The Literary Image of the Shtetl*

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I

Volf (Vevik) Rabinovitz started his book of memoirs about his older brother, Sholem Aleichem, with a short evocation of his Ukrainian hometown, Voronkov or Voronke. Volf was a mere five or six years old when the Rabinovitz family, driven by financial circumstances, had to leave the tiny, cozy shtetl for the larger provincial town of Perieslav. His memories of Voronke, perforce, were meager and sketchy and had to be recalled "as if through a fog."[1] Nevertheless, as Sholem Aleichem's brother, Volf felt obliged to offer some description of the town and of the famous writer as a high-spirited lad who had spent the happy formative years of his childhood there. Moreover, Voronke was familiar to all readers of *Funem yarid* ("Back from the Fair"), Sholem Aleichem's autobiographical novel, as the model for Kasrilevke, the world-famous comic shtetl of some of the author's best and most-loved works. Sholem Aleichem himself had insisted in *Funem yarid* that Voronke and Kasrilevke were identical, the one and only shtetl of his childhood which he would forever remember as the most comfortable and pleasant place in the whole world.[2]

As is well known, Sholem Aleichem dedicated a considerable part of his mature work to the description of Kasrilevke/Voronke. The town loomed large not only throughout the first part of *Funem yarid* but also through sizable sections of other long works, such as *Motl, peyse dem khazns* ("Motl, the Son of Cantor Peyse"), as well as in dozens of novellas, short stories, sketch sequences and plays. In richness of detail and liveliness of presentation it was second to no other locus, no other imaginary place, created by a modern Jewish writer. Nevertheless, it is useful to compare this colorful, wonderfully vivid and focused picture

of the small town with the blurry and dull image projected by the writer's younger brother in his memoirs, for as poor in detail as the latter was, it unintentionally pointed to aspects of Voronke which completely eluded Sholem Aleichem's narrative.

For instance, Volf remembered that the alley near which the Rabinovitz family had resided was known as *dos kloyster gesl* (the church alley) because at its end stood an old wooden church that served the Christian population of Voronke and its vicinity. Here, in the *kloyster gesl,* under the command of the lad Sholemke, the rowdy Jewish children of the shtetl prepared for their "attacks" on the Christian edifice, running up to the fence and showing their disrespect by throwing stones and dirt into the large charity box which was nailed to it. At this time, Sholemke would offer a mock prayer to the statue of the Holy Virgin hanging over the box. This would continue until the outraged church warden would give chase, to the merriment of the unruly urchins who, from a safe distance, enjoyed the ungainly quaking of the feeble old man as he brandished his walking stick and hissed insults at them.

Volf recreated this rather coarse scene not only because he remembered it well but also because he thought it served to illustrate his brother's high spirits and natural talent as a mimic and comedian. In *Funem yarid,* Sholem Aleichem himself had amply illustrated these characteristics as they revealed themselves since his early childhood, but he had chosen not to remember, or not to mention, scenes such as these. He probably considered them unsavory and irrelevant, as indeed they were. However, as we read through Volf's description we are suddenly struck by a strange realization: no reader of Sholem Aleichem's Kasrilevke stories would imagine the town possessing a street named *dos kloyster gesl.* Indeed, no one could imagine the town as having a church, a priest, a church warden or any other vestige of organized Christianity. Young Sholemke Rabinovitz who lived near Voronke's *kloyster gesl* must have been exposed to Christian ceremonies on a regular basis. Every Sunday he would see Ukrainian men and women flocking to the church, crossing themselves, genuflecting and praying before the statue of the Holy Virgin and then dropping their coins into her charity box. He witnessed processions with colorful banners and icons, funerals on their way from church to the nearby *tsvinter* (Christian cemetery). He heard the deep intonations of the priests' singing. All this must have been a very real part of life in the historical Voronke of the writer's childhood, and yet one would not find even a trace of Christian culture or religion in the manifold projections of Kasrilevke throughout his oeuvre.

The literary Kasrilevke was depicted as an exclusively Jewish enclave, an unalloyed entity. Of course, it was a tiny Jewish island in a vast non-Jewish sea. Economically the town depended on its non-Jewish environment. Its merchants, including the relatively comfortable Rabinovitz family, bought and sold the agricultural products of the estates of the local Polish landowners, cut the timber in their dwindling woods and floated it to far-away places. Its poorer shopkeepers, innkeepers and street vendors eked out their scanty livelihood from the peasant population which thronged to Kasrilevke's market once a week and during fairs. Kasrilevke was also vulnerable to threats from the non-Jewish population and from the Russian authorities. However, in and of itself it remained quintessentially Jewish, a *yidishe melukhe* (a Jewish "state") as a later master, L. Shapiro, ironically called the shtetl in a story which told the tale of its final disintegration and destruction. Even if the ground upon which it stood belonged to an absentee Polish landlord, still, from the height of its sky and its nearby hill—known to the children of Kasrilevke as "Mount Sinai"—to the depths of its wells and its tiny river, it consisted of Jewish stuff and formed a Jewish universe. The town boasted an old synagogue, some houses of learning and not one but two Jewish cemeteries, a new and an old one, the latter prized by the Kasrilevker as their crown jewel because there the remains of hallowed saints and martyrs rested alongside the legendary treasure, allegedly buried by the Ukrainian rebel Mazepa or the great Napoleon himself. These, however, had no Christian counterparts such as a church and a *tsvinter.* While Kasrilevke had rabbis, sextons, cantors, ritual slaughterers and other *kley koydesh* (religious functionaries), it had no priests or church wardens. The few non-Jews who lived in the town were more than half-Judaized and were defined by their Jewish functions, like Khvedor the *goy shel shabes,* the non-Jew responsible for putting out the lights in the synagogue and in Jewish houses during the Sabbath, as well as for performing other tasks forbidden to Jews on that day. Even the gendarme, Holoveshke, the sole representative of the Russian authorities in Kasrilevke, was a Jew, albeit a converted one, as his name—which means "extinguished firebrand"—indicates. As for Kasrilevke's past, only a single non-Jew managed to carve his name into local history, legends and myths—a drunken suicide who hanged himself in the local Jewish steambath, entangling the community for years in legal problems and thus leaving his mark on its collective memory.

The Voronke memoirs of Volf Rabinovitz help us to become more aware of the aesthetic-fictional status of Sholem Aleichem's Kasrilevke and of the selectivity involved in its creation as an artistic, imaginary

locus. Kasrilevke and Voronke were not one and the same, as the author insisted. The reality projected by the Kasrilevke stories was a poetic construct and differed in important ways from the historical reality of the memoirs. While the fictional reality of Kasrilevke was based, to some extent, on the historical reality of Voronke, it also superimposed upon the town its own nonhistorical or suprahistorical norms and limitations that necessitated the exclusion of historical aspects or facts which did not enhance a certain image that the author desired to project. And, of course, the literary construction of Kasrilevke is not unique in its selectivity and nonhistoricity. Actually, many of the literary shtetlekh of the modern Yiddish and Hebrew classics, such as S. Y. Abramovitsh's Kabtsansk and Tuneyadevke, Y. L. Peretz's shtetlekh in his brilliant *Bilder fun a provints rayze* ("Sketches from a Tour of the Provinces") as well as in his Hasidic stories and pseudofolk tales, and even S. Y. Agnon's Shibush, are expurgated and, in a certain sense, unhistorical.

As we ponder the descriptions of these and many other literary shtetlekh, we realize that there actually existed in Jewish literature an influential tradition, a potent norm, which demanded the radical Judaization of the image of the eastern European shtetl; it had to be presented as purely Jewish. Only then could it be satirized, exposed as benighted and reactionary, soporific, resistant to initiative and innovation, or, alternatively, portrayed nostalgically and romantically as the quintessence of spirituality and communal intimacy, the nucleus of a besieged civilization that nevertheless enjoyed internal harmony and perfect internal communication. Either rendering demanded an unhistorical Judaization of the shtetl and involved a strict selection of historical facts to enhance the author's dark or bright vision.

Those writers (usually of the more recent, post-"classical" phase in the development of Jewish literature) who chose to disregard the tradition of Judaization, did not do so because they were eager to preserve the historical record but because they wished to project their own fictional artistic images, which were ideologically and temperamentally motivated by an oppositionist agenda. These authors intended their shtetlekh to clash with those of the masters in order to undermine and deflate them, not for the purposes of historicity but rather in order to highlight, by means of juxtaposition, their own visionary insight.

M. Y. Berdyczewski, for instance, the great antinomian thinker and fiction writer of the so-called Hebrew renaissance of the turn of the twentieth century, who had always experienced his own life as well as Jewish history in terms of discontinuity, duality and internal strife, projected in his stories images of the shtetlekh divided into two conflicting segments. The title of one of his best-known novellas,

Makhanayim—"two camps"—is, in that respect, highly characteristic of his dramatic conception of space as a projection of a torn soul at war with itself. The shtetl in his story *Me-ever la-nahar* ("Across the River"), for example, was not only divided by a river and situated between a hill and a valley but equally divided between Christians and Jews, the former comfortably occupying its hilly, airy upper part and the latter squeezed into the lower part.[3] The significance of this inner division becomes perfectly clear as the rebellious Jewish protagonist crosses the river which for him marks the borderline between tradition and modernity. Another edifying illustration is the shtetl in Dovid Bergelson's *Bam dnyeper* ("Near the Dnieper"), the autobiographical, self-critical novel which he wrote when he was well into his Marxist phase. Here, among other inner contradictions, Jews confronted non-Jews in the same way as the Jewish bourgeoisie faced down the Jewish masses. Thus, the protagonist (the boy Penek) witnesses scenes which his counterparts in the works of Sholem Aleichem had never seen. A Jewish wedding procession, for instance, with in-laws, musicians and a wedding jester, suddenly encounters—as it reaches the central intersection of the two main streets of the town—a Christian funeral, complete with priests, golden icons, incense and bereaved relatives.[4] Penek objectively observes the temporary paralysis of both groups, thus discovering within himself the seeds of ethnic neutrality, which would in a later phase of his development enable him to join the socialist revolutionary movement. Obviously, the experiences of Penek were pitted against those of the protagonists of the classical shtetl stories, particularly those of Sholem Aleichem. The encounter, however, was not one between *Wahrheit* and *Dichtung*, historical reality confronting poetic vision, but rather one of vision measured against countervision.

II

There are two reasons for emphasizing the fictional status of the literary shtetl—a truth which is self-evident to the point of becoming a truism. After all, a spatial fiction such as a town in a novel or a story or a play, as "realistic" as it might be, is by definition unhistorical. And why should the case of Kasrilevke or Kabtsansk or Shibush be unlike other cases of fictional loci, which as much as they might be based upon extrinsic, nonfictional models, always obey a system of intrinsic, nonmimetic norms—Dickens' London, for instance, or Gogol's Dikanka and St. Petersburg, or Faulkner's Southern towns, villages and hamlets?

There are, however, two reasons, not equally important, for reminding ourselves that the literary shtetlekh in the works of Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, Peretz and Agnon are not exact replicas of the historical shtetlekh of Ukraine, Poland and Galicia. Nor could these authors be expected to preserve such replicas for us. The first (less important) reason has to do with the criticism of shtetl literature and with the attitude toward this literature fostered by such criticism. The other reason pertains to a possible new reading of the classical texts and a more focused view of their famous loci.

Historically, critics have based their understanding and appreciation of the works of the masters, particularly those of Abramovitsh, on the assumption that they corresponded directly to historical reality and that as works of art they followed strictly mimetic poetics. These works were repeatedly praised as inherently "true" to life, and marked with enduring artistic and cultural value because they allegedly "covered" the entire spectrum of experience of a traditional, preurbanized eastern European Jewry of the nineteenth century. The great writers supposedly not only told the historical truth, but told the whole truth and nothing but the truth. David Frishman, the central critic of the Hebrew renaissance, opened his famous 1910 essay on Abramovitsh with a description of the experience of reading the works of the master while on a train making its way through the heart of the Jewish Pale. Raising his eyes from the pages of the book and looking at the passing small towns and villages, the reader finds total correspondence. The two realities, the one narrated in the stories and the one existing "out there," fully converge. Frishman goes on to make the following statement:

> He [Abramovitsh] encompassed the entire spectrum of Jewish life in the alleys of the small towns of Russia in the first half of the preceding century, developing it into an enormous, fully detailed picture. . . . If, let us assume, a deluge comes, inundating and washing away from the face of the earth the Jewish ghetto and the Jewish life it contains, not leaving behind so much as a residue, a sign, except by sheer chance, Mendele's four major works, *Fishke the Lame, The Travels of Benjamin the Third, The Magic Ring,* and *Shloyme, the Son of Reb Khayim,* as well as two or three shorter works—then, I doubt not, with these spared, the future scholar would be able to reconstruct the entire map of Jewish shtetl life in Russia of the first half of the ninteenth century in such a manner that not even one iota would be left out. [5]

How such an intelligent critic, known for his sensitivity and skepticism, could make such an extravagant and blatantly wrong statement is a

question of some interest. Frishman attributed total historical reality to fictional shtetlekh which had clearly been formed along generic lines as generalized entities unified by a certain characteristic of their inhabitants, who had all been fools or idlers or paupers—hence the names of Abramovitsh's towns, Glupsk, Tuneyadevke and Kabtsansk, or in Hebrew, Kesalon, Betalon and Kabtsiel. Such generic loci, representing not the multifaceted reality of life but rather a certain generalized negative trait of the human character, indicate not an essentially realistic-mimetic approach to reality but rather a satirical-moralistic one; and, as a matter of fact, Abramovitsh's rendering of shtetl life is informed throughout not so much by the conventions and traditions of literary realism as by those of satire from Roman times to contemporary Russian satire such as Saltykov-Shchedrin's *History of a Town.* Frishman completely disregarded this fundamentally nonmimetic feature of Abramovitsh's towns and was not even aware of the chronological absurdity of maintaining, on the one hand, that Mendele's shtetl descriptions meticulously corresponded to the reality of the first half of the nineteenth century, while, on the other hand, experiencing half a century later the very same sense of total correspondence between fiction and reality.

Obviously, these discrepancies involved more than sheer cognitive failure on the part of the critic. To the same extent, the readiness of the readers of 1910—who were still very much aware of the variability and complexity of historical shtetl life—to accept the notion that Abramovitsh's four short novels actually "covered" the full spectrum of this life at any given time must have involved more than naive credulity. An average reader could have known that these novels hardly touched upon some of the most significant phenomena and trends in nineteenth century eastern European Jewish history. For instance, Abramovitsh's novels had almost nothing to say about Hasidism and the Hasidic way of life, in spite of the fact that the Ukrainian shtetl society upon which the writer focused was largely dominated by Hasidism. The novels do not so much as mention either the Habad or the Musar movement. For that matter, the entire rabbinical tradition of learning and legal exegesis receives very little attention.[6] The critics, as well as the readers, were ready to believe in an omniscient "Mendele" and in his allegedly exhaustive coverage of the historical shtetl not because they did not know better but because they shared a compelling cultural need for such a belief. They needed to think that their literary masters had "immortalized" that premodern, preurbanized Jewish way of life which they, as members of the modernized Jewish intelligentsia, had abandoned. They wanted the works of the masters not only to "preserve" the world they had lost, but also

to justify their "betrayal"; hence, these works not only had to be critical of traditional Jewish society, but also had to assuage a sense of guilt as well as an unclear but growing awareness of the problematic status of Jewish modernity, which certainly lacked the coherent and distinct sense of Jewish identity of traditional society. The works of the masters thus allowed these critics and readers to both eat their Jewish cake and have it too. Literature was nominated as the official custodian of the national collective memory, guaranteeing the accessibility of the recent past to those who had drifted away from it. It had to enable one to be in the shtetl and at the same time be away from it, to maintain emotional ties with the past and yet belong to the present.

This double-faceted and, in a sense, self-contradictory function was projected onto modern Jewish literature from the 1870s to the 1920s, a period in which east European Jewish society was transformed by modernization, urbanization and emigration. This explains why so many writers who spent most of their adult life far from the shtetlekh of their childhood and within a cultural milieu totally different from those shtetlekh, nevertheless dedicated their best creative efforts to the portrayal of the shtetl. This also, I think, explains why readers, including astute critics, needed to interpret the depictions of shtetl life in historical, rather than aesthetic, terms.

These needs did not disappear (on the contrary, they seem to have gained in intensity), as from the 1930s—and particularly after the Holocaust—the last remnants of shtetl society were indeed, as Frishman had prophesied, "washed away from the face of the earth." What happened at this point resembled a tragic farce. On the one hand, so-called "revisionist" critical readers went back to the classics, holding tight to the promises of the critics (which the writers themselves had never vowed to respect), i.e., that through the literature, they, the readers, would be able to reconstruct and to reexperience historical shtetl life with all of its presently idealized attributes. When the "classics" seemed unable to satisfy these readers' needs—which grief, an overwhelming sense of loss and an equally overwhelming sense of guilt had rendered so much more pressing—the readers turned vehemently against their literature. Their bitter disappointment fed a critical denunciation which, as understandable and as emotionally touching as it was, lacked even the rudiments of literary, critically reasoned thinking. Other readers and commentators stuck more obstinately than ever to the notion that the works of the *klasiker* did in fact preserve the full historical truth and contained everything one could wish to know about premodern eastern European Jewish society. Some of these now took a step further and decided that *only* the

literary classics contained the truth about the shtetl. Thus, for instance, one reviewer reacted as follows to the 1952 publication of Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog's *Life is With People,* the well-known anthropological essay on shtetl culture:

> With all due respect to Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and the authors of *Life Is With People,* it can be safely asserted that the greatest "anthropologist" of the shtetl was the Yiddish novelist, Mendele Mocher Seforim. Neither the misery nor the glory escaped him. He was fortunate in being closer to the shtetl than the authors of the book, and in simultaneously having acquired from the Jewish Enlightenment the distance and the Western categories which made it possible for him to conceive of himself as the historian of the "convocation of Jewry," the "*knesses Isroel.*" He too concerned himself with a cultural portrait of the shtetl's way of life, or, as he put it more precisely, its *lebens-shtayger*: life-rhythm—and to this end he created in his books a gallery of historical-sociological types and constructs that rivals Balzac's *Comedie Humaine*—and with the same conscious purpose of recording an epoch. [7]

The terminology is that of modern socioliterary discourse, but the ideas were those of Frishman and his contemporaries, although, if possible, even more wrong-headed. For while Frishman had foreseen the future scholar of shtetl history making scholarly use of Abramovitsh's novels, the reviewer of *Life Is With People* actually concluded his review by claiming that shtetl scholarship could be of use only to readers to whom the works of the Yiddish *klassiker* were inaccessible because of problems of translation. Readers who were proficient in Yiddish could read the "classics" in the original and do without shtetl historians, sociologists and anthropologists. The silliness of this argument is once again too blatant to be explained as sheer intellectual deficiency. Pressing emotional needs, together with the presumed ignorance of the American readership, perhaps forced the reviewer to stumble into his untenable position. To some extent, we still share these needs. Even today when we say to ourselves that Kabtsansk and Kasrilevke are not mirror images of the historical shtetl, that they are, in fact, poetic constructs informed by the ideologies of their time and shaped to fit the idiosyncratic visions of individual writers, and that, therefore, they do not preserve intact our lost historical past, the realization is painful and involves a sense of loss. It is this pain that makes people who are otherwise sensible and astute recoil from the truth; and it is partly because of this intellectually numbing pain and sense of loss that the otherwise self-evident truth must be emphasized.

III

There is, however, another more compelling justification for this emphasis. With the traditional reading of the Yiddish and Hebrew shtetl classics having outlived its validity (whatever it was), a new reading of these works is urgently needed if these classics are not to become mere archaeological exhibits. For such a reading to emerge, the suprahistorical and nonreferential aspects of the shtetl narrative must not only be acknowledged but examined as well. We should not only become more aware of them but also be intrigued and puzzled by them, encountering them as problematic in their own right. For instance, we must ask ourselves about the meaning of the far-reaching Judaization of the image of the shtetl that we find in the works of Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem and others. Is it merely an indication of Jewish chauvinism or does it point in other directions? Such questions cannot even be properly asked before one disengages oneself from the reading of the shtetl stories as sociohistorical documents.

What the new reading of the shtetl classics requires, however, goes beyond overcoming the historical fallacy. The traditional understanding of shtetl stories in strict mimetic terms has conditioned our reading on more than one level. Not only has it drawn our attention away from the aesthetic development of the story and toward the nonaesthetic correspondence between various parts of the story—usually those which belong to the background of the story rather than to the forefront of the narrative—and external, sociohistorical facts, it has also limited the scope and depth of our response to the aesthetic aspects of the story, even when our attention is explicitly drawn to these. We have been taught to admire the vivacity of the mimetic representation in the shtetl story: how wonderful, real and "plastic" are the descriptions of the physical world, objects, landscapes, animals! How firm, economical and expert is the hand of the artist in drawing the physical and behavioral physiognomy of the characters! How pointed, fluent and *zaftik* (juicy) is the reconstruction of idiomatic speech, particularly that of the simple folk! etc., etc. We have been encouraged to admire the "style" of the masters, particularly that of Abramovitsh, who both in Yiddish and Hebrew managed to fuse together different dialectological or historical layers of language into a seamless and highly functional linguistic musculature. At the same time, however, we have become quite insensitive to other, crucially important, aesthetic aspects of the shtetl stories. The assumption that their poetics are purely mimetic has drawn our attention, as far as their narrative and descriptive art is concerned, to surface phenomena. What was supposed to exist or function beneath this sur-

face was the sociohistorical content. But that is hardly the case. What exists and functions beneath the descriptive surface is not just ideas, intellectual history and the like, but the deeper layers of artistic organization, less obvious poetic mechanisms. The stories, at least the best of them, are very complex and multitiered artifacts, even while they convey a complex and sometimes ambivalent sociohistorical commentary. In order to understand and appreciate their art as well as their ideas, we must delve into their infrastructure, where description, style, plot and discursive commentary are conditioned by a more covert regulating system, which is the artistic *and* the ideational core of any given story as a whole.

We have been prone to reading the classic shtetl stories either discursively or metonymically. Discursive reading aims at nonnarrative contents: ideas, sociohistorical facts and comments, ideological attitudes, psychological insights. It tends to "rearrange" the text, not along plot lines or structural patterns but rather along the discursive-causal line of an argument or by division into categories—how does the text present religion, education, economics, matrimonial relationships? Metonymic reading focuses on descriptive details and connections. It is based on an understanding of the text as a descriptive aggregate, the aim of which is to reproduce reality by amassing and vividly representing interrelated physical and behavioral data. It encourages us to seek in shtetl stories, the realia of the shtetl, its "types," its ceremonies, its rites of passage, its characteristic responses to both the religious and the seasonal calendars. It would be wrong, of course, to maintain that the classics of shtetl fiction do not validate, up to a point, both the discursive and the metonymic readings. Obviously, they offer ideational content that deserves a discursive-causal reconstruction; and they certainly offer great quantities of metonymic data as well. Indeed, they often develop what might be called pseudoanthropological rhetoric which compels the narrator to don the mask of an objective, systematic and meticulous scholar or collector, whose aim is to amass data and produce a scientific anatomy of shtetl culture. This scientific mask, however, is more often than not just another satirical device which enables the author to poke fun both at the provinciality and backwardness of the shtetl and at the pomposity and inanity of official scholarship. Abramovitsh, whom the reviewer of *Life Is With People* presented as the great anthropologist and historian of the shtetl, was indeed the chief exponent of the satirical-parodic use of the pose of the historian and anthropologist. With ever-so dexterous sleight-of-hand he made the shtetl and its "anthropological" observer disqualify each other—the

former being reduced to pettiness and unimportance by an ironic use of the seriousness of scholarly rhetoric, and the latter being revealed as intellectually vacuous by the application of high-flown rhetoric to insignificant objects. As much as Abramovitsh bitterly criticized the shtetl, his critique of the "scientific" attitude toward it—the historical, the philological and the ethnographic—was far more devastating.

In any case, it is my contention that the habitual discursive and metonymic readings of shtetl fiction should not only be supplemented but actually conditioned and controlled by yet another kind of reading which I shall call metaphorical. What I have in mind does not entail mere stylistic analysis of figurative language as it was used, often with great brilliance, in shtetl stories. Rather, it entails an understanding of each shtetl story as based on a single extended metaphor which consists of many submetaphors or partial metaphors and which, as a matter of course, finds expression *also*, but by no means *only*, in the actual metaphorical language used by the author. The extended metaphor, however, controls the story as a whole, including its nonfigurative and metonymic segments. Within the framework of such a mega-metaphor all of the components of shtetl fiction—plot, characterization, description, discursive commentary, social and cultural criticism, even hints of literary criticism—are integrated and stratified so as to form an aesthetic hierarchy. The metonymic segments of the text, those which deal mainly with description and plot, usually function within this metaphorical construct as a "vehicle," while the discursive segments, which emphasize attitudes and arguments, are usually a part of the metaphorical "tenor." However, neither of these controls or defines the "content" of the story. The "content" as a whole is defined by the relationships between the two—the metonymic and the discursive—which are neither causal and contiguous, nor even analogical and similar, but *metaphorical*. Metaphor, as we know, does not merely bring together different images and ideas; it melts them, makes them interpenetrate one another to form a new cognitive compound. In William Blake's *Forests of the Night,* for example, the actual forests and the actual night are integrated into a larger psychological and metaphysical entity which cannot be equ-ated with the mere combination of the two components. Thus, in some of the best shtetl stories, any descriptive "vehicle"—a certain shtetl locality or institution, a shtetl character or ceremony, for example—is integrated with ideas, comments and criticisms of and about shtetl life and culture into a larger metaphorical entity with far-reaching psychological and metaphysical ramifications.

This process of integration is not conducted in an accidental or erratic manner. In the "classical" shtetl stories integration is controlled

by a unified metaphorical gestalt, which is employed unobtrusively or perhaps even unconsciously; nevertheless, it informs the entire story and dominates the shtetl image that the story yields. Furthermore, I submit that this gestalt, as much as it is bound by and intrinsic to a specific text, also functions continuously not only throughout shtetl fiction produced by a single writer but also, as we have already seen, throughout shtetl fiction of some or even many writers. It enjoys a historical-literary longevity and forms the basis of a "tradition" which brings together writers who are contemporaries and noncontemporaries bound by father-son metagenerational ties.

Thus, for instance, it is not difficult to perceive that Sholem Aleichem's Kasrilevke follows as well as modifies Abramovitsh's shtetlekh Tuneyadevke and Kabtsansk. This is indicated not only by demonstrable similarities between the descriptions of the two writers' shtetlekh, but also by the toponymy, the names of the shtetlekh, for Kasrilevke—which is based on the Hebrew name Kasril or Katriel ("God is my crown" or "God surrounds and supports me")—intentionally resembles the name Kabtsiel, the Hebrew version of Kabtsansk, which, as one of Abramovitsh's many parodic spoofs, inverts the meaning of the name of the biblical town Kovtsiel—meaning "God gathers me, God collects and unifies my scattered and dispersed members"—to mean "God reduces me to poverty" or even "My God is a pauper, a kabtsan." Hence, the name Kasrilevke underlines the generalized, nonrealistic or nonmimetic generic and essentially satirical nature of Sholem Aleichem's fictional shtetl just as the names Kabtsansk or Glupsk or Tuneyadevke emphasize the satiric, generic and nonmimetic essence of Abramovitsh's towns. By replacing the name Voronke, Sholem Aleichem was, therefore, indicating substantive rather than nominative changes. Indeed, in art, a highly focused semiotic system, a change of name always points to a far-reaching metamorphosis. Kasrilevke, like Kabtsansk or Tuneyadevke, is a symbolic-satirical place whose inhabitants share one quintessential trait. This quality, however, was not stupidity or idleness or poverty but rather Kasriel-ism, which Sholem Aleichem defined as poverty and provincialism softened, even redeemed, by a sense of humor, a happy-go-lucky attitude and a touch of lyrical emotionalism.[8] Thus, while Sholem Aleichem was extending and expanding Mendele's Kabtsiel-vision, he was also modifying and, in a sense, criticizing it; for we can read the texts about the town of the Katriels as a critique of the texts about the town of Kabtsiel. Abramovitsh's portrayal of shtetl poverty and backwardness, Sholem Aleichem's Kasrilevke suggested, had been too harsh and narrow. Consequently, in Kasrilevke the crippling influence of these shortcomings was counterbalanced by redeeming features which were not to be found in Kabtsansk or

Tuneyadevke. In any case, the position of Kasrilevke vis-à-vis Abramovitsh's towns illustrates the dynamics of continuity within the framework of a living and expanding tradition.

This tradition involves resemblance and parallelisms between the various "classical" literary shtetlekh which were not primarily predicated upon sheer historical and social continuity. Historically, Kasrilevke projected a reality separate from that of Kabtsiel by four or five very dynamic decades fraught with historical change. Unlike Kabtsiel, it was connected to the world by a telegraph; its Jewish inhabitants were far better informed. For instance, they avidly followed the unfolding of the Dreyfus affair as it was reported in the Hebrew newspapers. Eventually, the Kasrilevker had their own hotels and restaurants and exchanged letters with relatives who had moved to Odessa or emigrated to New York. The parallelism between Kasrilevke and Kabtsiel was based on a shared metaphoric infrastructure, which tinged the two very different historical vistas with similar emotional and philosophical hues.

IV

I would like now to illustrate my argument and, hopefully, to render it more convincing by a few examples of the dynamics or the working processes of the regulating metaphorical system which I have already outlined. For such illustrations we shall have to resort to some of the submetaphors of which, as I have indicated before, the controlling mega-metaphor that defines the essential features of the classical literary shtetl image consists. There are many such metaphors and, of course, not all of them are employed in every shtetl story. However, they are used repeatedly, even obsessively, in dozens of shtetl texts to the extent that if in a certain text none are evident, that particular text immediately stands out from the others as deliberately *anti*-classical.

To start with one of the simplest submetaphors, the significance of which is easy to decipher, let us mention the metaphor of fire or conflagration. It occurs again and again in shtetl stories, so often that one learns to expect it. Every so often in these stories, the ongoing plot is interrupted by a scene of conflagration which is usually played out against a dark nocturnal backdrop. If we are to believe Sholem Aleichem, Kasrilevke's summer nights are continually disturbed by fires, sometimes more than one in a single night. The deep foreboding ringing of the bell alerts the Kasrilevker, sending them out of their beds into a street scene of raging flames, smoke, confusion and ineffective attempts to extinguish the fire. *Kasrilevke brent vi a likht* ("Kasrilevke

Burns Like a Candle")[9] is the title of a chapter in the comic novella *Kasrilevker nisrofim* ("The Burnt-Out People of Kasrilevke"). In his short story *Ha-nisrafim* ("The Burnt-Out"), Abramovitsh relates how the entire town of Kabtsansk is reduced to ashes. The shtetlekh of Y. L. Peretz in *Bilder fun a provints rayze* are waiting for the first spark to burst into flames and for the first breeze to carry away their ashes. In Mordkhe Spektor's *Reb Treytl*, a detailed description of a shtetl fire occupies a sizable section of the first part of the novel and triggers the machinery of the extravagantly comic plot. In his narrative-poetic ode to the shtetl, Sholem Asch swells the rhapsodic flow of the story to its first dramatic climax in a night scene in which a devastating fire reaches the hallowed synagogue and the "half-naked" Torah scrolls are salvaged by shtetl people at the risk of their own lives.[10]

One could easily multiply such examples. The question is why such scenes were so important to so many writers of shtetl stories. The simple "realistic" answer is that fires actually occurred very frequently in the densely populated small towns, where wood was virtually the sole material used for construction and very little attention was generally paid to basic safety precautions. In the hot dry season at the end of the summer, fires were common, and cyclically every decade or so a large-scale conflagration would reduce whole sections of the town to ashes and burning debris. Such fires would imprint themselves upon the memory of almost every person who was born and raised in a shtetl as cataclysmic holocausts. Hayyim Nahman Bialik, the great Hebrew poet, remarked that as a seven-year-old he had awakened in great trepidation to just such a shtetl fire. The incident left a profound impression, which he eventually put to poetic use in the grand prose-poem *Megilat ha-esh* ("The Scroll of Fire"), particularly in the sublime opening scene in which God sits on His throne in the midst of a terrible conflagration which consumes and destroys the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.[11] The great shtetl fires were in fact so memorable that, as Abramovitsh says, they would be recorded in the communal *pinkas* (ledger or minute-book) and marked as chronological watersheds, with all other important events marked as having occurred before or after them. The really great fires, Mendele goes on to say, became the subject of local lore and legend to be imparted by old-timers to astounded youngsters.[12] All of this notwithstanding, I do not believe that the frequency and the devastating results of the shtetl fires in and of themselves explain the need of Jewish writers to dwell on them. If that were the case, we should have found a virtually endless stream of descriptions of fires in medieval, Renaissance and seventeenth and eighteenth century European literature. For in their vulnerability to fire, shtetlekh were in a very similar

position to that of most European towns up until the end of the eighteenth century. Of course, fires do play a significant role in European fiction from Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* to Tolstoy's *War and Peace;* and yet it seems that only truly historic fires which all but transformed the fate of nations were allowed here to occupy the literary imagination, while in the literature of the shtetl fires are commonplace. It was, therefore, not the reality of fires but the particular metaphorical use to which they could be put which rendered them such a ubiquitous feature in shtetl stories and poetry.

For one thing, writers could and did express through the fire metaphor a very general sense of vulnerability and the proximity of disaster which for them marked the shtetl experience. Characteristically, in the 1880s and later, the literary reaction to pogroms would almost inevitably involve the employment of the fire metaphor, as in Abramovitsh's *Ha-nisrafim.* However, even this explanation does not take us far toward a full understanding of the prevalence and specific use of the fire metaphor in the shtetl stories. Indeed, we can hardly get at such an understanding before we realize, through a careful analysis of the allusive language in which the literary shtetl fires were habitually couched, that almost all of these fires are presented as reflections and duplications of the one great historical fire which lay at the very root of the Jewish concept and myth of *galut* (exile): the fire which had destroyed, on the ninth day of the month of Av, both the First and Second Temples of Jerusalem. Bialik's testimony concerning the connection between his childhood recollection and the writing of the mythical conflagration scene in *The Scroll of Fire* should be understood as indicating a two-way associative trajectory. As much as the shtetl experience brought to life the grand biblical scene and endowed it with the atmosphere of a true holocaust, the culturally ingrained collective memory of the destruction of the Temple informed and structured shtetl experiences and endowed them with meaning and importance. In any case, the fire scenes in many shtetl stories clearly alluded both pictorially and stylistically to passages in Lamentations and Jeremiah as well as to aggadic and midrashic sources which dealt with the fiery destruction of the Temples of Jerusalem. Writers sought ways of implanting the ancient and often highly metaphoric language of those sources into the modern context of their stories, frequently resorting to parodic means such as quoting reports of shtetl fires in the contemporary Hebrew press. They developed a special shtetl type, the local correspondent, a *maskil* with some literary ambitions who would use the fire in his town as an opportunity to see his name in print. He would assume the burden of description,

using such flowery expressions as "A voice was heard in Heaven! The daughter Kasrilevke is weeping, lamenting her great calamity, refusing to be comforted."[13] This, of course, was an adaptation of Jeremiah 31:15: "A cry is heard in Ramah, wailing, bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted." This verse was fleshed out in the Aggada into a story about Rachel, the matriarch who, in her roadside grave, encounters the exiles of Judea and Jerusalem after the destruction of the Temple and the collapse of the Davidic kingdom. Seeing the exiles, Rachel weeps bitterly. Refusing to be comforted, she intercedes with Heaven on behalf of her children. Projecting the image of Kasrilevke as "the daughter Kasrilevke" (like the biblical "daughter of Zion" or "daughter of Judea"), the archetypal lamenting mother of the nation, Sholem Aleichem underlines the hidden mythical significance of the mundane shtetl fire. No matter how parodic the phrasing of the allusion to Jeremiah, this hidden significance was meant to be taken seriously. Indeed, it points to the very core of the serious, all but tragic, meaning of the comic novella, *Kasrilevker nisrofim*, which comes out so clearly as Reb Yozefl, Kasrilevke's old *rov* and leader announces: "We'll show Him, the one who lives forever, that for us the destruction of Kasrilevke, God forbid, is even worse than the destruction of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple."[14]

Sometimes, the writers would intentionally juxtapose the biblical and midrashic allusions with a story's mundane context. Thus, for instance, in Abramovitsh's *Ha-nisrafim*, the author's spokesman, Mendele the book peddler, chides the people of Kabtsansk for talking about the fire which had devastated their town as if it were sent from Heaven when in reality the culprit is a certain shtetl burgher who had not taken care of his sooty chimney. But the people of Kabtsansk insist that even if the fire had reached them through a sooty chimney, it had been sent from above because "the Lord had not pitied the inhabitants of Kabtsiel. From heaven, He sent a flaming fire which burnt down our town."[15] Of course, they are only adopting and somewhat simplifying Lamentations 2:2–3: "The Lord has laid waste without pity all the habitations of Jacob. . . . He has ravaged Jacob like flaming fire, consuming on all sides." The juxtaposition of the practical and realistic book peddler with the "naive," mythically oriented *Kabtsansker* neither undermines the mythical explanation of the fire nor invalidates the practical advice to pay attention to safety precautions. Both positions are presented as valid. Actually, this is a dispute between the two components of a metaphor: the vehicle, i.e., the shtetl fire caused by a sooty chimney, differs from the "tenor," i.e., the understanding of the fire as caused by

a heavenly verdict and, as such, comparable with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. As an extended metaphor, however, the story as a whole integrates the "vehicle" and the "tenor," creating a new fictional reality which is outwardly mundane but essentially metaphysical.

V

Another central submetaphor which contributes greatly to the metaphorization of the literary image of the shtetl is to be found in the multiple scenes of departure, groups of people taking leave of their shtetlekh. Such groups may be tiny—for instance, the duo Benjamin and Senderl on their way out of their native Tuneyadevke in *The Travels of Benjamin the Third*, or Mendele the book peddler and the *melamed* (teacher) Reb Leyb in Abramovitsh's *Bi-yemei ha-raash* ("In the Days of the Earthquake"). Often the group consists of one or two emigrating families, such as in the famous departure scene in *Motl, the Son of Cantor Peyse.* Occasionally it is a very large group, such as the one consisting of "a quarter" of all the inhabitants of Kabtsansk in the autumnal scene of exodus from Kabtsansk to Glupsk in *The Magic Ring.* In *Ha-nisrafim*, it seems to Mendele the book peddler that the "entire Kabtsansk" is departing. Seeing the long convoy of old and young, men and women, infants, children and adults, Mendele exclaims, "Oy! Oy! The whole of Kabtsansk is on the move!"[16] In late shtetl stories, such as L. Shapiro's masterful *Yidishe melukhe*—which describes the deportation and expulsion of Jews en masse from wide areas close to the western borders of the tsarist empire during the first months of World War One—the scene of exodus is one of veritable *Völkerwanderung*, a terrible and sublime human landscape that the author charts with high epic seriousness and without any overt expression of sentiment.

Abramovitsh is the great master of such scenes of exodus from the shtetl. They are strewn all over his oeuvres. No one in modern Yiddish or Hebrew fiction could better evoke the sentiments of a people exiled from an intimate and cozy environment and thrown into an indefinite and alien space. This intimate environment is itself often savagely satirized by Abramovitsh, but the pain of departure is always real to him. Essentially, all of Abramovitsh's protagonists—from his autobiographical Shloyme the son of Reb Khayim to his spokesman Mendele the book peddler—are shtetl exiles. Abramovitsh's major novel, *The Magic Ring*, conjures up an image of the quintessential shtetl Kabtsansk as a place that is fated to lose almost everyone who had been born there. The *Kabtsansker*, says Abramovitsh, are like migratory birds. Once summer

with its friendly weather and plentiful food is gone, they must leave their hometown.[17] Devoid of means and resources for feeding and clothing its people, Kabtsansk actually produces them for export. Thus, sooner or later, each member of the community is bound to join the departing convoy. The local legend or myth of Kabtsansk related how almost all of its inhabitants had missed their sole opportunity to meet the patriarchs, the kings David and Solomon, the prophet Elijah and other biblical characters who had visited as *ushpizin* (guests) in order to celebrate the feast of Purim in Kabtsansk. All of the *Kabtsansker*, with the single exception of Reb Yudl, had left for Glupsk to find employment as carriers of holiday gifts, *shalekh-manes*, and thus missed the miraculous visit of their biblical guests. This myth was reenacted annually by a convoy of *Kabtsansker* leaving for Glupsk, just before the High Holidays. The autumnal departure scene is juxtaposed with an earlier summer idyll, in which the entire shtetl population spends a balmy night together under the open sky, in total, almost physical intimacy. Now, as the *Kabtsansker* leave town, squeezed together in carriages to the point of asphyxiation, this intimacy is ironically duplicated by the entanglement of human bodies in which people mistake each other's hands and feet for their own. Tragedy, comedy, farce and fantasy are intermingled in Abramovitsh's portrayal of that which in his writings becomes the chief function of the shtetl—a place to be left.

Comic-tragic scenes of exodus also abound in the shtetl stories of other writers. They are to be found in almost all of Sholem Aleichem's major works, from *Funem yarid* to *Motl*, from *Tevye* to *Blonzhende shtern* ("Wandering Stars"), as well as in a large number of shtetl stories (of varying importance) by other writers. Obviously, in this case, this fixed feature is bound to an immediately recognizable historical reality, the continuous process of urbanization and consequent mass migrations which the economic instability and the physical vulnerability of shtetl life made inevitable throughout the fifty years from the 1870s to the 1920s, when the so-called "classical" Hebrew and Yiddish literature was created. With this historical background, one could expect scenes of exodus as part of the realistic depiction of shtletl life. But even in this case the realistic-historical explanation does not tell us why the characteristic scenes of exodus assumed their specific tonality. Some additional element, which is not subsumed by sheer mimetic correspondence, is responsible for this tonality. We recognize it, for instance, when we ponder the significance of the title Abramovitsh gave to the Hebrew version of *The Magic Ring—Be-emek ha-bakhah* ("In the Vale of Tears"). While the original Yiddish title optimistically pointed first to science and Enlightenment and then to emigration, perhaps even to Zionist aliyah, as the

"true" magic ring (as opposed to the "false" one, the passive expectation that redemption would occur miraculously) by which eastern European Jewish society could be delivered from its misery, the Hebrew title evoked altogether different, much less optimistic, associations. It was borrowed from the well-known sixteenth century historical chronicle of the same title. Written by Yosef Ha-Kohen, a son of Spanish exiles, under the impact of the expulsion from Spain and Portugal, the work listed all of the persecutions, *gezerot* (harsh edicts), forced conversions and expulsions to which the Jewish people had been exposed since "Judea was expelled from its land." The narrative came to a climax with the Iberian expulsions and the horrific scenes of misery and terror that attended it. Abramovitsh's Hebrew title pointed to more than a mere parallelism between the exodus from the shtetl after the pogroms of 1881–82 and the expulsions of 1492–96. Just as the Spanish Expulsion has been regarded by contemporary Jewish historians and theologians as a catastrophe similar in magnitude to the destruction of the Temple and the fall of the Jewish Commonwealth, so too the destruction of the shtetl was now to be interpreted as a link in a chain of major national disasters, a chapter in the continuous story of woe and bereavement, of life in the vale of tears. All of the links in that chain were understood as duplications, or at least approximations, of the original event, the destruction of the Temple and the fall of Jerusalem.

The archetypal scene, reverberating with cosmic overtones, was that of a city and a temple consumed by fire, and a long convoy of exiles taking leave of their capital (in ruins and still covered by black smoke), bracing themselves for a long and difficult voyage to far-away places. This scene often looms in the background of the departures from the shtetl, regardless of the manner in which the author chooses to present this departure—serious and tragic, as in the epilogue to *The Magic Ring* or comic as in *Motl, the Son of Cantor Peyse.* The allusion to this archetypal scene is often direct and supported by appropriate quotations or paraphrases, but it can also be indirect, without being announced by the appropriate sacred texts, such as the allusion in the description of Motl's family as they embark on their voyage to America. Everything is ready and time is pressing, for the voyagers have to catch a train, but the family is held up by Motl's mother who has to make a last-minute visit to the cemetery for a final leave-taking from the loved ones who are to be left behind. Finally, Motl's mother returns late, her face red and swollen from crying. She falls, covered with tears, into the arms of her neighbor and friend, Pessy, who responds to her wailing with her own sudden silent tears as big "as beans" rolling down her fat cheeks.[18] The two weeping women are closely but rather coldly watched by the boy

Motl, in whom their tearful embrace provokes impatience and a sense of the grotesque. The reader, however, whose reaction is not confined by the limitations of Motl's mentality and perception, can see the presence of the archetype behind the trite comic figures: the matriarch Rachel at her roadside grave lamenting her exiled children, refusing to be comforted. Indeed, throughout *Motl, peyse dem khazns,* Motl's mother, always red-eyed from weeping, functions as a comic duplicate of the wailing matriarch.

True, in some descriptions the biblical or midrashic analogy may reflect not the departure from Jerusalem and the ruins of the Temple but rather its diametrical opposite, the exodus from Egypt. Such is the case, for instance, of Benjamin and Senderl in *The Travels of Benjamin the Third.* Their departure from Tuneyadevke is a brilliant parody of the biblical story of the Israelites' hasty escape from their house of bondage as well as the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. But Benjamin and Senderl leave the shtetl on their way to the Holy Land, and such "messianic" departures, from Abramovitsh's *Benjamin* to Michl Burshtin's *Iber di khurves fun ployne* ("On the Ruins of Ployne") and Agnon's *Bi-lvav yamim* ("In the Heart of the Seas") will always call forth the analogy with the exodus from Egypt. Occasionally, descriptions of the voyage to America are also informed by this analogy, particularly those which deal with the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean, although the Jewish imagination could hardly conceive of America as the new Canaan. However, in most cases the scenes of departure from the shtetl convey messages of *galut,* alienation, uprootedness. It is when the shtetl Jews cut themselves off from their native ground that they might become the proverbial *luftmenschen.* Inside the shtetl Jews might be poor, even destitute, but only in the very last phases of the disintegration of shtetl society might they develop the traits of the *luftmensch.* Even Sholem Aleichem's Menakhem-Mendl, the archetypal *luftmensch* of modern Jewish literature, becomes what he is only when he leaves Kasrilevke for Odessa. Cut off from the soil of the shtetl, one is a *luftmensch* not only, not even primarily, in the economic sense of this metaphorical term, i.e., a person inclined to speculative, economically unproductive occupations, but also in a literal sense of weightlessness, lacking a center of gravity. One physically knows oneself to be in exile by one's hesitant footsteps or by one's uncomfortable sense of space. Abramovitsh watches closely the feet of his *Kabtsansker,* which, he says, were shaped especially to tread on the mud of their shtetl alleys; now, though, in Shikhor (i.e., Odessa), having lost their grip, they skid—all but fly—putting their owners in danger.[19] Departing from the shtetl, Sholem Aleichem's *Kasrilevker nisrofim* actually drift off into the air. The narrator describes the comic appearance of Kasrilevke's communal leaders in the

elegant streets of Yehupets (i.e., Kiev). While the description as a whole is in every way based on the ancient stereotype of the rustic or provincial *ingénu* who comes to a big town, some tell-tale details point in a direction which transcends the sitcom atmosphere. For instance, Sholem Aleichem's narrator pays what seems like exaggerated attention to the extraordinarily large and awkward umbrellas carried by the Kasrilevke dignitaries. The narrator observes that such umbrellas are rarely seen actually protecting their owners from rain. This, he explains, is either because they would not open or because when they do open, they never fold up, and then with the first wind they might turn into parachutes, carrying their owners away into the cloudy sky to great distances "almost like an airplane."[20] The fanciful hyperbole, as merry as it is, conveys a sense of uprootedness, of a dizzying suspension of the law of gravity which is far from being funny. It underlines the metaphorical dimensions of the exodus scenes in shtetl stories and illustrates how the great shtetl writers metaphorically expand their shtetl images without resorting to ancient texts and myths. What Rachel the matriarch and the laments of Jeremiah did for other texts, the modern parachute and airplane do for this one. These images emphasize the essence of the exilic experience as the core of the historical individual or mass departure from the shtetl. This experience means dispersion, alienation, loss of one's connection with terra firma, whether it is enacted, or rather reenacted, as a repetition of an ancient expulsion or played out in a modern world of trains, ocean-liners and airplanes. The metaphorical enlargement of the description of such an experience, which is usually interpreted in socioeconomic terms, brings out its psychological and metaphysical aspects.

VI

A third metaphor which systematically appears in many classical shtetl descriptions is that of the unexpected visitor. The shtetl, a small, out-of-the-way place, is an intimate cohesive entity where everyone knows everyone else and the appearances of strangers are few and startling. Yisrael Aksenfeld, the first modern Yiddish novelist, said in his *Shterntikhl* ("The Headband") that when a Jew meets an unfamiliar face in the street, he immediately decides that his town has grown into a city.[21] When the appearance of a stranger in the shtetl does occur, Abramovitsh says, in *The Travels of Benjamin the Third*

> the townsfolk open their doors and windows to gawk and gape at the newcomer. Neighbors peering through open windows ask one another,

> "Ha! Now just who could that be? Now just where did he pop up from, out of the clear blue sky? What's he after, anyway? Does he have something up his sleeve? It just doesn't look kosher!" [22]

And yet, appearances of strangers are not only numerous in many shtetl stories but also of wide significance as indicated by their strategic placement along the plotline, i.e., at points of exposition, peripateia, closure scenes of recognition.

The visit and the visitors assume a wide variety of guises. One is the legendary or mock-legendary guise of the angel, the biblical *ushpizin* and the saint. Literary shtetlekh often predicate their Jewish identity upon a legend about such a supernatural visit that brings biblical transcendental greetings to a distant Jewish community situated on Slavic ground, thus uniting this ground with Jewish heaven, the present with the past, and the everyday with the holy. These stories have a folkloric source. Often the description of the visit would be directly adopted from popular *Märchen*, or a chapbook or Hasidic legend. Modern nineteenth century writers, under the influence of Enlightenment rationalism, retold the stories of such visits in a parodic derisive vein and hinted that the hallowed visitors were merely charlatans and crooks who took advantage of the naiveté of their hosts. Often they would go further and make an obscene association between the sainted figures and the "miraculous" pregnancies of infertile women. In later neo-Romantic shtetl stories, such as those of Y. L. Peretz, the naive faith of the original *Märchen* would be reproduced either for the purpose of sheer aesthetic reconstruction of *Lubok*, folk-art, or as a means for the creation of a symbol or a parable, the significance of which usually had nothing in common with the spirit of folk-religion.

Another, albeit related, guise was that of the emissary from the Holy Land. Throughout the modern period and during the nineteenth century in particular, the Palestinian Jewish community developed the institution of authorized *meshulakhim* (messengers) who would visit the Jewish communities in the diaspora, collecting donations for the various Palestinian yeshivot and charities. The visit of the Jew from Eretz-Yisrael, who was sometimes a Sephardi and who communicated in a Hebrew bafflingly different from that with which the Ashkenazi Jews were familiar (i.e., pronounced with too many "a" vowels [pathas] and with the accent on the ultimate syllable), was used again and again as a feature in classical shtetl stories. The character had an aura of piety, even of saintliness, which modern writers, more often than not, questioned. They did not, however, doubt the genuine feelings which such a visitor would inspire in the shtetl. Thus, the man who came to Tuneyadevke

and showed its inhabitants a date, the fruit of the *tamar*, which was so often mentioned in the Scriptures, powerfully stirred their imagination and wakened their dormant messianic yearnings.[23]

A third and very different kind of unexpected visitor was that of the *daytsh*, a Jew from western Europe, usually from Germany, emancipated, Europeanized and always meticulously dressed according to current bourgeois fashions. The visit of the *daytsh* shakes the shtetl and arouses suspicions. Who knows if he is not a spy sent by the authorities to report on commercial and cultural "crimes" such as the buying and selling of contraband goods or doing business without the proper authorization, or sending their children to old-fashioned *khadorim* (elementary schools) instead of the new government-approved schools, or wearing traditional gabardines and fur hats banned by the government of Nicholas I? Usually, the *daytsh* had no such unfriendly intentions. He was in town on business or to help his "benighted" eastern European brethren. In some early nineteenth century plays and stories, he might have been accepted by the writers as a true harbinger of the Enlightenment, the bearer of the torch of rationalism and science. Later writers were aware of the ambivalent position of the *daytsh* in the shtetl. Abramovitsh in particular dwells on the sartorial discrepancy between his immaculate suits and warm surtouts and the habitual garb of the shtetl dwellers. In the shtetl, Abramovitsh's Mendele says, "worn-out heels, quite visible shoulder blades, bare chests and threadbare elbows, were not considered a crime" and even a discreet opening left unbuttoned would not elicit a comment of disrespect.[24] While ridiculing the people of the shtetl in this way, Abramovitsh also pointed to the *daytsh* as a person who had managed to get himself to a place where he did not belong, and where he could, even with the best intentions, do more harm than good. Other writers, such as Sholem Aleichem in his early *Dos meserl* ("The Penknife") also depicted the presence of the *daytsh* as destabilizing and even dangerous.

In quite a few instances the visit of the *daytsh* assumes a special significance and interest, as he is revealed to be none other than the shtetl's own prodigal son, the mature Westernized man revisiting the alleys and cottages he knew so well as a shtetl-born child. In stories written prior to the 1890s, this visitor had left the shtetl as a boy or a teenager to go to Germany, eventually becoming a scholar, a scientist, a physician or a successful businessman. From the 1890s on, the *daytsh* is usually represented as an emigrant who has made good in a far-away country like the United States. Now he has returned on a visit to pay his respects at the graves of departed parents and relatives and to renew his connections with living relatives and, sometimes, to find for himself a chaste and kosher shtetl wife, presumably scarce abroad. Whatever

his purpose, his position in the shtetl is poignantly ambivalent. At first he is not recognized and his arrival arouses fear and suspicion. Then, after a dramatic scene of recognition, he is "attacked" from every direction as a prospective philanthropist and benefactor. His visit, even when it leads to a wedding, rarely ends without some disappointment and bitterness. Sholem Aleichem is particularly critical of such visitors, as we learn from his drama *Di goldgreber* ("The Gold Diggers") better known as *Der oytser* ("The Treasure") and even more incisively from his devastating portrayal of *A mentsh fun buenos aires* ("A Man from Buenos Aires"), a high-level entrepreneur in the international white slavery market, who believes that only in the tiny Lithuanian shtetl—from which he was exiled as a child by his cruel stepfather—can he find a bride whose virginity and sexual purity he can trust.

The heightened awareness of the ambivalence of late homecoming allows for penetrating insights, particularly in shtetl stories in which the unexpected visitor is either the author himself or his slightly fictionalized proxy. Here the tragicomedy of the visit is often enlarged into a full-fledged anatomy of the problematic relationship between modern Jewish literature and the premodern Jewish condition symbolized by the shtetl. The writers explore the ramifications of the rift, forcing themselves, as well as their readers, to look into the cultural chasm which separates them from the world with which they seem to be so intimately acquainted. *Bilder fun a provints rayse* of Y. L. Peretz is a sensitive rendition of the tragicomical predicament of the modern writer as a prodigal son visiting the shtetl. Agnon's *Oreah nata lalun* ("A Guest for the Night") and Y. Glatshteyn's *Ven Yash iz gekumen* ("When Yash Arrived") are equally sensitive and even more tragicomical. There are major differences between the cycles of sketches written by Peretz in the early 1890s and the novels of Agnon and Glatshteyn, written in the 1930s when the shtetl, already moribund, was on the verge of physical annihilation, but the basic meaning of the situation is the same. The modern Jewish writer, no matter how sympathetic, cannot help but blunder as he goes back to the world of his childhood. The more emotional his homecoming, the better he thinks he understands the culture of the shtetl and identifies with its ideals, the worse, more comical but also more harmful, his blunders. Agnon's *oreah* (guest) is a self-portrait infused with subtle sarcasm that sometimes waxes lethal. Finally, whatever these visitors can take back with them is not, in any sense, the knowledge that they have rendered some service to the people of their hometown or even that they have become better acquainted with them. They earn only self-knowledge, the realization of their own limitations as well as those of their own art and the entire

culture which it represents, that of modern Judaism. The self-ironizing inherent in this realization makes for little dramas which are essentially dramas of the mind. They present the modern Jewish consciousness at loggerheads with itself rather than with the inertia of tradition; thus, the visits to the shtetl discussed here often go hand-in-hand with modernistic breakthroughs in Hebrew and Yiddish literature. Replacing satire with self-ironizing, mimetic description with the inner flow of consciousness, these visits pushed shtetl fiction away from its Dickensian and Gogolian beginnings toward Proustean and Joycean directions.

Another modernist version of the visit and visitor motif, which appears as shtetl stories come under the influence of Symbolism, is that of the generalized-symbolic wanderer; for example, the wanderer who walks toward the shtetl and away from it in the prologue and epilogue of Sholem Asch's *Dos shtetl*, or who falls asleep at the beginning of Y. L. Peretz's *Bay nakht oyfn altn mark* ("At Night in the Old Marketplace"), wakes up at the end and is supposed to have dreamt the entire drama which unfolds in-between. Here the fictional contours of the visitor-character are intentionally blurred so that he can play his symbolic role as the representative of the author's poetic consciousness or the modern Jewish poetic spirit coming home to roost for a while in the old abandoned premodern Jewish home.

One can point to further versions or nuances of the visitor motif. However, those which we have already mentioned suffice in order to pose the question of whether or not this motif really represents a single unified feature, a real topos of shtetl stores. After all, some of the configurations seem to have little, if anything, in common with the others. What, for instance, is the common denominator of the saint, the emissary from the Holy Land and the prodigal son? The first, as we have seen, stems from folklore and Hasidic legend, the second represents a historical institution which formalized the relationship between the premodern traditional Jewish communities of Palestine and eastern Europe, while the third represents modern, urbanized, westernized Jews in their unsuccessful attempts at a belated homecoming, i.e., the modern Jewish condition in the era of mass emigration. How are all these to be connected and how are they all related to the overdressed daytsh? It would seem that on the literal-mimetic level the variants of the motif, albeit linked to each other by a basic dramatic formula—the shtetl surprised by an unexpected visit—are substantively unrelated, or related to each other only in small groups of two, the legendary visitor to the emissary from the Holy Land, the *daytsh* to the prodigal son. On the metaphorical level, however, all of the variants come together and converge into one entity. Here, perhaps more than in the preceding

examples, we can closely watch the integrative mechanism of the metaphorical system we are trying to describe. It picks up the different metaphorical "vehicles" and unifies them by a common metaphorical "tenor." The latter, like in the other examples, is most often indicated by the emergence of biblical quotations or midrashic analogues.

Here, for instance, is how Mendele the book peddler, himself a wanderer and a not altogether expected and trusted visitor in the shtetlekh he frequents, announces the appearance in Kabtsansk and Tuneyadevke of Hirsch Rattman, an overdressed *daytsh* who is actually Kabtsansk's prodigal son Hirsch-Hershele, who had left the town as a mere lad and had become a scholar, educator and writer in Germany. Now, after the pogroms of 1881–82, which took their toll on Kabtsansk (among other shtetlekh), he returns to his hometown as a philanthropist and ideologue who seeks to deliver his brethren from their life of misery through a grandiose plan for national regeneration, which presumably follows the thinking of Leon Pinsker's *Autoemancipation*. In the meantime, he intends to publish (in Yiddish and Hebrew) his autobiography, which is in fact the novel *The Magic Ring* itself. Hirsch Rattman is, therefore, at one and the same time the *daytsh*, the prodigal son, the modern Jewish writer and, as a Zionist, the emissary from Eretz-Yisrael. Mendele the book peddler, who serves as the editor, translator and publisher of Rattman's book, refers to his rather belated and certainly unexpected homecoming in a language which is nothing if not messianic. Of course, Mendele's messianic rhetoric is laced with irony. Nevertheless, one cannot fail to notice its serious aspect as well. Mendele interprets Rattman's visit to Kabtsansk in the traditional terms of messianic *geulah* (redemption). The visitor is a redeemer of sorts and he, Mendele himself, as his harbinger, is the carrier of the "good tidings" of his advent, playing the role of the prophet Elijah or Deutero-Isaiah, the great biblical consoler: "Congratulations Kabtsansk! Congratulations Tuneyadevke! You are both to be made fortunate and happy. Your term of service is accomplished and you will soon find favor, very soon indeed."[25] Mendele is clearly paraphrasing the Bible's best-known prophecy of messianic consolation: "Comfort, oh comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and declare to her that her term of service is over, that her iniquity is expiated." (Isaiah 40:1–2.)

As one ponders the sublime or mock-sublime tonality of Mendele's announcement, one realizes that all of the shtetl's unexpected visitors, no matter what their special guise, are depicted in redemptive terms, as harbingers of *geulah* of one kind or another. The fact that this is usually accomplished within a parodic context is beside the point of the argument. The angels, saints, *ushpizin* and hidden *tsadikim* brought

miraculous solutions to the insoluble problems of shtetl people—the community as a whole or individuals—by bringing wealth to the destitute, health to the sick, progeny to the childless and security to those threatened with expulsion by landlords and princes or in danger of physical violence. Like Peretz's *kuntsnmakher* (juggler), who is supposedly the prophet Elijah disguised as a *daytsh* and a circus juggler, they appear magically in the depressed, anxious shtetl and immediately hurry to the spot where their help is most urgently needed. They are, in fact, minor messiahs.

The Jew from the Holy Land brings greetings from Jerusalem and the other holy places of Eretz-Yisrael as well as packets of soil from holy ground. These would be placed in the coffin, under the head of the corpse, in order to spare the dead the torture of *gilgul mehilot*—rolling underground in order to arrive in Eretz-Yisrael in time for the general resurrection. In every way, the Jew from the Holy Land awakened the sense of *geulah* as a potential reality for the shtetl population. Thus, the adventures of Benjamin the Third, who sets out to find the Ten Tribes of Israel in order to accelerate the regaining of Jewish political independence (triggered by, among other things, a messenger from the Holy Land) are not in vain.

The *daytsh* supposedly brought with him the light of the Enlightenment and the promise of Jewish emancipation. His appearance in a distant "benighted" shtetl resembles, says Mendele the book peddler half-mockingly, that of a person carrying a torch into a dark chicken coop, overwhelming the drowsy, blinking fowl with his light and movement.[26]

The prodigal son, a person who has redeemed himself by leaving the shtetl, returns in order to share his redemption with those he has left behind. He brings with him financial assistance and educational reform. In many cases, he also shares with his brethren a redemptive ideology of one kind or another—Enlightenment, Zionism, Territorialism, Bundist socialism. The modern Jewish writer would offer the shtetl, in addition to all these ideological possibilities, an aesthetic redemption through his art. As has been said before, in many shtetl stories these promises of redemption are viewed with skepticism, and the would-be redeemers are presented ironically; and yet this does not mean that the pseudomessianic visit as a metaphor is devoid of serious meaning.

The visit/visitor motif, as an essential component of the metaphorical system which conditions the classical shtetl image lends this image, the atmosphere of a historical and metaphysical drama. On the one hand, it conveys the feeling that the shtetl's history was reaching an apocalyptic

phase, in which drastic changes could be expected. On the other hand, it imparts a sense of helplessness, of the forlorn. The shtetl was in distress, facing mounting threats and dangers, hardly capable of helping itself. Help had to come from the outside, be it heaven, Eretz-Yisrael or America. The little messiahs were themselves comic and pathetic figures, but the anguish which necessitated their appearance was genuine and intense. It was the anguish of insufficiency in the face of an approaching upheaval, that of a people who know they must be saved but, being unable to save themselves, lift their eyes to the hills to see whence their help might come. The traditional concept of the myth of *geulah* supplied the modern writers with a set of metaphors and analogues which they could use to highlight this drama of distress and need for rescue. Hence, the recurrence of the scene of the unexpected visit as a messianic metaphor. Many writers, nonbelievers and anti- or non-Zionists included, could not give up this dramatic metaphor even if they were forced to stand it on its head and develop it into a comedy or a farce, a *geule komedye* (a comedy of redemption), as the poet and playwright H. Leyvik called it.

VII

Fire, exodus and unexpected pseudomessianic visits are only three of the submetaphors that function within the larger metaphorical gestalt that regulates the classical image of the shtetl in Yiddish and Hebrew literature from the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. One can point to many illustrations of other such submetaphors, pieces of shtetl reality or folklore which are elaborated in the works of the Yiddish and Hebrew masters into historical and metaphysical combinations of the present and the past, the mundane and the transcendental. Many stories, anecdotes, archetypal scenes and motifs are made to function as such submetaphors: the search for buried treasures; the metamorphosis of domestic animals—calves, cows and goats—who develop fantastic qualities; the annals of local bathhouses; visits to graveyards, whether for burial or for prayers of commemoration or for inviting the dead to weddings; stories of dybbuks, devils and ghosts; stories about widows and *agunot,* deserted women who "sit solitary" and "weep sore in the night, the tears on their cheeks"; stories of dangerous voyages undertaken by exiled shtetl people in their attempts to reach their families to celebrate the holidays together at home; stories about newborn infants threatened by evil forces; stories of *hakhnasat kalah* —collecting money for the dowries of poor brides—and of canceled weddings; stories of

separations and saintly deaths; and so on. In and of themselves, the stories, anecdotes, scenes and motifs are of different origin and nature; I think, however, that it can be shown that in the classical shtetl texts all of these, when metaphorically employed, point in one direction, the direction in which our three illustrations point and which by now may have been grasped and deciphered.

The classical literary image of the shtetl is structured around a metaphorical-conceptual core which is none other than the following: the shtetl represents a tiny exiled Jerusalem, a *Yerushalayim shel mata*, in the enriched sense of the term which indicates not only an earthly, mundane Jerusalem as opposed to the "celestial" Jerusalem but also the low, downtrodden Jerusalem-in-exile as opposed to the lofty, royal, independent ancient capital graced by by the presence of God in His Temple. The shtetl was Jerusalem in her fallen state and yet it was still Jerusalem—the Jewish polity par excellence.

Hirsch Rattman of *The Magic Ring* had searched in vain for a sign of his hometown Kabtsansk on the best, most detailed and most accurate geographical maps. The shtetl was too small and insignificant to be indicated even with the tiniest dot on the map. However, as a boy Hershele "knew" that Kabtsansk was nothing less than the center of the world. He was aware, of course, of the existence of another and more august city, which "in his mind's eye [was] hovering as if it were in the air, teeming and swarming with whole hosts of angels—winged attendants and couriers from God to the children of Israel. That was the holy city of Jerusalem."[27] Hershele, however, conceived of his own hometown as the earthly counterpart of that celestial Jerusalem. The best people, "the elite, the cream of the cream, were to be found in Kabtsansk. For them alone did the sun shine by day and moon and stars by night. God concerns Himself exclusively with the Jews there."[28] The author of *The Magic Ring* knew, of course, what his mature protagonist Hirsch Rattman knew, i.e., that within the "objective" general scheme of human affairs Kabtsansk was a nonentity. Nevertheless, he incorporated in the image of the shtetl he created not only this "objective" view of Kabtsansk as seen from the outside, but also the naive, childish, insider view of Hershele. He truly understood that without the latter, the image as a whole would lack both historical meaning and artistic lifeblood. His literary shtetl, he felt, had to be presented as a *Yeryshalayim shel mata* even when the purpose of the representation was allegedly to criticize and ridicule it as a poor backward hamlet.

The shtetl was described, for better or for worse, as the Jewish "body politic." It was corporeal, a physically Jewish piece of territory carved

out and separated from the continuum of space in which it was embedded but to which, ostensibly, it did not belong. As a Jewish territory it had Jewish borders prescribed by Jewish law (halakhah) and defined as the *tehum shabat*, the Sabbath limit, beyond which one was not allowed to go on the Sabbath and on certain holidays. It was marked only by a cord tied to poles or to tree branches, but it was a barrier strong enough to hold back Y. L. Peretz's poor *melamed* who discovered a treasure on the Sabbath but refrained from following the trail leading to it as soon as it moved beyond the *eruv*, the line defining the *tehum shabat*.[29] Out there, beyond that line, non-Jewishness reigned. The young Hershele from *The Magic Ring* thought of the space beyond the limits of the shtetl as a wilderness, the preserve of wild beasts. The naive Reb Yudl from Agnon's *Hakhnasat kalah* ("The Bridal Canopy") believed that this region was controlled not only by robbers and murderers but also by evil spiritual forces; when forced, much against his will, to set foot out of the shtetl he prayed for protection from the devils and for the release of the lost souls of Jewish sinners who had been captured by the evil ones and forced to wander through the alien open space, "some floating on the waters, some hanging in the trees."[30] Mendele the book peddler, who sold and also read books written by the followers of the Jewish Enlightenment movement called this open space "nature" and viewed it as an essentially non-Jewish feminine entity, beautiful, seductive and subtly demonic.[31] Conversely, the territory within the limits of the shtetl was not only Jewish in and of itself but also had a Judaizing effect upon almost everything with which it came into contact, including plants, like Avrom Reyzen's tree in his short story *Der boym*, and animals, like Abramovitsh's nag and heifer, Sholem Aleichem's dogs, calves and goats, or Agnon's goat and the cat, Lassunka, who saved a Jewish community in *The Bridal Canopy*—but always, it should be noted, with the consistent exception of pigs and hogs.

But the shtetl was not just a Jewish territory. It was a living Jewish organism, a functioning body. Writers from Abramovitsh to Der Nister describe its various "organs" like the head (the houses of prayer and learning), its beating heart (the marketplace), or its stomach. Abramovitsh, whose works were in many ways rooted in eighteenth century satire, not excluding even its scatological layer, talked about Glupsk's colon and hinted that the two "travelers" Benjamin and Senderl entered the town through its rectum.[32] This body was, as I have said before, a polity, a ministate. As such, it had not only a territorial continuity, no matter how small, but also a temporal one, a history that often stretched over hundreds of years and contained such cataclysmic events as the Chmielnicki rebellion of the mid-seventeenth century and the Napoleonic

invasion of the tsarist empire as well as Napoleon's hasty retreat in 1812–13. The history of the shtetl, however, was a Jewish one; it did not present historical events as they impacted upon the area as a whole. Rather, history was interpreted in exclusively Jewish terms. Thus, the Chmielnicki rebellion became the Chmielnicki massacres, and the Napoleonic wars became a part of Hasidic hagiography or, at most, were connected with the advent of the *Haskalah* into the shtetl—a movement that developed thanks to the encouragement of the new Jewish bourgeoisie which had grown rich, powerful and influential as contractors to the Russian army during the Napoleonic wars. Kasrilevke, as we have seen, remembered Chmielnicki because of his victims, the Jewish martyrs, and Napoleon because of his treasure, allegedly buried in the old cemetery in the town. Thus, Kasrilevke's sense of history was intrinsic, local and episodic, as if the content of history was identical with what was recorded in its communal *pinkas*, in which memorable events, primarily *gezerot* and persecutions but also fires and the unfortunate suicide committed by the *goy* in the communal bathhouse, had been intermittently jotted down.

As a polity, the shtetl inevitably contained a power structure. It had its spiritual and lay leadership, which drew its authority from the triad of Jewish learning, wealth and important contacts with the non-Jewish authorities, the Polish landlord and the Russian *nachalstvo* (officials). The shtetl, of course, had its fair share of internal Jewish politicking, of struggles for power and of ruthless, sometimes brutal, suppressions of opposition. The modern shtetl classics, even those written by such "neo-Romantics" as Peretz and Agnon, examined these internal conflicts as they had taken place both within the traditional shtetl society and particularly between the traditionalists and the followers of the Jewish Enlightenment. It was Agnon in particular who, as the chief exponent of neotraditionalism in modern Hebrew literature succeeded in portraying shtetl despots such as Reb Yisroel Shloyme in *The Bridal Canopy* or Reb Avigdor in *Ha-nidah* ("The Exiled"), a novella which focuses on the struggle between Hasidim and their rabbinical opponents in a Galician shtetl at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

As a polity, the shtetl also possessed communal institutions, the three most important of which were the synagogue, the bathhouse and the cemetery. The importance of the synagogue as a spiritual center is self-evident: it was the shtetl's own replica of the Temple. There the prayers of at least a *minyan* (a quorum of ten men) were offered three times a day, replacing the offerings and the sacrifices of the Temple in Jerusalem according to Hosea 14:3: "Instead of bulls we will pay [the offering of] our lips." In many shtetl stories the synagogue as a temple is projected as a living entity which possesses a consciousness of sorts

and sometimes mysteriously "knows" that disaster is approaching even before the townspeople are aware of it. It has extrasensory premonitions of *hurban* (destruction).[33] But the synagogue was also a political institution, a kind of parliament where, Abramovitsh says sarcastically, all matters of consequence

> domestic secrets, the politics of Istanbul, the Sultan, the Austrian Kaiser, high finance, Rothschild's fortunes—as well as rumors of persecutions and of the Red Jews [the Ten Tribes of Israel]—[were] taken up in due order by a special committee of honorable and venerable Jews who [sat] there all the live-long day—abandoning wives and children and devoting themselves to all of these matters.[34]

One sometimes wonders why the communal bathhouse occupies such a central position in almost all of the classical shtetl stories. Mordkhe Spektor dedicated a whole novel, *Reb Treytel*, to the history of the communal bathhouse of the shtetl Zlidnivke, how it had been founded and burnt down more than once, as well as the fantastic results of the failure of the residents of Zlidnivke to rebuild it—a situation which completely destabilized the community, redoubling the burden of exile. Abramovitsh was wholeheartedly attached to the image of the bathhouse and used it as the pivotal locus of *Fishke the Lame*, one of his two major novels. According to him, "no Jew can turn down the bathhouse. What a tavern is to peasants and a pond is to geese and ducks, that's what a bathhouse is to a Jew, only a hundred times more so."[35] Y. Y. Linetski focused on bathhouse scenes in his *Poylish yingl* ("The Polish Lad"). Simkha Ben-Tsiyon positioned a detailed bathhouse scene at the center of his best and most elaborate shtetl novel, *Nefesh retsutsa* ("A Crushed Spirit").

The truth is that without a communal bathhouse no Jewish community could exist. It was even more important than a synagogue, since prayer could be conducted anywhere and the mere presence of a *reynikeyt* (a Torah scroll) could elevate any private room to the status of a synagogue; in contrast, without a *mikveh* (pool or ritual bath) for postmenstrual ritual cleansing, Jewish women could not be sexually accessible to their husbands and the first commandment of the Torah—to "be fruitful and multiply"—could not be obeyed. However, the steam bath for the men of the shtetl was likewise an institution of great importance and in many shtetl stories played the role of a richly suggestive, albeit often ambivalent, symbol of shtetl intimacy. Here every shtetl man knew from early childhood the entire male population of his hometown in total nakedness. No physical blemish could be covered, no defect hidden. Involuntary physical contact was inevitable. In many

shtetl stories, particularly those in which the sensibility of a child is used as the "central intelligence," the bathhouse experience was described as overwhelming, all but devastating. The heat, the smells, the proximity of naked, wet, adult bodies are described here as unbearable. On the other hand, the bathhouse is also described as a cozy, protected "Jewish" space, a well-heated resort for physical and social relaxation in an otherwise cold and harsh environment. Mendele's Fishke misses the bathhouse where he used to work as an attendant in the same fashion that one would miss one's paternal home. In *The Travels of Benjamin the Third*, Mendele even jokingly attributed political values to the bathhouse. Indeed, he presented it as the very core of the *shtetldik* Jewish political entity, commenting:

> A Jew enters a bathhouse as if he were entering a fatherland, a realm of freedom where all people have the same rights, where anyone is free to reach a higher level, to clamber up to the top bench to revive his gloomy soul, to relax his bones for even an hour and to cast away his burden of cares and worries.[36]

A separate Jewish cemetery was also absolutely essential to the existence of the Jewish community. Without it, Jews could not bury their dead and were forced to depend on other communities for the indispensable services connected with a proper burial, a situation which entailed not only exorbitant taxes but also a state of subservience. No community could be officially recognized as a *kehilah kedoshah* (a holy congregation) unless it possessed a cemetery of its own. Thus, the presence of a cemetery marked the difference between a geographical Jewish entity and a mere *yishuv*, which was a non-Jewish place where Jews were deprived of all of the environmental attributes of Jewishness and exiled from the Jewish universe, as it were. But that was not the only reason that cemeteries played such an important part in classical shtetl projections such as Sholem Aleichem's Kasrilevke, Agnon's *Ve-haya he-akov le-mishor* ("And the Crooked Shall be Made Straight") and *Khupat dodim* ("The Lovers' Canopy"), L. Shapiro's *In der toyter shtot* ("In the Dead Town"), Der Nister's *Mishpokhe Mashber* ("The Family Mashber") and so many others. The cemetery is obviously the metonymy available to those writers who regarded the shtetl itself as moribund, a *toyte shtot*. Hence, for instance, the gruesome role of the cemetery in Peretz's *Di toyte shtot* ("The Dead Town") as well as in his poetic drama *Bay nakht oyfn altn mark*. Sholem Aleichem for one, however, does not focus on Kasrilevke's old cemetery in order to emphasize the shtetl's moribund state, but, on the contrary, makes this cemetery contain the shtetl's inner life, its soul,

its hopes. For one thing, it allegedly contains the fabulous treasure which would one day be found, bringing wealth and happiness to the town. But the cemetery contained much more than the fantasy of material riches. It also contained the town's *yikhes* (pedigree), its history and legends; in many ways it was the most consecrated part of its Judaized territory, forming its metaphysical core. Peretz Markish started his family epic *Dor oys dor ayn* ("A Generation Passes Away, Another Generation Comes") with a description of the shtetl's cemetery, of its tombstones with their weather-beaten, all but erased etchings of the Star of David. Markish says that the cemetery was the place where all Jews searched for a genealogical record, as if all of them were the princely, albeit impoverished, descendants of the Davidic dynasty.[37] Sholem Aleichem says that Kasrilevke itself, seen from a distance, looks like a Jewish cemetery—its houses, weather-beaten and squeezed up against one another resemble blackened tombstones. But then, he goes on to say, it also looks like a large sunflower, chock-full of ripe, well-dried, black seeds.[38] Thus, the author pits the death-like visage of the town against a symbol of fecundity, nutrition, growth and plenitude. To him, the shtetl's cemetery represents the wrinkled husk which contains the shtetl's living anima in the Jungian sense of the term.

In the final analysis, some of the best classical shtetl texts understood both cemeteries and bathhouses as indications of a secret bond between the Jews and the foreign soil upon which they had been placed as a result of being exiled. Both involve digging Jewish holes in non-Jewish ground and thus Judaizing it. The *mikveh* represents a womb. It was dug so that the halakhic consecration of Jewish sex could take place; it stands for *yihud* (the seclusion of husband and wife for the purpose of sexual intercourse), pregnancy, birth and renewal. The grave receives the cleansed Jewish body after death, but it is also the opening of an underground corridor that will eventually lead to Eretz-Yisrael and to resurrection. Both womb and tomb convey a sense of intimacy with the soil once it has been cleansed or Judaized.

VIII

This brings us to the final point of the argument: as a Jewish "polis" the shtetl of the literary classics possessed a myth, a sacred story which explained and justified its coming into being, legitimized its current condition and structure, and foretold its future. The myth assumed various forms, was based on diverse textual and folkloristic sources, and was developed in different narrative techniques. Nevertheless, it

rested upon one basic infrastructure and revolved around fixed principles. Of course, not all of these would be emphasized in any given shtetl image as conveyed by a specific work. The principles formed a gestalt which could be temporarily fractured, or the image could appear with one or some of its components emphasized while others were absent or played down. However, all of the fixed principles were bound to be given some recognition as the base of the shtetl image expanded, gradually encompassing an ever larger corpus of shtetl texts. There are essentially four such principles: a) in one way or another, the myths present the shtetl as an extension, a continuation or an ersatz of the original Jewish "polity," i.e., of Eretz-Yisrael, of Jerusalem; b) it connects the creation of the shtetl, its foundation, with some direct or indirect transcendental intervention that had vouchsafed its Jewish legitimacy and linked its existence to the continuum of Jewish sacred history; c) it projects the existence of the shtetl, no matter how old it is, as temporary, since as Jerusalem-in-exile it was bound to undergo the fate of Jerusalem, trials and tribulations that would culminate in a great fire and a general exodus; d) some extrinsic being or power would finally redeem the shtetl by removing it, so to speak, from its exilic environment and transplanting it to its permanent home. Of course, the people of the shtetl would be the ones to be removed and redeemed; occasionally, however, the expectation emerged that the removal and transplantation would also include parts of the shtetl's real estate or of the inanimate shtetl environment. Thus, Agnon's *Oreah nata lalun* ends with the protagonist back in Jerusalem, expecting the arrival not only of the people of Shibush but also of its old house of learning, which—together with all of its old books—was expected to soar, landing intact in Jerusalem.[39]

One finds bits and pieces of this quadrangular gestalt strewn all over classical shtetl fiction as written by Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, Peretz, Agnon and scores of others. The myth assumes one of its most essential forms in the etiological story which contains a folk etymology of the Hebrew-Yiddish name of Poland—Polin or Poyln—as if it consisted of the two Hebrew words *po lin* meaning "rest here." The folkloric story repeated by both Agnon and Peretz describes the exiles of Jerusalem being told to make Poland their temporary place of rest. In Peretz's version, the one who had made this decision was the *rosh ha-golah* (the exilarch).[40] In Agnon's, the two Hebrew words reach the convoy of exiles on a piece of parchment that falls directly from heaven, the decision having been made by God Himself.[41] Thus, the aboriginal Polish shtetl was founded by a divine decree as the temporary home of

the Jerusalem exiles. This story and others like it depict the people of Jerusalem in the midst of a sylvan, half-pagan and half-empty medieval Poland, as they Judaize the wild country, carve talmudic tractates on the trunks of trees, build synagogues, and chase away animals, devils and fertility gods. Agnon further develops the myth in his *Ir u-meloah* ("The City and All Within It")—a vast encyclopedic compendium of the legends, traditions and history of his hometown Buczacz—in a story that relates the way in which Buczacz was allegedly founded by a contingent of Jews from the Rhine Valley who had decided to leave their comfortable abode and return to Jerusalem. They did not know the way but assumed that they needed to proceed eastward. Thus, they found themselves in the heart of the Polish forest, where they were detained first by the Jewish High Holidays and then by the severe winter. They eventually cut down the trees, made a clearing, built a synagogue, established their shtetl and have remained there ever since on a temporary basis, for the shetl was only an outpost, a resting place. Their voyage toward the final destination was to be resumed.[42]

Of course, the myth was not always related in this heroic Zionist vein. Indeed, often it was developed in mock-heroic terms and served as the core of a satire. For instance, Abramovitsh's Glupsk was also founded by the exiles of Jerusalem. However, these were not the people who had been exiled from the Holy Land by the Romans. Rather, they were the biblical experts in finance and commerce dispatched by King Solomon to Ophir to purchase its legendary gold. From here they migrated to India, where they opened stores which eventually went bankrupt. Fleeing their creditors, they boarded ships that carried them all the way from the Indian Ocean to the river Pyatignilevke, where they were shipwrecked by a mighty storm. On the muddy and slippery banks of the river they established their commercial Jerusalem-in-exile, Glupsk, the town of clever fools, where Jewish merchants flourished, only to be subsequently "shipwrecked" on the shoals of bankruptcy, and forced to redeem themselves by an "exodus," by fleeing their creditors.[43] The entire mythical gestalt is recreated in this mock-myth only to be parodically travestied. The point which our argument seeks to make, however, is that in order for Abramovitsh's shtetl image to be what it is, it needed to comply with this myth, even in the form of parody. Similarly, Kabtsansk could not be Kabtsansk without the requisite visit of the *ushpizin*, even if the story of the sacred visit had to be interpreted obscenely, as it indeed was. Obscene and parodic as it was, however, the mythical visit was essential: when young Sholem Aleichem, as the editor of the *Yidishe folksbibliotek* (which published *The Magic Ring*), suggested that the obscene story be deleted from the novel, Abramovitsh adamantly refused, insisting that the story

formed the very core of *The Magic Ring*, the original seed which had to grow and develop organs and limbs like a fetus in the uterus.[44] The mature and experienced Abramovitsh understood that for his shtetl novel to function aesthetically and ideationally, it had to include a mythical or mock-mythical kernel, from which an elaborate metaphorical system could be activated. As Sholem Aleichem matured he too grasped this truth and internalized it.

As was stated at the outset, not all writers who focused on shtetl life adhered to this "truth," or rather there were writers—some of them of great talent—who questioned its truthfulness. While by the turn of the twentieth century the metaphorical shtetl of Abramovitsh and Sholem Aleichem had crystallized into a normative literary tradition, it had also aroused suspicions and even objections in some younger writers. Was the metaphor anything more than a grandiose sham? Was it not used merely for obscuring the flat existence of shtetl people, their boring provincial lives, underneath glittering self-serving fancies? Was it not meant to endow shtetl society with a national unity that did not exist in order to emphasize its common Jewish legacy and thus avert the reader's attention from the struggle, both economic and cultural, which went on inside the shtetl between rich and poor? Was the image based on the metaphor in touch with a dynamic reality that was quickly changing the rhythm and tonality of shtetl life? These questions became increasingly relevant as the metaphoric shtetl waxed hyperbolic in works such as Sholem Asch's 1904 novella *Dos shtetl*, where shtetl life was not only idealized but also excessively metaphorized. Itshe Meyer Vaysenberg's *A Shtetl*, published two years after Asch's poetic novella, answered all of the aforementioned questions in the affirmative. Whether or not originally written as a response to Asch, it brilliantly deflated his hyperbolic treatment of the shtetl. While thematically it recoiled from the image of the shtetl as a symbol of a unified *knesset yisrael* and developed instead an image of a society at war with itself, torn by internal conflicts which outweighed by far any common denominator, artistically it recoiled from metaphor and hyperbole, dedicating itself completely to the poetics of metonymy. Vaysenberg intentionally described events and actions that were "by definition" metaphorical, such as the Yom Kippur ritual, as if they consisted of aggregates of objects, gestures, close-ups and fragmentary pictures which had no cultural meaning and no supraliteral overtones.[45] He did this consistently and with full artistic awareness. He thus produced an "anti-classic" which was nevertheless a masterpiece. Many followed in his footsteps, some with considerable artistic success, for instance Oyzer

Varshavski in his novel *Shmuglares* ("Smugglers") a naturalistic description of the corruption and criminalization of the shtetl as a center of black market activity during World War One. None, however, not even Vaysenberg himself in his late work, proved as skillful in producing a coherent shtetl image through sheer metonymic presentation as Vaysenberg in his early publication.

A few years after this publication, another young writer of great talent, Dovid Bergelson, created in his early novella *Arum vokzal* ("Around the Depot") and in his first novel *Nokh alemen* ("When All is Said and Done") shtetlekh whose existence was devoid of any cultural and spiritual depth. They were *fargrebt* (coarsened) little places, where people submerged themselves in monotonous daily routine and in provincial social niceties. The novella and the novel made a point of presenting shtetl life as devoid of any spiritual significance. The protagonists not only refused to play by the rules of shtetl society, but also refused to attribute any cultural meaning to those rules. Mirl Hurwits, the heroine of *Nokh alemen*, is a young woman who refuses to accept marriage, pregnancy, sexual fidelity or any other conventional expectation of shtetl society. She also instinctively recoils from the notion that life around her could reverberate historically or metaphysically. When, for instance, the Hebrew writer Herts points out the "Jewish" beauty of a Friday sunset and suggests that Mirl "see" the spirituality and soulful harmony of a metamorphosed shtetl as it lit its Sabbath candles, Mirl categorically rejects his suggestion, which she suspects has not been made in good faith. She says that she sees nothing and does not know what Herts means.[46] The scene is a parody on Y. L. Peretz's *Tsvishn tsvey berg* ("Between Two Mountains"), in which the forbidding and ascetic Brisker *rov* is asked by Reb Noakhke, his ex-student of Talmud who had gone over to the Hasidic camp, to "see" the mystic beauty and vitality of the Hasidic community celebrating *Simhat Torah* (Rejoicing of the Law). The *rov* refuses and the beauteous scene, evoked by Reb Noakhke, is reduced to its drab external aspect: a group of ordinary Hasidim in torn caftans. However, where Peretz validates the mystical vision of Reb Noakhke, Bergelson identifies with Mirl's refusal to "see" and attributes to it a positive moral value as a refusal to be cheated or brainwashed.

Bergelson's late work, written from a Marxist point of view, elaborates this refusal into a formidable attack on the metaphorical-metaphysical image of the shtetl. Thus, the writer launches his extensive autobiographical *Bildungsroman*, *Bam dnyeper* ("Near the Dnieper") with a negative allusion to the biblical "antecedents" of the shtetl:

> *Odom, Sheys, Enoysh . . .* "
>
> That is how some of them would have preferred their story to have begun, as a story about the patriarchs.
>
> But . . .
>
> for the sake of brevity the story begins as follows: About thirty years before the revolution: towns on the eastern bank of the river Dnieper, far away from the Jordan and the patriarchs; far enough even from the Dnieper, deep in the heart of the black-clodded, green-leaved Ukraine.[47]

One immediately notices that the author wants to bring about a radical change in shtetl literature, make it shift course drastically in terms of both time and space. Temporally, the future, the revolution, is to replace the dead biblical past. Spatially, the fecund Ukrainian plain, no longer regarded as demonically "non-Jewish," is to replace the memories of the Jordan and of the Holy Land. Thus, Bergelson's shtetl would not be a *yidishe melukhe*, a Jerusalem-in-exile. Rather, it would be one of the many places, big and small, throughout the tsarist empire, in which the seeds of a new, humanistic, antibiblical revelation are sown. Bergelson wanted to reintegrate the shtetl into the new canon, and in order to do that he needed first to destroy the mental and literary fixtures that bound it to the old one. Peretz Markish, as has already been noted, wrote in *Dor oys, dor ayn* that shtetl Jews traced their Davidic descent in the cemetery, but, like Bergelson, he pointed to what he thought was a self-aggrandizing lie. The truth of the shtetl was to be found not in the pseudobiblical cemetery but rather in the nearby tanneries with their far from pleasing emissions and brackish yellow puddles. The cemetery represents metaphor and tradition and it is rejected, as Kasrilevke's cemetery has to be undermined; the tanneries are a metonymy of contemporaneity and they are validated as blunt representations of the real.

Thus, the *anti-klasiker* lived by metonymy, based their art on metonymic poetics and deliberately deflated the metaphorical shtetl image. Their countervision, particularly as shaped by great artists such as Vaysenberg and Bergelson, deserves attention in its own right. In the Soviet Union it achieved the status of an official "truth." However, within a comprehensive historical perspective it forms a mere foil, a contrasting backdrop against which the contours of the richer and more complex vision of the *klasiker* stands out. For the *klasiker* —Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, Peretz, Agnon—never rejected the metonymic truth and never averted their eyes from the miserable and often ugly picture it presented. Nobody was more bitterly critical of shtetl mores than Abramovitsh; nobody understood better the inherent weakness of shtetl people than Sholem Aleichem; nobody infused the shtetl idyll with irony more subtle but at the same time

more corrosive than Agnon. And yet all of these masters knew that the shtetl was more than what met the eye—that it could not be summed up by the mere accumulation of metonymic physical, social and behavioral "truths." The shtetl had based its existence not only on the Jewish religion and halakhah but also on Jewish myths and metaphors. It had developed its own Jewish self-image which had conditioned its perception of time and space. The *klasiker* did not share the shtetl's own image of itself and were not bound by its perceptions. They were modern artists working for a modern audience. The traditional shtetl did not speak through their art; nor did they speak through that art to it. They believed, however, that a genuine artistic encounter, or even a genuine ideological confrontation, with a civilization could not discount its metaphysics and its mythical self-projection. A true artistic presentation of a civilization, they thought, must internalize the self-image of the civilization and integrate it within a wider, critical view, just as a true psychological understanding of an individial cannot be achieved without integrating that individual's subjective sense of self in a wider, critical, objective framework.

By pointing to the fact that the Ukrainian shtetl lay closer to the Dnieper than to the river Jordan, Bergelson had revealed nothing that the *klasiker* themselves did not know; but, unlike Bergelson, the *klasiker* also took into account the fact that the children of the shtetl were raised in such a way that whenever they saw a river or crossed a body of water, they would remember the river Jordan or the Red Sea as it was being crossed by the Israelites. They did not mean to describe these children as if they actually lived near the Jordan or the Red Sea, but they certainly meant to incorporate into their portrayal the fantasy of living there and its psychological and metaphysical ramifications. The writers' sense of Jewish history was in every possible way different from traditional Jewish historical self-awareness and the difference was fully conveyed in their works. The sacred historical narrative upon which this traditional self-awareness was predicated, with its main chapters of covenant, exile and messianic redemption, was to these writers a tragic illusion or at best a concept that needed to be agonizingly questioned. However, they internalized this narrative in their shtetl stories and dramas as one internalizes (at least to some extent) the soul of the protagonist of a story one is about to write.

Thus, they created an image that combined the observed metonymy with the intuited metaphor. They faced the shtetl of their own childhood as exponents of a Jewish modernity facing its premodern ancestor. They tried not only to observe the premodern condition but also to envision what could not be observed. They knew that the real shtetl was situated somewhere between the modern awakening and the traditional dream

that had preceded it, and they decided that their vision of it would swing as a pendulum between the two. At their best, they created not a historical or an anthropological shtetl but rather a double-tiered visionary one, a metaphor as rich as any in the annals of literary toponymy. Kasrilevke is such a bright jewel in our literary crown precisely because it is not, and never was, identical with Voronke.

Notes

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1 Volf Rabinovitz, *Mayn bruder Sholem Aleichem—zikhroynes* (Kiev, 1939), 15.

2 *Ale verk fun Sholem Aleichem* (Folksfond ed.), vol. 15: *Funem yarid,* pt. I (New York, 1923), 19.

3 *Kol sipurei Mikha Yosef Bin-Gorion (Berditshevski)* (Tel Aviv, 1951), 8.

4 Dovid Bergelson, *Bam dnyeper,* vol. 1 (Moscow, 1932), 173.

5 See "Mendele Mokher Sefarim,"in *Kol kitvei David Frishman,* vol. 6 (Warsaw-New York, 1931), 74.

6 These as well as other glaring "lacunae" in Abramovitsh's "coverage" of shtetl life were listed by "revisionist" detractors during the 1940s and 1950s, particularly by Avraham Kariv in his essays "Olam ve-tilo" and "Kelalot u-feratot" in his *Atarah le-yoshnah* (Tel Aviv, 1956) 30–115.

7 Moshe Decter, The "Old Country" Way of Life—the Rediscovery of the Shtetl," *Commentary* 13 (January-June 1952): 604.

8 See, for instance, "Di shtot fun di kleyne mentshelekh," in *Ale verk fun Sholem Aleichem,* vol. 3: *Kleyne mentshelekh mit kleyne hasoges* (New York, 1918), 9–10.

9 *Ale verk fun Sholem Aleichem,* vol. 4: *Alt-nay kasrilevke* (New York, 1918), 18–21.

10 Sholem Asch, *Geklibene verk,* vol. 1: *Dos shtetl* (New York, 1947), 70–75.

11 Hayyim Nahman Bialik, "Mashehu al 'Megilat ha-esh'," in *Devarim she-be-al-pe* (Tel Aviv, 1935), vol. 2, 30.

12 In "Ha-nisrafim," in *Kol kitvei Mendele Mokher Sefarim* (Tel Aviv, 1947) 444; Mendele Moykher Sforim, *Geklibene verk,* vol. 5: *Tsurik aheym un andere dertseylungen* (New York, 1949), 245.

13 *Ale verk fun Sholem Aleichem,* vol. 4, 14.

14 Ibid., 29.

15 *Kol kitvei Mendele,* 444; Mendele Moykher Sforim, *Geklibene verk,* vol. 5, 246.

16 Ibid.

17 *Kol kitvei Mendele,* 161; Mendele Moykher Sforim, *Geklibene verk,* vol 4: *Dos vintshfingerl* (New York, 1946), 56.

18 *Ale verk fun Sholem Aleichem,* vol. 13: *Motl, peyse dem khazns,* pt. 1 (New York, 1920), 163.

19 See "Bi-yimei ha-raash," in *Kol kitvei Mendele,* 410; Mendele Moykher Sforim, *Geklibene verk,* vol. 5, 199.

20 *Ale verk fun Sholem Aleichem,* vol. 4, 11.

21 Yisroel Aksenfeld, *Dos shterntikl,* ed. M. Viner (Moscow, 1938), 51. See also Joachim Neugroschel, ed. and trans., *The Shtetl* (New York, 1989), 50.

22 *Kol kitvei Mendele,* 58; Mendele Moykher Sforim, *Geklibene verk,* vol. 2: *Di klytshe, masoes Binyomin hashlishi* (New York, 1964), 165; Neugroschel, 181

23 *Kol kitvei Mendele,* 59; Mendele Moykher Sforim, *Geklibene verk,* vol. 2, 167–68.

24 *Kol kitvei Mendele,* 248; Mendele Moykher Sforim, *Geklibene verk,* vol. 4, 326.

25 See Abramovitsh's "Di vintshfingerl," in *Di yidishe folksbibliotek,* ed. Sholem Aleichem, vol. 1 (1888), 2.

26 *Kol kitvei Mendele,* 248; Mendele Moykher Sforim, *Geklibene verk,* vol. 4, 326.

27 *Kol kitvei Mendele,* 158; Mendele Moykher Sforim, *Geklibene verk,* vol. 4, 23.

28 See the sources cited in n. 27.

29 See "Der oytser," in *Ale verk fun Y. L. Perets,* vol. 5: *Folkstimlekhe geshikhtn* (New York, 1947), 198–201.

30 *Kol sipurav shel Sh. Y. Agnon,* vol. 1: *Hakhnasat kalah* (Jerusalem, 1952), 12. S. Y. Agnon, *The Bridal Canopy,* trans. I. M. Lask, (New York, 1967), 8.

31 *Kol kitvei Mendele,* 91; Mendele Moykher Sforim, *Geklibene verk,* vol. 3: *Fishke der krumer* (New York, 1947), 17–18.

32 *Kol kitvei Mendele,* 76–77; Mendele Moykher Sforim, *Geklibene verk,* vol. 2, 224; Neugroschel, 237–38.

33 This is particularly well articulated in L. Shapiro's "Di yidishe melukhe," in *Di yidishe melukhe un andere zakhn* (New York, 1919), 7–8, 13–16.

34 *Kol kitvei Mendele,* 58; Mendele Moykher Sforim, *Geklibene verk,* vol. 2, 165–66; Neugroschel, 237–38.

35 *Kol kitvei Mendele,* 82–83; Mendele Moykher Sforim, *Geklibene verk,* vol. 2, 241; Neugroschel, 254.

36 See the sources cited in n. 35.

37 Peretz Markish, *Dor oys, dor ayn,* vol. 1 (Kharkov, 1929), 8.

38 In Sholem Aleichem, "Di shtot fun di kleyne mentshelekh," 14.

39 *Kol sipurav shel Sh. Y. Agnon,* vol. 4:*Oreah nata lalun,* 440, 444.

40 *Ale verk fun Y. L. Perets,* vol. 2: *Dertseylungen, mayselekh, bilder,* pt. 1, 2.

41 *Kol sipurav shel Sh. Y. Agnon,* vol. 2: *Elu ve-elu,* 353.

42 S. Y Agnon, *Ir u-meloah,* (Jerusalem, 1973) 10–13.

43 *Kol kitvei Mendele,* 77; Mendele Moykher Sforim, *Geklibene verk,* vol. 2, 226.

44 See Abramovitsh's letter to Sholem Aleichem of 20 June 1888: "Briv fun Mendele Moykher Sforim," in *Shriftn,* ed. N. Shtif, vol. 1 (Kiev, 1928), 253.

45 Y. M. Vaysenberg, *Geklibene verk,* vol. 1 (Chicago, 1959), 343.

46 Dovid Bergelson, *Verk,* vol. 5: *Nokh alemen,* pts. 1–2 (Berlin, 1922), 210–11.

47 Bergelson, *Bam dnyeper,* vol. 1, 5.