדת מתבונן לגלגני לעמדה של אמפאתיה והזדהות. אלא שהארה זו היא רק בבחינת רמז קל או ניחוש עמום נוגע־לא־נוגע בעיקרה של היצירה: תחליך ההשתנות העובר על מנדלי מוכר ספרים עצמו במהלך הסיפור כולו. תהליד זה הוא המסביר את טיב המגעים בין יתבנית העלי הקומית ליתשתית הפאתיטיתי ביספר הקבצניםי. מגעים אלה, כפי שראינו, הם קודם כול מגעים בין חלקי אישיותו הבלתי־אחדותית של מנדלי. בתחילה, כשהשסע בין חלקיה של אישיות זו פעור לרווחה, המגעים הם פתאומיים, יאֶראטייםי, יוצרים רושם של אי־רלוואנטיות. של קפיצות מעניין לעניין. בסוף הסיפור, כשחלקי האישיות קרבים זה לזה - בהשפעת הדוגמה של פישקה - נעשים המגעים רצופים ומשמעותיים יותר. התהליך דומה לקליטה של תַדֶר, שבתחילה, כשהמכשיר אינו מכוּון ואינו תקין, היא מלאת הפרעות, הפסקות ורעשים; לאחר מכן, כשהמכשיר נמצא מותקן ומכוון יותר, משתפרת הקליטה והמסר המועבר באמצעותה נעשה רצוף ושלם.

ה) יספר הקבצניםי הוא יצירה אחדותית לחלוטין מבחינה תימאטית וסטרוקטוראלית, אלא שאחדותה כרוכה במורכבות ובסיבוך, ולאורך חלק גדול מן הסיפור עליה להיות נסתרת, או גלויה רק למחצה. המורכבות וההסתר האלה לא באו לצורך הפגנת וירטואוזיות או לשם אֶזוֹטֶרְיוּת מאיזה סוג שהוא. הם נובעים בפשטות מגוף התימה – חינוכו של מנדלי באמצעות פישקה – מן הסיפור החייב להיות מסופר כדי שתימה זאת תעמוד לפנינו בשלמותה ומן האידיאה המבקשת והמוצאת את ביטויה בסיפור זה.

ו) יספר הקבצנים׳ אינו סאטירה ואינו פואמה, אף כי מצויים בו יסודות בולטים הן של סאטירה והן של ליריקה אֶלֶגית ופאתיטית. זהו רומאן, רומאן מובהק. למעשה, זהו אולי הרומאן המשמעותי ביותר בחלקה המוקדם של ספרות הרומאן היהודית. בכל מקרה, יחד עם יאהבת ציוןי ויאשמת שומרון׳, יהתועה בדרכי החיים׳ וידאס שטערנטיכלי, סיפור זה הוא אחד מאבני השתות המרכיבות את היסוד של הזיאנר הרומאניסטי בספרות היהודית על כל לשונותיה. הירומאניותי המובהקת של יספר הקבצנים׳ נובעת בראש ובראשונה מהתרכזותו של הסיפור בנושא המרכזי של כלל ספרות הרומאן של המאות השמונה־הסיפור בנושא המרכזי של כלל ספרות הרומאן של המאות השמונה־הסיפור בנושא המרכזי של כלל ספרות הרומאן של המאות השמונה־

עשרה והתשע־עשרה — האהבה כערך אנושי עליון, שבאמצעותו יכול האדם היחיד לחרוג מבדידותו הקיומית, לגעת בזולת, כלומר בעולם, לממש את הפוטנציות הביולוגיות והמוסריות הגלומות בו, לחיות את חייו בצורה המלאה והערכית ביותר. בשום סיפור אחר במסגרת היצירה הרומאניסטית היהודית של המאה התשע־עשרה לא הוצגו יבעיית האהבהי ומקומה בחיים האנושיים בכלל והיהודיים בפרט בתוקף ובחדות מרובות יותר מאלו האופייניות ליספר הקבצניםי. צדק שלום־עליכם כשראה דווקא בספר זה את המודל הקלאסי לירומאן היהודיי בהא הידיעה. אין להבין את המשך התפתחותו של הזיאנר הרומאניסטי בספרותנו ללא הבנת התפקיד המכריע שמילא יספר הקבצניםי בעיצוב דפוסיו הראשוניים של הזיאנר; כך, למשל, אפשר להבין כמה מן היצירות הרומאניסטיות החשובות ביותר בעברית וביידיש (כגון יהכנסת כלהי של עגנון) כתגובות על יספר הקבצניםי, כפארודיות עליו, כיתשובותי סיפוריות ואידאיות לחיווּיָיוֹ מלאי התוקף הרוחני והזיאנרי.

ז) מנדלי ואלתר אחים תאומים הם, ולא רק משום ששניהם מתענים יחדיו בעסק מכירת הספרים בישראל. אמנם, אלתר הוא אדם סקסואלי־פיסי ומנדלי הוא אדם א־סקסואלי ושכלתני. אבל שניהם אנשים מעוכבים מבחינה רגשית־מוסרית ושניהם זקוקים להיפתחות אמיתית לעבר הזולת האנושי. אלתר חייב להשתחרר מן האגואיזם האינטלקטואלי שלו ומנדלי חייב להשתחרר מן האגואיזם האינטלקטואלי שלו. הסיפור הוא סיפור ההשתחררות של שניהם. אלתר מגיע ליקאתארזיסי רגשי־מוסרי ולשינוי אופי בדרך האישית־המיידית ביותר. ההיוודעות שלו – היוודעות אידיפאלית בהיפוך – מכה בו ומשנה את כל מערכי עולמו. מנדלי מגיע לאותו קאתארזיס ולשינוי דומה בדרך האמפאתיה וההזדהות עם הזולת. היהיוודעותי שלו משנה אף היא את מערכי עולמו; אמנם בצורה פחות דראמאטית משמשנה החיוודעות את אלתר.

ח) גם פישקה ומנדלי הם אחים תאומים. לכאורה, גדול מאוד הניגוד (התרבותי, החברתי, המנטאלי) ביניהם. עם זאת הם מהווים שני חלקיה של פסיכֶה מפוצלת אחת; פסיכה, שתמצא את תיקונה כאשר חלקיה הללו יאוחו. האישיות היהודית זקוקה הן למפוכחות ולביקורתיות של מנדלי והן לרגשות ולעושר החיים הפנימיים של פישקה. היא זקוקה לצירוף של מודעות מתמדת ושל חיי נפש ספונטאניים, המסוגלים לפרוץ גדרי מנהג ואורחות חיים ובאותה מידה גם גדרי ביקורת ושיפוט חיים. האם מאמין אברמוביץ

באפשרויות של איחוי כזה בזמנו ובמקומותיו, בתנאי החיים היהודיים השוררים בהווה של סיפורו? ספק רב הוא אם יש בו אמונה כזאת. קרוב לוודאי, שהוא חושש שפישקה יישאר עלוב־החיים שהיה, ואילו מנדלי גם הוא יישאר מעוֹט חיים וחצוי־נפש כשהיה. משום כך שני הגיבורים העיקריים של הסיפור הם בעלי־מום. פישקה — בעל־מום חיצוני וחברתי, שהוא, כמובן, גם מום פנימי (מוגבלות, נאיביות המביאה לכישלון); ואילו מנדלי — בעל מום פנימי נפשי, שהוא, כמובן, גם מום חברתי־חיצוני (חייו בשולי החברה כאדם ללא משפחה, למעשה). פישקה מוצא מעין תיקון באמצעות האהבה; מנדלי — באמצעות הפתיחות לסיפור האהבה של פישקה. אך השניים נותרים באמצעות הפלית, כשכל לחומר חיים רגשי, ושניהם אינם יכולים לרוות להארה שכלית, כשכל לחומר חיים רגשי, ושניהם באכזריות — אך מגיע לסופו בצירופם האלגי: "שני יהודים באים לכסלוו!..."

ט) יפישקה החיגרי או יספר הקבצניםי – איזו כותרת הולמת יותר את עיקרה של היצירה! תיקו. שתי הכותרות כאחת חיוניות ונכונות הן. הראשונה מבליטה את העיקר האישי של הסיפור, הבא ללמדנו, שהקיום האנושי המוסרי הוא תמיד קיום אישי, ששום הכללה אינה יכולה למצותו. אבל כותרת זו אינה מבליטה דיה את תפקידו של מנדלי ביצירה; את תפקיד הקוזרי שלו, את תפקיד שנינתו, פיקחותו, שקיעתו, הסתלקותו מן השנינה והפיקחות, ענוותו אל מול נסיון החיים של פישקה. הכותרת יספר הקבצניםי מכוונת את דעתנו בדרך עקיפין לעיקר נוסף זה, ולא רק משום שהיא מדגישה את ההגות הלאומית של מנדלי, את ניתוח מצב החברה והנפש היהודית בסיפורו. בין השאר מכוונת היא אותנו גם להבנת הקירבה בין שני גיבוריו העיקריים של הספר: הקבצן החומרי, פישקה, והקבצן הרגשי, מנדלי. היא מעבירה אותנו מן הפרט, פישקה, אל כלל לאומי־חברתי המגולם במנדלי, אך מחזירה אותנו לבסוף יחד עם שני הגיבורים מן הכלל אל הפרט; שכן רק בחייו של הפרט. אם אכן חיים מלאים הם, יכול מעשה החיים הגדול, העיקרי – מעשה האהבה – להתרחש.

ירושלים ותל־אביב, יוני – יולי, 1987

לידידי החביב והיקר מנשה מרגלית מביא את הספר הזה כמתנה מקרב לב המחבר

ואבוי לראשי!

מרוב חמלה התחלתי לנחם את ר' אלתר ולפייסו בדיבורים טובים. ביקשתי לשכנעו, שהוא עדיין יכול לתקן את משוגתו. הוא קם, התיישב על דוכנו, נשא את עיניו לשמיים ואמר מקרב לב:

— הריני נשבע לעיני החי לנצח, שלא אשוב הביתה אל אישתי וילדי, שלא אשיא את בתי הבתולה לאיש עד אשר אמצא את ילדתי האומללה... והנה הם — כאן הוא הצביע עלי ועל פישקה — שני רוי־אדם עדים י

פישקה נפל על צווארי ר' אלתר, חיבק אותו ונשק לו.

הו... — הוא התחנן לפניו בקול בוכים — רחם נא עליה! — געוואלד, הצל אותה, הצילנה!

ר׳ אלתר עלה מיד על עגלתו, נפרד מאיתנו, הפך את כיוון נסיעתו ויצא לדרכו. אנוכי ופישקה הגענו בערך בשעה עשר בלילה אל כסלון.

JUDAH GOLDIN

יש לתמוה, איך יירא מחנה גדול של שש מאות אלף איש, מהרודפים אז לא ילחמו על נפשם ועל בניהם. התשובה, כי המצרים היו אדונים ליש ממצרים למד מנעוריו לסבול עול מצרים, ונפשו שפלה. ואיך יוכל עתה י שראל נרפים ואינם מלומדים למלחמה. והשם לבדו שהוא עושה גדוג סבב שמתו כל העם היוצא ממצרים הזכרים. כי אין בהם כח להלחם נ אחר דור המדבר, שלא ראו גלות, והיתה להם נפש גבוהה.

e view in Deut. Rabba, ed. Lieberman, 71 (bottom and top 72), when

33:6, 310. Note also Lam. Rabba 1:29, 14a, in the paragraph follwing

ish and Christian History (Leiden, 1976), 1: 199.

31

JEFFREY FLECK

Mendele in Pieces

At that moment, my body stretches itself out and becomes very light, like a thing of no substance. Mendele breaks up into little pieces, and those pieces spin and flutter about in the air so that one cannot tell where the center is or which piece is the main piece. Suddenly I have two faces and two Mendeles jostle each other . . . "Good evening," says one Mendele with a bow, "where are you off to on a night like this?" 1

HAVING COMPLETED A DAY of fasting, as required of Jews on the 17th of Tammuz, Mendele, the narrator-hero of *The Beggars' Book*, fortifies himself with a drink of wine before setting off in search of his friend, Reb Alter Yaknehoz. On an empty stomach, the wine has immediate and powerful effect, and the hallucination of Mendele in Pieces is the result. In the dialogue between the two Mendeles that eventually emerge from the pieces, one Mendele indulges in tears of self-pity, invoking the hardships and humiliations he must suffer as a Jew. The other Mendele merely scoffs, telling his tearful other half to get on with the search. "Quiet down! A Jew should complain? A grown-up Jew with a wife and children stands and bawls to the moon in the middle of the night and isn't ashamed of himself? Hold your tears and be still . . . the devil won't carry you off." (H103; Y49)

Mendele seems to be a man in serious conflict with himself, the victim of an identity crisis of no small proportions. At least that is what, as post-Freudian readers, we would assume to be the symbolic import of the hallucination and its "dream-work." But if this is an identity crisis, it is a curiously short-lived one. After the brief dialogue, the "pieces" are quickly reassembled and Mendele returns to his narrative duties as if nothing had transpired. He does not pause to consider the implications of his hallucination, nor does he suffer a similar breakdown in *The*

Beggars' Book.² The conflict, moreover, plays no part in the plot of the novel and its psychological implications are neither developed nor explored. Indeed, the quasi-allegorical terms in which Abramovitsh evokes the inner conflict of his protagonist discourages this kind of development. By personifying the conflicting impulses as two autonomous and antagonistic Mendeles, he leaves himself little room in which to reunite them, to show how they can co-exist in a single psychological configuration. Rather, Mendele simply and suddenly deconstructs and then, just as suddenly, comes back together again. But for that isolated moment, Mendele becomes an enigma both to himself and to us: "one cannot tell where the center is or which piece is the main piece."

The critics, of course, have ignored Mendele's warning. Indeed, the question of Mendele's true identity—the "main piece"—has preoccupied Hebrew and Yiddish literary critics from Abramovitsh's day to our own, and the efforts have led to widely varying results. Mendele has been described as the most Jewish of Jews, a folk-type symbolizing the Jewish people, a man with a tragic vision, a humanist and apostate essentially alienated from his Jewish environment, and even an antisemite,³ Efforts at identifying Mendele were considerably complicated, moreover, by the fact that, early in his career, Abramovitsh adopted the name of his main character and narrator as his pseudonym. As a result, critics often con
Gused the issue by equating the fictional character with the author chimself.⁴

Mendele's enigmatic quality, then, is not confined to isolated moments of deconstruction. The "main piece" has consistently eluded the critics, and claims of having discovered it have invariably evoked heated counter-claims. Few critics, however, would find much to quarrel with Dan Miron's estimation of Mendele as "one of the best, most lively, and round characters ever created by a Jewish writer of fiction." Nor, I suspect, would Gershon Shaked's statement that there are only two characters in Abramovitsh's fictional world—Mendele and the collectivity of Am Yisrael—evoke much debate.6

Now the paradoxical situation of a "memorable" character who evokes different and at times widely diverging memories is certainly not an unprecedented phenomenon. From Odysseus to Leopold Bloom, fictional characters have been made the object of countless "character sketches," ranging from impressionistic and personal responses to sophisticated analyses based upon the psychological or psycho-sociological theories in vogue at any given moment. It is little wonder, then, that the results of these efforts have often varied. Still, a case such as Mendele, in which the responses have varied so widely and evoked so much controversy in a relatively short span of time, presents us with an interesting opportunity to consider the source and the implications of this paradox.

One of the assumptions shared by the critics whose views on Mendele I have cited is that fictional characters can and indeed should

Mendele in Pieces

be analyzed as though they were real people. Thus, in attempting determine Mendele's identity, they use the same terms, concepts, techniques that we ordinarily use to analyze friends, acquaintances historical figures. They speak, for example, of Mendele's personality some psychological essence underlying and explaining his overt spe and behavior, they speculate as to Mendele's values and motives, they may even attempt to explain these in terms of Mendele's pas present biographical situation. Now this way of dealing with fiction characters is, of course, the standard procedure of traditional liter criticism and it is, one could argue, firmly based upon the convention realism that have dominated the writing of fiction at least since latter part of the eighteenth century.7 Fictional characters in reali novels are supposed to be "life-like," and thus what better way analyzing them than by analogy to real life? Nor is there any lack contemporary literary theorists ready to confirm the legitimacy of wl after all, appears to be common practice.8

In recent years, however, the analysis of fictional characters though they were real people has come under considerable suspicion particular, the literary theorists and "narratologists" associated w Structuralism and its various manifestations have engaged in a system and often polemical critique of the assumptions underlying traditic modes of character analysis, and have attempted, with varying degr of success, to generate an alternative to them. Writing in the 1968 is of Communications, Roland Barthes summarized the Structuralist approin this way:

Anxious not to define character in terms of psychological essence, structuanalysis has so far attempted, through various hypotheses, to define chacter as a "participant" rather than as a "being."

The Structuralist attack on traditional approaches to the analysis character in narrative discourse has its roots in the work of the Russ Formalists and is particularly indebted to Vladimir Propp's Morpholog the [Russian] Folktale. In this study, Propp analyzed character not in ter of character-traits but rather in terms of their "spheres of action," tl is, according to the role they play in the unfolding of the rather sta plot structure of the tales he considered.10 In the work of Greimas a Todorov, characters are similarly viewed as "agents of action," or, Greimas' terminology, embodiments of "actantial" categories. 11 In own treatment of the question of character in S/Z, Barthes calls attenti to the fact that what we call a "character" in narrative discourse nothing more than the sum of attributional signifiers (Barthes ca them "semes") which the reader collects and processes as he moves his reading along the narrative syntagm. Thus, a character's personal is, for Barthes, "just as much a combination as the odor of a dish or t bouquet of a wine."12 The task of naming that combination and

constituent elements is, according to Barthes, the essence of the reader's activity, and while the task is always erratic and subject to constant reevaluation, the reader is aided, on the one hand, by the economic relationship between the sum of the attributes and the Proper Name and, on the other, by an ideology of character which he brings to his reading of the text. Rather than analyzing characters as more or less accurate representations of human beings as we know them or believe we know them, then, the Structuralists insist upon treating fictional characters as constructs, as functioning elements in a narrative structure, and their goal has been to define the nature of that function.

At the outset, at least, we will follow the advice of the Structuralists and view Mendele not as a "being" but as a "participant." Thus, rather than attempting to reassemble the pieces revealed in Mendele's hallucination and to identify or name the "main piece," a task which, as we have seen, has evoked more controversy than consensus, we will attempt to define Mendele's function in the narrative structure and then show how the requirements of that structure affect and largely determine Mendele's semic portrait.

Although his precise role varies considerably, Mendele appears in most of Abramovitsh's major works. At times, he is a fictional editor who provides an introduction or epilogue to the documents he has "received." His editorial role, however, may lead him to make substantial changes in the "original" text and when this happens he becomes, in effect, the narrator of the "improved" tale. In other works, he describes events that he himself has witnessed, and in a few cases he emerges as a full-fledged character, a narrator-hero who not only reports on the action but plays a major role in it. Regardless of his varying visibility, however, Mendele's structural function remains constant: He is the intermediary between the reader and Jewish society and it is only through him that, ultimately, the reader has access to that society. Dan Miron has put it succinctly: Whenever Mendele speaks, it is "his consciousness that constitutes the fictional world." 13

In The Beggars' Book, Abramovitsh exploits Mendele's role as intermediary more fully and consistently than in any other work. Here he is both narrator and actor and, at least in the first thirteen chapters of the novel, he remains steadily in the foreground. The events that form the object of Mendele's narrative consist largely of his encounters on the road with fellow Jews and the swapping of tales which, in Mendele's world, invariably follow from such encounters. Thus, when Mendele meets up with Reb Alter Yaknehoz, an itinerent book peddler like himself, the latter tells Mendele of his recent misadventure at a nearby fair

where, in his eagerness to earn a commission, he mistakenly ma "match" between two young men. Mendele, in turn, tells Reb Alt Fishke, a crippled bathhouse attendant who obtained a bride whe their eagerness not lose their commission (and the pleasures of a mar feast), the matchmakers and other town "officials" chose him as a minute substitute for an unwilling groom. After a night searching their horses which had wandered off into a nearby forest while were talking, Mendele and Reb Alter resume their tale swapping. time with the participation of a third party. Reb Alter tells Mer how, in the course of the night, he saved their horses from a bar roving beggars and discovered a miserable beggar left for dead i abandoned hovel. When Mendele recognizes that the beggar is other than Fishke, the subject of his earlier tale, both Mendele and Alter urge the new arrival to tell his story. In his tale (which take more than half of the novel), Fishke describes the disastrous sequences of his unexpected marriage and the grief-filled chain of ev that led him to the hovel in which Reb Alter discovered him. After the tales are told, Reb Alter declares that the hunchbacked waif whom Fishke found solace during his torments is none other than daughter whom he had abandoned years before. Moved by Fisl description of her miseries, Reb Alter sets off to find her and mak for his past misdeeds. Mendele and Fishke continue with heavy he on the road to Ksalon/Glupsk.

Although Mendele participates in the action of The Beggars' Box an equal footing with the other characters and converses with the one Jew to another, as narrator and intermediary he is in a unic privileged position. He is the only character to whom the reader direct access-all the others are known to us only through Mend description and commentary. And he is the only character who address the reader directly—for the others the reader simply does exist. Indeed, Mendele is guilty of a certain duplicity or, at the least, a conflict of loyalties. For even as he accepts the confidences of other characters, seemingly sharing their values and concerns, he not hesitate to go behind their backs, as it were, and hold their va and behavior up to ridicule before the reader. But Mendele is in guilty of more than duplicity; he is also guilty of defying the lav nature. For as narrator and intermediary, he succeeds in being in places at one time: In the "world" of The Beggars' Book (the world inhal by Reb Alter and Fishke), and in the "world" of the reader. Mend privileged postion, then, is uniquely literary; there is no analogy to real life where we are all confined, for the time being at least, to world.

Mendele moves from one world to the other almost constantly with absolute ease. Even as he participates in the action or listens tale he may at any moment absent himself from the immediate situation and turn, as it were, directly to the reader. When, for example, Mendele and Reb Alter meet on the road to Ksalon, Mendele tells us that they immediately began to question each other "in the manner of Jews," and when Reb Alter responds to Mendele's questions, he does so, Mendele points out, "according to Jewish practice in which one does not respond properly with a straightforward answer but rather acquits oneself with a grimace and a grunt." (H92; Y10) Later, when Mendele attempts to get the unresponsive Reb Alter to tell his tale, he turns to the subject of business since, as he explains to the reader, "there is no better ruse than that to get a Jew talking." (H94; Y19)

These little asides to the reader often expand into long comic digressions in which Mendele speaks of Jewish behavior in general. Thus, after his ruse takes effect and Reb Alter begins his tale, Mendele once more turns to the reader and explains why it worked so well: "Even when a Jew is dying, as soon as he hears of business matters his mind immediately settles down and the angel of death, taken aback, loses control of the situation. Too bad for anyone who visits a Jewish merchant when his mind is set on business! At that instant, the whole world doesn't mean a thing to him and he dismisses his best friend and even his own brother with a mere glance. But that's not my point." (H94; Y19) Reb Alter's predictable response to Mendele's manipulation serves as the catalyst for a satiric commentary upon Jewish society and its mores. While Reb Alter is reduced to caricature, his behavior is seen as typical rather than eccentric, symptomatic of a society which, in Mendele's view, has made business its supreme value. Indeed, it almost seems as if Mendele's encounter with Reb Alter and his manipulation of the Jewish "business ethic" are merely pretexts for pushing his satiric message, for exposing to the reader this ludicrous element of Jewish behavior.14

But Mendele does not have to interrupt the action by turning to the reader in order to push his satiric message. Even when he speaks to the other characters, it is often the reader who is the real addressee. When, for example, Mendele expresses amazement at Reb Alter's blunder at the fair and asks him how he could have fallen into such a trap, Reb Alter is suprised at Mendele's sudden ignorance. "Were anyone to hear you they might mistakenly think that 'his honor' is not a Jew at all, heaven forbid, and does not know how matches are made . . . It seems to me, Reb Mendele, that you certainly do know the customs of the Jews and the way we handle marriage arrangements." (H96; Y24) Reb Alter is quite justified in reacting in this manner, for he does not know (and cannot know) that Mendele does not ask his question for his own enlightenment but rather for that of the reader. Mendele's loyalty to the reader and his habit of using his encounters on the road to illustrate

aspects of his satiric message result in a temporary breakdown in a munication with Reb Alter. Unaware of Mendele's hidden purpose, Alter finds his behavior inexplicable.

A similar breakdown in communication occurs in Mendele's s about Fishke. When Mendele launches into a detailed and mocki elegiac description of the Jewish bathhouse, Reb Alter cannot unders why Mendele must interrupt his story with such useless informat "What's he talking about? A bathhouse? So what's the point? Bless Lord, I have seen many a bathhouse in my day . . ." (H99; Y34)15 (again, Reb Alter's complaint is perfectly justified. He has indeed a many bathhouses and thus is in no need of Mendele's descript Mendele lingers over his description, not for Reb Alter's benefit, at though he is the apparent addressee, but for the benefit of the rea The satiric intent of the description, of course, goes completely a Reb Alter's head.

When Mendele does address the reader, he often ends up apologi for his "digressions" by protesting that "that's not my point." This rative sweep of the hand emphasizes the "told" nature of the narra as well as Mendele's role as intermediary between Jewish society the reader. Indeed, Mendele's apparent inability to stick to the p gives his narrative the quality of a verbal improvisation, as if we v dealing with a narrator who is not quite in control of his narrative at constantly getting side-tracked by his own verbosity. Abramov inherited this technique from the Russian skaz, a conversational narra style that thrives upon digressions and narrative faux pas for its coeffects. Like the narrators of Gogol's stories, Mendele's familiar consational style, his constant asides to the reader, and his frequent dig sions foreground the narrative at the expense of what is narrated. are, in the end, less interested in what happens than in what Menhas to say about what happens. 16

Mendele's comic manipulation of biblical and rabbinical allusi plays a major role in the foregrounding of the narrative. Wrench phrases from their original context, Mendele employs them, someting with slight but crucial modifications, to describe entirely mundane even trivial matters. In the new context, the elevated connotations the phrase are subverted or completely reversed; the spiritual is reducted to the grossly physical, the sacred suddenly appears profane. At same time, the new context itself receives a new signification. Short-circuited allusion (to borrow Baruch Kurzweil's image) emphasis the spiritual poverty of the present which, forced to stand in the shad of ultimate meaning, appears all-the more absurd. Thus, for exam when the two book peddlers decide in the absence of cash to swap bo as well as stories, Mendele uses a biblical phrase to describe Reb Alternthusiasm over the prospect of doing business. Reb Alter, Mence

tells us, was as happy "as one who has discovered much booty." (H101; Y41)¹⁷ In Psalm 119, this simile captures the speaker's joy over God's promise of salvation; in the new context, the simile takes on a more literal meaning, for Reb Alter has indeed found much booty, even though he can hardly expect to gain much profit from Mendele's tattered wares. Spiritual exaltation has been replaced by exaggerated and ultimately futile economic zealousness, sacred yearnings reduced to a mechanical struggle for subsistence. In the same paragraph, Mendele is able to capture this reversal of values as well as the ultimate futility of this "business ethic" in a single phrase by slightly modifying a well known rabbinic dictum. Both sides derived satisfaction from the transaction even though not a penny changed hands because, as Mendele puts it, "the reward of business—is business." (H101; Y41)¹⁸

Through his manipulation of allusions, Mendele can transform relatively commonplace occurrences into comic situations and opportunities for satiric commentary. When, for example, some peasants who happen to pass by help Mendele and Reb Alter untangle their wagons, Mendele makes use of rabbinic gloss on a biblical verse to describe the action.19 "They were pushing just right, and from their pushing it was clear that the hands were the hands of Esau. As for us, forgive the comparison, our strength is only in our mouth—the voice is the voice of Jacob. And so while they pushed we yelled, push on, push on, for the voice is useful for pushing." (H92; Y12) While in the rabbinic tradition the biblical verse was interpreted symbolically as an expression of the eternal conflict between Jew (Jacob) and Gentile (Esau), Mendele, as in the previous example, applies the metaphor to a mundane situation and in doing so reverses its original meaning and effect. The self-flattering rabbinic distinction between the spiritual Jew and the coarse, physical Gentile turns into an indictment of the Jew's helplessness in physical matters and his abject dependancy upon the Gentile to get along in life.

Mendele's short-circuited allusions are not a matter of chance or an unconscious distortion of a pious Jew's natural propensity to embellish his speech with scriptural verse and rabbinic maxims. In spite of his protests to the contrary, Mendele is in complete control of his narrative, and it is precisely in his digressions and his "reinterpretations" of traditional phrases that he makes his most telling points. It does not take long, in fact, for the reader to realize that whenever Mendele says, "But that's not my point," he means just the opposite. At one point, moreover, Mendele takes the reader into his confidence in order to justify his narrative procedures. In the process, he fashions an elaborate parody of the "mosaic" style of nineteenth-century Hebrew writers according to whom a sublime style could be achieved only by stringing together biblical verses and phrases: "A Jewish poet would have found ample material ready at hand that morning with which to write a lovely

song. . . . And, the muses willing, he might have added a few touches his own: A flock of sheep grazing in roses, cows grazing among the reeds, a hind longing for running streams. . . . But we are in no need his bag of tricks. We have, thank God, baggage of our own. . . . As fume, I will tell what is in the depths of my heart on my own. (H11 Y75)20

For Mendele, telling his story on his own means exploiting the comic devices of the skaz, playing the narrative game for the enjoymer of his reader and at the expense of his companions on the road. He is a irrepressible storyteller whose one abiding passion is to transform hencounters on the road into comic narrative and opportunities to pus his satiric message. In typical skaz, we laugh at the narrator and henarrative clumsiness; in The Beggars' Book, we laugh with the narrator and take pleasure in his only lightly concealed narrative ingenuity.

Mendele is not, however, a consistently detached observer of Jewis life. When his attention turns to the circumstances responsible for th behavior of his comic victims he can reveal hidden stores of sympath and understanding. On such occasions, Mendele abandons his usua conversational style and indulges in highly charged, melodramatic prose The self-serving rhetoric of irony suddenly gives way to the effusivenes of sentimental identification and the narrative game turns serious. When during his search for the horses, Mendele ends up in an inn run by his relative Chaya-Traina and her henpecked husband, Chaim-Chona, he describes the poverty, filth, and ignorance that he finds there from his usual detached point of view. Sympathy and sentimental rhetoric are comically shifted to a fly-bespattered portrait of Napoleon that hangs on one of the walls: "Woe to him and woe to his soul, how his face has changed! His glory has descended-now he makes his abode in this Jewish inn." (H106; Y59) When he is finally left alone for the night, however, Mendele reveals some very different sentiments in his plaint to the moon:

Oh dear Mother. . . . The pain is so great. How afflictions are multiplied and how we suffer and grieve day after day. The eye of the envious falls even on the bread of our affliction, on the little we have to eat in wrath and worry. . . . And as-if the trouble and pain and affliction that assault the flesh were not enough, more miseries and harsh torments are heaped on by others. Even in this life of distress, which really isn't life at all but a protracted death throe, envy has the upper hand. Oh dear Mother, how bitter it is for me, how great the pain. (H108; Y63-64)

Mendele identifies with the Jews, making it clear that he shares both their plight (poverty, hunger, undeserved hatred) and their pain. Indeed, he shares more than that. Whenever Mendele describes his own behavior, he invariably refers to it as being no less typically Jewish than that of Reb Alter. After pouring out his heart to the moon, he tells us

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that "a spark of hope flickered within me like that which comes to a Jew after he has stood in prayer before the Omnisicent One and has told Him all his troubles." (H108; Y64) In fact, Mendele often uses his own behavior, just as he does that of Reb Alter, as a pretext for satiric digressions on typical Jewish behavior. After spending the night at Chaya-Traina's inn, Mendele describes getting up in the morning in this manner:

It wasn't of my own will that I got up early that morning. My limbs weighed me down from the bumps of the road, but necessity pushed me out of bed and set me on my feet. The Jew lives and moves on momentum alone. In action and speech, in bargaining and all his deeds, he is always in a rush, always pressed for time. But if the momentum begins to weaken a bit, his body is immediately enfeebled and he collapses like a golem. (H108; Y65)

No longer a detached observer criticizing and ridiculing the behavior of others, Mendele has become both the observed and the observer, the object of his own satirical scorn.

Mendele's privileged positions—his ability to be in two "worlds" at the same time—allows him, indeed, requires him to be both an "everyday" Jew and a detached observer of everyday Jewish behavior, including his own. Among his companions on the road, Mendele may at times act oddly, but he is clearly a Jew among Jews, trapped by the same social and economic circumstances that trap all Jews and, when pressed, responding to those circumstances with the same stereotypical patterns of behavior. When Mendele turns to the reader, on the other hand, his values and attitudes undergo a radical reorientation and he is able to observe and analyze Jewish behavior-including his own-from a perspective that his companions on the road would have a difficult time understanding, much less sharing. It is this apparent split in Mendele's narrative personality that has been the source of much of the confusion over his "identity." Critics who chose to emphasize Mendele's ties to Jewish society and his self-proclaimed status as an "everyday" Jew saw one Mendele; those who emphasized the distanced satirist and cynic saw quite another. One critic, borrowing a phrase that Russian critics often apply to Gogol, argued that there really are "two Mendeles," and that this was indicative of Abramovitsh's ambiguous feelings toward traditional Jewish society.21 Meanwhile, critics who insisted upon keeping Mendele in one piece made various attempts to naturalize his privileged position. Reference was made, for example, to Mendele's travels as a bookpeddler which, so the argument goes, provide him with a more detached and inclusive perspective than that of those who remain in the towns.22

In recent years, however, attention has shifted from the question of Mendele's identity to that of his function. Emphasizing Mendele's role as intermediary, Dan Miron, for example, argues convincingly that

Abramovitsh's use of such a narrative persona (which, as Miron points out, was by no means uncommon in nineteenth-century Yiddish literature) was prompted, on the one hand, by his specific thematic objectives and, on the other, by the special circumstances of the Yiddish writer in the nineteenth century. Thus, well aware of the cultural gap that separated him, a secular, Westernized Jew, from the Jewish masses of the Pale of Settlement whom he wished to address, Abramovitsh created in Mendele a kind of "traveler disguised," a character who spoke the language of the masses and adopted the pose of an "everyday" Jew, yet who could criticize traditional Jewish society from the point of view of a maskil.23 Similarly focusing upon Mendele's function in the narrative structure, Shalom Luria distinguishes between Mendele's role as "character," "narrator," and "rhetorical figure" in his study of The Beggars' Book. As a rhetorical figure, Luria argues, Mendele constantly evokes visions of Jewish society that contradict or at least provide alternatives to those expressed by Mendele as character or narrator. "If the text presents the words of the ironic narrator," Luria writes, "the figure turns our attention to the non-ironic elements. If the text presents the words of the lyrical-pathetic narrator, we would expect the figure to give expression to the non-pathetic view."24 The overall effect of this narrative procedure, according to Luria, is the evocation of a complex but "balanced" vision of traditional Jewish society in which contradictions (in point of view, response, evaluation, etc.) are viewed as complementary elements of the total picture.

What Miron's and Luria's studies suggest is that Mendele's "identity," that complex of feelings, thoughts, behavior, and action which we call a character, is in fact dictated, to one degree or another, by his function in the narrative structure. Neither Miron nor Luria, however, pursue the implications of their functional analyses far enough. Both, for example, maintain the notion of "character" and, on occasion, speak of Mendele as if there were indeed some "psychological essence"—in addition to the functional requisites—underlying the striking inconsistencies in his behavior. In calling Mendele a traveler disguised, Miron assumes that there must be a "real" Mendele beneath the mask, a "humanist and apostate" who reveals himself only to the reader, and that only sporadically. Luria writes explicitly of Mendele's role "as character," but he never fully explains the function of this aspect of Mendele and, indeed, it is difficult to perceive on what basis he distributes Mendele's words and actions between the three roles he isolates.

Mendele's narrative practice, in fact, prevents us from determining with any degree of confidence just who the "real" Mendele is. Mendele shifts perspectives and attitudes with the ease of a quick-change artist and, what is even more disconcerting, he accomplishes these metamorphoses before our very eyes. At any given moment he can be a naive

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storyteller or a sophisticated ironist, a pious Jew or an apostate, an "everyday" Jew whose behavior is determined by social and economic circumstances or a detached, cynical observer of that behavior. It is left up to the reader to orient himself to these shifts, to fill in the narrative gaps that might explain the inconsistencies. At times, this task may present no great difficulties, and with a little ingenuity the reader will be able to reconstruct a reasonably coherent identity for Mendele. At times, however, even the most ingenious reader, if he is attentive, may have difficulty fitting the pieces together.

Indeed, a careful reading of the first four paragraphs of The Beggars' Book reveal at least four distinct points of view, four potential Mendeles. "When the warm winds blow and sunny days arrive and there is light and joy in the world of The Holy One Blessed be He," Mendele tells us in the opening lines of his narrative, "days of mourning, fasting, and tears arrive for the Jews one after another." (H91; Y6) Only a pious Jew would refer to God as "The Holy One Blessed be He," but Mendele's words clearly subvert traditional piety. With the epigrammatic precision of an accomplished ironist, Mendele articulates the absurd contradiction between the natural order and the Jewish religious calendar that turns the summer months into a period of national mourning. The reference to God in connection with nature, in fact, suggests that mourning during a period of joy in His world goes counter to God's will. And while Mendele is clearly implicated in the Jews' absurd behavior—he supplies the prayer books and religious paraphernalia which, as he says, are "useful for the spilling of tears"—he maintains his distance, emphasizing his purely commercial interest in the conduct of his people: "Our people Israel lament and pass the balmy days in tears—and I turn it to trade." Then, as if he has pushed his irony as far as he dares, Mendele discounts all he has said with his characteristic disclaimer: "but that's not my point." But of course the point has been made only too well, and Mendele, the master of ironic equivocation, has made sure that his readers know

In the next paragraph, however, Mendele adopts the pious stance he has just ridiculed. Wearing tallit and tefillin as required by Jewish law, Mendele recites the morning prayers as he leads his horses absent-mindedly down the road. The beauty of the countryside, "Satan's handiwork," as Mendele now refers to it, tempts him from his religious duties and his thoughts are in conflict. Using traditional rabbinic categories, Mendele tells us how the Good Impulse urges him to close his eyes to nature while the Evil Impulse just as firmly encourages him to look and enjoy to his heart's content. The Evil Impulse apparently gains the upper hand, for Mendele begins to describe "Satan's handiwork" in visital sual detail. This sudden burst of pastoral lyricism throws the method between the impulses into disarray and invites the reader to pastoral between the impulses into disarray and invites the reader to pastoral standards.

ironic reversal of values. The Evil Impulse no longer appears very siniste and the demands of the Good Impulse remind us of the absurdity lai out for us so clearly in the preceding paragraph. But while the irony i clear, it is no longer obvious who the ironist is. Unlike the self-confiden ironist of the first paragraph, this Mendele is taken aback and ashames of his "evil thoughts" and ultimately rejects the lyricist within him siding rather with the pietist and the values of the "everyday" Jew. The curses that escape his lips and mingle with his prayers are, for this Mendele, a product of temporary delirium and he feels that he mushide his disgrace from God.

The cover-up is attempted, but in the process a new Mendele suddenly appears. The confusion and inner turmoil vanish and Mendele, now quite deliberately and self-consciously, decides to play the role of an "everyday" Jew. With surprising candor he tells us how he "puts on an innocent expression" and, when that "ruse" does not satisfy him, "puts on a sad face, sighs piously," and returns to his prayers. No longer a pious Jew in conflict with himself, Mendele is now only an impostor whose every move is carefully planned in advance. This, then, is the concealed apostate, the "traveler disguised" pointing to his own mask.

The most dazzling of Mendele's metamorphoses, however, is yet to come. For even though Mendele admits that his recitation of the traditional prayers is only a ruse, it affects him, he tells us, as it would a truly pious Jew. "As soon as a Jew pours out his heart to the Omniscient One and recites a hymn," he notes, "he thinks that he has done all that is in his power and his mind is set at ease, just like a child who, having received his punishment, wipes his tears and is still." (H91; Y8) Mendele is now the pious Jew he describes and, accordingly, his prayers put his mind at ease. "Lord of the Universe," he proclaims, "I did my part and performed my duty; now it all depends on you." (ibid.)

Mendele's hallucination was not, then, as isolated an incident as it first appeared. It is not only in moments of delirium that Mendele breaks into little pieces; the pieces are, in fact, strewn throughout The Beggars' Book. Mendele's identities can proliferate in this manner because his behavior is not determined by considerations of psychological "realism," because there is no stable center or "psychological essence" underlying and limiting his choice of action. Mendele is simply a voice, or more accurately a series of voices attached to a proper name that neither add up, reveal psychological depth, nor reward efforts to find human analogies. Thus, questions of psychological motivation, environmental determinants, or moral freedom—questions that we might legitimately ask of a "character"—are irrelevant here. Mendele's function, his raison to narrate, and in fulfilling this function he must conform to conform to the matter.