

Rabbis, Rebbes and Other Humanists: The Search for a Usable Past in Modern Yiddish Literature

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"And your Torah, Noah?"

"Would you like to see it, Rabbi?"

"See the Torah?" The Brisker was astonished.

"Come, I will show you. I will show you the glory and the joy that radiate from it and touch all of Israel." —I.L. Peretz, 1900

These Zydkis, wooden figurines of traditional Polish Jews, come in all shapes and sizes. Where once they played a talismanic role for Polish Catholic peasants—as protectors of beehives, of home and hearth, or simply as Easter toys for the very young—they have now been turned into souvenirs. There are gaunt ones, stained a deep brown, from Lodz, and grotesque ones, in gaudy colors, from Nowy Sadz. In the Old Town of Warsaw, lovingly rebuilt from the ruins, sculptors hawk their wares—in English. Too young to have ever seen these Jews in the flesh, Polish woodcarvers seem to know what caps the men once wore, how they draped a *tallis* over head or shoulders, that they carried oversized books, and that the women always covered their hair. But as Polish folk artists try to keep pace with the demand for ever new types of Jews, the naive medium is being pushed beyond the pale of collective memory. To the standard Jewish *klezmer* band of fiddle, bass and drum, and to the Jew carrying a bag of gold (a piece of sympathetic magic, if there ever was one), there are now ritual slaughterers, tavern keepers, various and sundry craftsmen, and a dizzying array of effeminate-looking rabbi-types with curly side-locks. In one upscale store on Marszalkowska, I spied a marionette of a young hasid carrying a book with Hebrew lettering, which, upon closer inspection, read: *Farlag Shveln Lodz*. This would be roughly analogous to depicting a Virgin Mary cradling a copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. They don't make wooden rabbis the way they used to.

Whereas to the Polish folk mind, the only real Jew was (and still remains) a bearded Jew with his *tsitsis* showing, the status of these same rabbis and hasidic *rebbeim* among the purveyors of modern Jewish culture has been extremely problematical. This is because modern Jewish literature in Eastern Europe began where the

folk culture ended, and the rise of secular forms of Jewish self-expression coincided with the Kulturkampf between Hasidism and the Haskalah. Precisely because each camp claimed to speak in the name of Jewish tradition, the image of the rabbi and rebbe (a.k.a. zaddik, or *guter yid*) became the battleground for the hearts and minds of the impressionable masses. And what better way to stake one's claim to the future than to read that image all the way back to the past? Even a new translation of the Book of Proverbs into the Yiddish vernacular could be used by the reformers (wolves in sheep's clothing) to draw a firm line between the biblical zaddik, glossed as an *erlekher*, or a *koshere neshome*, and the usurpers of that title in the present.¹ Meanwhile, in the rival camp, hagiographic tales about the great *zaddikim* of old were used for propaganda and popular education from 1815 onwards.²

Because, moreover, each movement could spread its gospel in at least two languages at once—Hebrew and Yiddish—and because the audience for each language was differentiated as to gender and educational level, there soon developed a division of literary labor. The Hebrew biblical epic written by a noted *maskil* in syllabic verse and starring a tragic and neoclassical King Saul became a modest, anonymous and didactic Yiddish folk book in prose. The Hebrew was designed for a literary salon frequented only by men, while the Yiddish could be adapted for the one-day-a-year theatrical farce of the *Purimshpil*, performed before an audience of men, women and children. The Yiddish-reading audience had as yet no access to the noncovenantal past, to the past as a foreign country. Not until the 1860s did there emerge a highbrow literary culture in the Yiddish vernacular, its concern being the here-and-now, the ills of the feudal economy, the corruption of shtetl society, and the exploitation of the masses on the part of hasidic *rebeim*. Explorations of the Jewish past, meanwhile, remained the province of Yiddish popular writers.³

Foremost among them was Isaac Meir Dik (1814–1893). Beginning in 1855 with a tiny *mayse-bikhl*, or chapbook, titled *Der yoyred (The Impoverished Man)*, Dik made a conscious effort to supplant the zaddik and miracle worker with a normative, rationalist, nonhasidic rabbi as hero.⁴ Himself a descendant of Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Heller (1579–1654), Dik translated and supplemented his forebear's autobiography in *Stories of the Gaon, Author of "Tosafot Yom Tov"* (1864) and a year later tried to make a culture hero of Rabbi Abraham Danzig (1748–1820) in *Seyfer beys Avrom*. "He came to Vilna on account of business," wrote Dik in his gushing preface to the latter work,

and earned his living strictly from trade, though study always remained of paramount importance, . . . his pronunciation was pure German. He dressed entirely [in traditional] Jewish [garb], though very clean and proper. He lived well and expansively and in a highly dignified manner for he was a worldly man and it was a joy to speak to him. . . . As an able Leipzig merchant he always knew what merchandise to order for he was never idle even for a moment.⁵

The rabbinic ideal was a man who combined Torah with business acumen. Dik quotes from Danzig's ethical will in which he instructed his sons on what prayer to recite for success in business (ch. 16), how to lend money on interest (ch. 39) and how to leave a will of their own (ch. 42).

Though greatly idealized, Dik's fictional rabbis were portrayed in scrupulously

human terms. Theirs was a faith in God, a faith that had no truck with the Devil. Indeed, his rabbinic heroes were not above exploiting other people's superstitions in order that justice and morality might prevail. This is what happens in *Der siem hatoyre* (*The Ceremony of the Torah Completion*, 1868), Dik's superb historical romance set in seventeenth-century Poland.⁶ It is the story of Reb Yosl the Parvenu, who gains wealth and power by making use of the anarchy in Poland following the Cossack revolt but also seeks legitimation for his crimes by ordering a Torah scroll written in his name. The man who unmask him is the brilliant halakhist Rabbi David Halevi (1586–1667), author of the *Tur zahav*, and thus known as the *TaZ*, who is seen here as a henpecked husband and underpaid rabbi of the town of Olyk. More to the point, the *TaZ* is aided in his undercover work by no less a historical personage than Count Potocki, which proves that in the seventeenth century, at least, Polish rabbis could win the confidence, admiration and, ultimately, the undying friendship of enlightened gentiles.

In the Yiddish chapbook, the moderate *maskil* could have it all. He could invent a "true" story that extolled the life and salvific deeds of the great European rabbis. He could follow the normal practice of learned Jewish storytellers down through the ages, mixing fact and fiction for the sake of a good moral and rereading the past in the light of the present. By laying claim to the lineage of his illustrious forebear Yom Tov Lipmann Heller, Dik was less concerned with perpetuating the traditional Jewish view of history—may the accumulated merit of the ancestors redound to the later generations—than with portraying the Sages in an enlightened image. Dik assembled a portrait gallery of distinguished rabbis, from Heller and David Halevi to Reb Shmelke of Nikolsburg (1726–1778), all the way to Abraham Danzig of his own Vilna childhood, in order to unveil a proto-*maskilic* Hall of Fame.

Yet a storyteller who saw the drama of exile and redemption played out on the stage of secular history, by human actors alone, could not use memory for the sake of moral improvement in quite the same way as traditional hagiographers had before. And a storyteller whose audience had become more fragmented than ever—men versus women, pietists versus enlighteners, East versus West—could no longer assume that one kind of story would appeal to all. And a storyteller for whom change was both inevitable and desirable, who felt that the old way of life was about to disappear forever (would that it had happened a little sooner!) had to engage in a form of triage in order to save what he deemed worthy of saving.

So he divided the past, once timeless and covenantal, into a normative and farcical realm, and drew the sharpest possible line between "earlier times" and "more enlightened ages."⁷ He used the history of past events and personalities to underscore the progress Jews had already made since the dawn of emancipation. The privations suffered by Rabbi Heller could only have occurred then; nowadays, under the benign rule of Alexander II, Russian Jews enjoyed equal rights, engaged freely in trade and their educated children could achieve high rank in the empire.⁸ Russian Jews, in particular, could count their blessings now that the Polish republic had been replaced by the tsarist empire. "Khelem a shtot un Poyln a medine," Dik was found of saying—that is, Poland is as much a state as the foolstown of Chelm is a city.⁹ The one Polish nobleman worthy of praise in that whole rotten bunch was the aforementioned Count Potocki, not only because of his friendship with Rabbi

David Halevi, but also because one of the Potockis, Count Valentine, had converted to Judaism and died as a martyr. Dik rewrote the legend of the Ger Tsedek (the righteous convert), as he was called, to kindle the one bright light in Poland's Counter-Reformation.¹⁰ However selective, Dik (and his army of imitators) brought about a veritable explosion in the gallery of heroes, heroines and villains that henceforth peopled the octavo-sized pages of Yiddish popular fiction—both real and legendary figures drawn from medieval Ashkenaz, from the Polish-Russian Wild East, and from the most recent past. Through their deeds and misdeeds, the rabbis and merchants of Yiddish popular romance plotted the progress of Jews and all humanity from feudalism to enlightened despotism; that is to say, the course of redemption in and through history.

This linear and ameliorative view of the Jewish past was not at all what a thirty-six-year-old former lawyer named Yitskhok Leybush Peretz had in mind when, in a series of Hebrew letters, he lectured Solomon Rabinovitch (alias Sholem Aleichem) on the need to educate Jewish women in the history of their people. Peretz was equally keen to provide the educated male readers with highbrow and especially scientific material in Yiddish, lest the latter defect to reading only Polish, Russian or German.¹¹ From that day in June 1888 until his death in April 1915, writing under various and comical pen-names in the pages of his own literary almanacs, Peretz tried to liberate Yiddish both from the lifeless repertory of the study house and *shetibl* and from the narrow concerns of the *maskilic* salon. The portrait gallery that Peretz brought to life would necessarily reflect the critical transition in modern Jewish culture from the low ground of satire and the pantheon of biblical and bourgeois heroes to a serious reengagement with the *Volk* and its spiritual leaders.

Yet satire was the natural province of a writer infected with the virus of Heine's "brilliant mockery," especially someone raised in the walled city of Zamosc, with its local rhymsters, innovative playwrights, and visiting Yiddish entertainers, the famed Singers of Brody.¹² Insofar as Yiddish was still associated in Peretz's mind with Jews and jesting, the more "Jewish" the subject, the more it became for him an object of ridicule. Where there was no music to be found; no informal, emotional outlet for one's individual strivings; where the tradition sold ready-made solace in the world to come or in a legendary past, Peretz was roused to heights of righteous—and revolutionary—anger. Until he discovered a positive use for this material, Peretz distilled his parodic venom into Yiddish miracle tales.

Verging on blasphemy, he turned the first-century miracle-worker Hanina ben Dosa—a beloved figure of talmudic legend—into a heartless exploiter of his wife. Hanina studied while she and their children starved.¹³ More subtly, Peretz retold the Golem of Prague legend to expose how the heirs of the great Maharal had reduced the legacy of Jewish heroism to mere sophistry:

To this very day the golem lies concealed in the uppermost part of the synagogue of Prague, covered with cobwebs that have been spun from wall to wall to encase the whole arcade so that it should be hidden from all human eyes, especially from pregnant wives in the women's section. No one is permitted to touch the cobwebs, for anyone who does so dies. Even the oldest congregants no longer remember the golem. How-

ever, Zvi the Sage, the grandson of the Maharal, still deliberates whether it is proper to include such a golem in a minyan or in a company for the saying of grace.¹⁴

Dead to Jewish collective memory, the golem lived on to delight the brains of the Jewish intelligentsia. Since cobwebs were the golem's only physical remains, they too were enshrouded in sanctity.

If there was no going back to the cobwebs and casuistry of a moribund civilization, then a meaningful past, one that would instill a feeling of nationhood and heroic purpose, would have to be sought elsewhere. Guided by new, post-Enlightenment ideologies, Peretz began his search with the Bible, then cast about for something much closer to home. Under the spell of Romanticism, he conjured up the biblical Prophets as the font of poetic vision; indeed, as the wellspring of all modern literary movements.¹⁵ For Peretz the positivist, the Bible was also the record of the nation's history. For Peretz the ideologue of cultural renewal, the Bible was the Jewish perspective on the world.¹⁶ His first mandate to the Yiddishist movement in 1908 was to retranslate the Bible into a modern idiom.¹⁷

But unlike his contemporaries Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Ravnitzky, Peretz stopped short at the Hebrew Bible, and never warmed to the idea of rescuing postbiblical legends for modern times. Excessive Talmud study, according to Peretz, like excessive doses of modernist angst, produced nothing but madness, "zig-zags and dilemmas and hairsplittings."¹⁸ Peretz the neoromantic wanted to wipe the slate clean. He wanted a new Oral Torah without its old content. He wanted a Jewish humanism and piety without Jewish law. He wanted folk narrators who only raided the Talmud for a legendary motif, a turn of phrase.

Instead of studying Talmud, a male prerogative in any event, Peretz reimagined his Jews, male and especially female, singing Yiddish folk songs about love and death. Peretz recalled with fondness the songs he himself had collected during a four-year period among Jewish artisans and seamstresses in Warsaw. These anonymous lyrics were a mirror of the people's life!¹⁹ They expressed the ethos and moral sensibility of the folk far better than any rabbinic dictum. The folk-song recitals at his home with that indefatigable young fieldworker Judah Leib Cahan (b. 1881) had the intensity of a revivalist meeting.²⁰ Peretz and the young intellectuals (some, aspiring folklorists; others, aspiring writers) spent their Saturday afternoons sharing a mystical experience of self-discovery.²¹

If rabbinic lore seemed stale, folklore offered a new and seemingly inexhaustible source of poetic inspiration. If rabbinic lore seemed reactionary and remote, folklore was a secular alternative of the people, for the people. If once Peretz had thought that Yiddish, and Jews in general, were "without feeling for nature, for simplicity, for love, beauty and poetry," these Yiddish folk songs proved otherwise.²² And if the Poles, bereft of a political base and state support, could use folklore to affirm their national identity, then so could Jewish intellectuals. While his Polish compatriots, however, predicated the study of *Jewish* folklore on the rapid assimilation, if not actual conversion, of the Jews, Peretz was among the first of the positivists to turn that study into a tool of Jewish national revival.²³

The same ideal—self-knowledge as the basis of a new secular identity—that inspired Peretz's group to collect Yiddish folklore, inspired others to rehabilitate

Hasidism as a Jewish folk phenomenon. Simon Dubnow, the dean of East European Jewish historians, began his explorations of the hasidic movement in the pages of the Russian Jewish periodical *Voskhod* (1888–1893). There, or in the Polish translations of the Warsaw *Izraelita*, Peretz had surely seen the Ba'al Shem Tov described as a radical reformer and the tales *In Praise of the Besht* defended as latter-day Gospels. Perhaps Peretz also knew the work that had inspired Dubnow to begin with: Ernest Renan's *History of Christianity*. Like Renan, Dubnow separated the nature-loving spiritualist from the earthbound institutions that he spawned; the teacher from his disciples; the man from the miracles.²⁴ If the Besht could be Jesus, he could be anything at all.

Equally bold was Micah Joseph Berdichevsky's manifesto "The Soul of Hasidim" (1899), which identified the "new hasidic man" (i.e., the first generation of hasidim) with the Nietzschean transvaluation of values. "Standing upright, with the spirit of life in him, a spirit that penetrates the world open before him in all its breadth and depth, . . . he will be like a king among troops, like a man with the wreath of God on his head among those who sit in darkness."²⁵ Virile antinomian, pantheist, king among troops, the Besht and his early followers were revolutionaries for all seasons. The fact that Peretz met a hasidic rebbe only once in his life, in the offices of the Warsaw Jewish community council, gave him freer rein than Dubnow, who had to mediate historical documents, and Berdichevsky, who had to reconcile his personal experience.²⁶ Peretz's hasidim were free to dance and sing to their hearts' content.

Peretz, much like his contemporaries, salvaged from the ruins only those aspects of Jewish culture that could stand for secular humanistic values: the Bible as prophecy and history; folk song as lyric poetry; sacred legend as collective saga; Yiddish as the surrogate for nationhood; Hasidism as the route to transcendence. And since Peretz did not believe in the rebbe's miracles himself, it behooved him to find a credible narrator who did.

Reb Shmaye of Biala, the aged narrator of "Between Two Mountains," is a storyteller in Peretz's own image: he combines the language of learning with unusual descriptive powers.²⁷ Though himself a man of faith, he can also envision other people's doubts. Reb Shmaye understands why Talmud study without a social base and without *agadic* flights of fancy can drive a young man like Noah (his future rebbe) out of the yeshivah of Brisk (Brest-Litovsk, a bastion of Lithuanian Jewry). Reb Shmaye's own spiritual yearnings are pure enough that he does not expect the young-man-turned-Bialer-rebbe to spend his time giving out amulets and performing miracles. Yet Reb Shmaye is true believer enough to explain the labor pains of the Brisker *rov's* daughter as divine punishment. "It was known that because the Brisker *rov* had once ordered a hasid to be shaved—that is, to have his beard and sidecurls shorn by gentiles—the *rov's* good name had been tarnished in the eyes of the saintly men of his generation." How to turn the shtetl talmudist into a romantic hero? By charting his journey from the "cold" and empty precincts of the Lithuanian yeshivah to the warm embrace of the Polish-hasidic court. How to make the miraculous come alive in a skeptical age? By fashioning a narrator who perceives the hand of heaven at work the moment he sets out to fetch the Brisker *rov* and bring him to Biala.

Will the daughter merit a miracle for the sake of her learned father or will the rabbi's sin be visited upon his child? Will the "two mountains" be reconciled? Meanwhile, "the wind increased, piercing the cloud as if it were tearing apart a sheet of paper. The wind began to chase one piece of cloud into and over another, as if herding ice floes on a river." Folk narrators, Peretz apparently believed, routinely yoked the concrete to the abstract.²⁸ With so versatile a storyteller as Reb Shmaye, Peretz can eat his cake and have it, too.

The "cake" is the story's climactic vision, an apotheosis of Romanticism called by another name.

"And your Torah, Noah?"

"Would you like to see it, Rabbi?"

"See the Torah?" The Brisker was astonished.

"Come, I will show you. I will show you the glory and the joy that radiate from it and touch all of Israel."

Accompanied by Reb Shmaye, the two spiritual giants look down from the rebbe's balcony at hasidim dancing in honor of Simhat Torah, but what they see is nature in perfect harmony with man, religion in harmony with life, and disparate individuals united in song. "Everything sang—the sky, the constellations above, and the earth below. The soul of the world sang. Everything sang!" Yet never was a miracle so filtered through the eyes of its beholders. The Brisker *rov* has only to remind his former pupil that it is time for afternoon prayers and the spell is broken:

Silence fell. The curtain closed again before my eyes. Above me, an ordinary sky, and below, an ordinary pasture; ordinary Hasidim in torn caftans murmuring old tattered fragments of song. The flames were extinguished. I looked at the rebbe. His face too was somber.

In Peretz's own day, the Brisker *rov*'s disenchantment was shared by very few readers. Alone among contemporary critics, Hirsh Dovid Nomberg maintained that the *rov*, of plain speech and direct action, was far more memorable than the rebbe, who didn't even perform the deeds expected of a zaddik and was merely a mouth-piece for universal values.²⁹ Almost every other reader aspired to the rebbe's vision of things. Since they had no intention of becoming hasidim themselves, or for that matter of returning to the study of Talmud, they were content to read a story about Simhat Torah that celebrated the universal appeal of Judaism: music, joy, nature and the unity of all men.

Peretz, for his part, made his revisionism abundantly clear by titling his two major collections *Khsidish (In the Hasidic Mode)* and *Folkstimlekhe geshikhtn*, a highfalutin title meaning *Stories in the Folk Vein*. Peretz was well aware how little of the "real thing" remained in his stylized Yiddish folk and hasidic narratives. Yet for all that he subverted the Yiddish romance and sacred tale in the name of radical individualism, he did remain true to the one hasidic master whom he greatly admired: the first "modern" Yiddish storyteller, Rabbi Nahman ben Simha of Bratslav (1772–1810). Like Reb Nahman, Peretz reused old plots and motifs to argue for the redemption of humankind *from* history: Nahman—through a new kabbalistic world order with himself at its helm; Peretz—through a new humanism with every man, woman and child acting in accord with his inner light and to the sound of her inner

melody. Early Hasidism, moreover, as opposed to its later, dynastic rule, served Peretz as the breeding ground for a true spiritual leader who could hasten the millennium by severing the bonds of historical determinism. Enter: Reb Shloyme, the most famous zaddik in the annals of Yiddish literature, the first and most vital link in *Di goldene keyt* (*The Golden Chain*) of Jewish messianic struggle.³⁰

From Act I of Peretz's verse drama to all subsequent Yiddish literary representations of the great hasidic masters, we come in on the rebbe in his moment of crisis. Since the more overtly "religious" the setting of a modern Yiddish play, novel or poem, the more secular its concerns, and since the messianic theme in particular, as Chone Shmeruk has cogently argued, arose not from an ongoing debate with past traditions but precisely from the crisis of Jewish modernity, it follows that the figure who stood for that crisis could not be some fabulously successful miracle worker busily negotiating This World and the Next, but rather the zaddik at odds with his surroundings, captured in a state of personal, religious and existential turmoil.³¹ Reb Nahman might have served this purpose, had his cryptic *Tales* and fierce messianic struggle been better understood.³² Another early master, Reb Levi Yitskhok of Berdichev (1740–1810), had long since been transformed—on the basis of a few Yiddish-Hebrew songs ascribed to his pen—into the ombudsman of his unruly flock. Expunged from folk memory and literary representations alike were the actual, esoteric (Hebrew) writings of this presumed democrat for all seasons.³³ Conversely, the highly esoteric teachings of the Ba'al haTanya, Shneur Zalman of Liady (1745–1812), did not spread much beyond Lubavitch and its environs until well into the twentieth century, despite the dramatic tale of the rebbe's imprisonment in St. Petersburg, as retold in M.L. Frumkin's *Shivhei harav*.³⁴ For high drama and internecine warfare, there was always the flamboyant Yisroel Rizhiner (1797–1850), and his loyal opposition, the Sandzer Rebbe, Reb Khayiml Halberstam (1793–1876). But these revered dynastic rulers were of no use to a generation of Jewish neoromantics trying to read their own rebellion and angst back into the people's past. That left only one possible candidate, the reclusive Menakhem-Mendl of Kotsk (1787–1859), the model for Peretz's Reb Shloyme, and the rebbe of choice for Peretz's disciples.

Reb Shloyme desires nothing less than the abrogation of Time. Calling for a race of spiritual giants, much as the Kotsker cried out for "ten men of truth," Reb Shloyme's ecstatic vision of *shabes-yontefdike yidn* who would force God's hand by ushering in the messianic Sabbath is doomed from the start. Each of his successors will likewise attempt a reversal of the natural order and will face defeat within his own hasidic court, but for sheer poetic and psychological force, none will match Reb Shloyme's defiance of history itself. Shloyme's offspring, with weaker lines to speak and less transcendental ambitions, are that much worse off, coming as they do after the last great hurrah of Jewish self-liberation.³⁵

And so Peretz's reengagement with Hasidism led in two complementary directions: toward the populism of the Bialer rebbe, who drew his strength from the dancing, singing *Volk*; and toward the giants in each generation who went for broke, trying to force a cosmic solution at the expense of the folk and its petty concerns. ("Oylem, der oylem" is how the unruly masses were characterized in *Di goldene*

keyt.) Both scenarios ended essentially the same way, however: either with a rude return to mundane reality or with a tragic sense of loss.

That sense of loss was quickened by the physical destruction of the hasidic heartland in the First World War. A plot of generational decline no longer sufficed for S. Ansky (1863–1920), eyewitness and chronicler of that period of monstrous upheaval. Conceived before the war and completed after the Bolshevik seizure of power, Ansky's *Between Two Worlds, or The Dybbuk* was also an outgrowth of contemporary history, when Ansky observed the Jewish spirit struggling to maintain itself against forces of overpowering destruction. Thus, in each of the play's four acts, there was one figure who tried to reconcile This World with the Next: Khonon, the young kabbalist; Leah, his predestined bride; Reb Azrielke, the zaddik of Miropolye; and the town rabbi, Reb Shimshon. Cast in a Peretzian mold, however, Reb Azrielke was frail and plagued by self-doubt, while Reb Shimshon, the halakhic complement to Reb Azrielke's charisma, was a character so devoid of character that most actual productions of *The Dybbuk*, whether on stage or screen, telescoped into one the rebbe and the *rov*. While young and old alike, in Ansky's scheme of things, struggled with temporal forces, only the young rebels, alone and in the face of all odds, could challenge the moral and metaphysical order by sacrificing their own earthly pleasures and desires.³⁶

In the sixty-five years that separated the publication of Dik's inaugural tale from the premiere of Ansky's *The Dybbuk* (the all-time greatest hit of the Jewish, not to speak of Yiddish, theater), the complex web of East European Jewish spiritual life had been reduced to a cultural artifact—the rabbis reimagined as strict rationalists facing off against the wonder-working mystics. This radical flattening of the Jewish cultural landscape, moreover, occurred over an ever-widening literary field. Whereas hasidic wonder tales and *maskilic* romances were once deemed fit only for women, servant girls and boors, the neohasidic tales and “dramatic legends” by Peretz and Ansky were written with a highbrow audience in mind. Other Yiddish playwrights, meanwhile, were beginning to raid the East European Jewish past for its historical plots. Whereas the father of the modern Yiddish theater, Abraham Goldfaden (1840–1908), divided his repertory clean down the middle between satires set in the here-and-now and historical melodramas set in the time of Bar Kokhba and the biblical Shulamis (much as Abraham Mapu and I.M. Dik had done before him), Goldfaden's heirs were soon to (re)discover the heroic saga of the Ger Tsedek in their own backyard, the tragedy of Jacob Frank, the Polish Jew who claimed to be the Messiah, and most suggestive of all, the extra-marital relationship of King Casimir the Great with his Jewish lover, Esterke.³⁷

The issues raised by this reappropriation of converts, lovers and messianic pretenders from the Polish Jewish past had nothing to do with faith or the legitimacy of traditional leadership. The subject of debate in the literary salons of Jewish Eastern Europe from the nineteenth century's end until the outbreak of the First World War was over the Jewish claim to nationhood. To qualify as a nation, the Jewish intellectuals understood, the Jews would need not only a bona fide folklore and artfully crafted fakelore, but also a fullblown, secular history. And so, with their wives dutifully serving them tea, the Odessa Circle of Dubnow, Ben-Ami and Ahad

Ha'am convened in the salon of Sholem-Yankev Abramovitsh (1836–1917) to prevail upon the crotchety old gentleman to finally write his memoirs. "Our people have no memory of past experience," says the anonymous guest who espouses Dubnow's position,

and even events in our own times disappear into oblivion like a dream. Many things have happened in our lifetime that have not been recorded in any book only because of the foolish belief held by many people that nobody but the historians of the next generation can properly ascertain the true facts and form a correct and balanced picture. By that time, many of the events of our age will have been forgotten.³⁸

But "Reb Shloyme" (i.e., Abramovitsh) can give as good as he gets. In his lengthy and acerbic rebuttal, he shows the absurdity of holding up Jewish corporate existence in Russia-Poland to Western criteria:

None of us ever did anything to set the world on fire. Dukes, governors, generals, and soldiers we were not; we had no romantic attachments with lovely princesses; we didn't fight duels, nor did we even serve as witnesses, watching other men spill their blood; we didn't dance the quadrille at balls; we didn't hunt wild animals in the fields and forests; we didn't make voyages of discovery to the ends of the earth; we carried on with no actresses or prima donas; we didn't celebrate in a lavish way. In short, we were completely lacking in all those colorful details that grace a story and whet the reader's appetite.³⁹

Devoid of any political history, bereft of individual acts of heroism or perfidy, all the Jews can offer is an unbroken and utterly banal record of collective suffering:

In place of these we had the *cheder*, the *cheder*-teacher and the *cheder*-teacher's assistant; marriage brokers, grooms, and brides; housewives and children; abandoned women, widows with orphans and widows without orphans; people ruined by fire and bankruptcy, and paupers of every description; beggars who make the rounds on the eve of Sabbath and holidays, new-moons, Mondays and Thursdays and any day at all; idlers and officers of the community; poverty, penury, and indigence, and queer and degrading ways of making a living. This was our life, if you can call it a life—ugly, devoid of pleasure and satisfaction, with not a single ray of light to pierce the continual darkness.⁴⁰

Reb Shloyme finally relents, however, goaded into reconstructing his childhood in the shtetl of yore not so much by the arguments of his peers as by a jolt of painful memories unique to his own experience. In the novel that follows, the portrait of an artist as a young man, historical forces are depicted as operating behind the scenes, wreaking havoc with the medieval economy, the education of the young, and finally casting the shtetl's native sons far and wide.

For all its ethnographic and historical sweep, there are no rabbis or even Talmud scholars in Abramovitsh's reimagined Lithuanian shtetl. Besides mother and father, both portrayed in soft hues, those who loom largest in Shloyme's spiritual landscape are shtetl artisans who occupy the margins of respectable society. Father, who collects the tax for kosher meat, is the only man in town to interact with the Polish count. When Father dies, the shtetl's security dies with him. In the fictional shtetl of Sholem Aleichem (1859–1916), Abramovitsh's self-professed grandson, there is similarly no historical role for rabbis to play. All of Sholem Aleichem's main actors

are salt of the earth: Tevye the dairyman, Menakhem-Mendl the schlemiel, Shimen-Elye Shma-Koleynu, Shimele Soroker, Motl the orphaned son of Peyse the cantor. At best, Reb Yuzifl the rabbi of Kasrilevke can offer up psalms in times of distress ("The Great Panic of the Little People," 1904), or the rabbi of Krushnik may himself be offered up upon the gallows as a silent prayer ("Tales of 1001 Nights," 1914).⁴¹ Keenly aware of their responsibility during this critical period of nation-building in Europe, the leading East European Jewish intellectuals responded with a secular, populist and egalitarian agenda. In the imagined Jewish community of the future, there was little nostalgia for "men of the cloth."⁴²

Three were the schools of historical thought that developed over the course of the nineteenth century: one that owed its existence to Reb Nahman (via Peretz and Nietzsche) and celebrated the visionary leaders who transcended historical exigency; a second, going back to Isaac Meir Dik and the bevy of popular fiction writers and playwrights, which created a Jewish heroes' gallery akin to the "dukes, governors, generals or soldiers," or who otherwise performed deeds of true historical import and engaged in "romantic attachments." The third school, represented by Abramovitch and Sholem Aleichem, asserted that only social history was worth recording, not the nonsense of legends, fairy tales and sentimental romances. The historical record of how the Jewish family and community collapsed or were severely challenged in the face of modernity was the stuff of the realistic "Jewish novel," which they had introduced. If the Jews of Eastern Europe were ever to boast of a history worthy of the name, then its story would have to be told in a novelistic form that portrayed the individual as shaped by social, sexual and intellectual forces. Whether among those competing forces there was any role for rabbis or rebbes to play was very much an open question.

The answer given by Joseph Opatoshu (1886–1954), author of the first bona fide historical novel in Yiddish, would seem to have been a resounding: yes. By choosing young Mordecai to be the intellectual hero of *In poylishe velder* (*In Polish Woods*, 1921), Opatoshu implied that if the young did not rescue the past, it would be lost forever.⁴³ By choosing as his initial setting a forest far removed from organized Jewish life, Opatoshu made the contest among competing cultural forces that much more dramatic. Mordecai's life is a crash course in the history of Polish Jewry; a Jewry, he is to learn, that sprang directly from the verdant Polish forests with its birdsong and beech trees, each inscribed with the names of the Jewish Founding Fathers; with its half-pagan, half-Christian fisherfolk; with its Jewish military heroes and heretics, its mystics and rebels, its scholars and saints. The novel leaves nothing out and nothing to chance:

The eyes of the sixteen-year-old youth opened wide in wonder, and all at once, unconsciously, he reached out behind him to the preceding generations and felt in him a surge of power to continue spinning the thread. He believed, as did the woodcutters, that when this beech-tree, perhaps the solitary representative of its kind left in all Poland, disappears from one country, it grows in another, returning in a few generations.⁴⁴

Mordecai, the narrative equivalent of a shadow puppet, seen but seldom heard from as his silhouette flits from one historically luminous landscape to another, gets

himself pretty tangled up in these threads. As who would not, given that Opatoshu constantly interrupts his very thin plot with lengthy “historical” digressions: the legend of Napoleon, the cobbler’s apprentice who rose to be emperor; the legend of the Kedushas Levi, the saintly Berdichever; the saga of Berek Joselewicz, martyred to the cause of Polish independence; the story of Yosl Shtiral, the last “light-beam” of the Haskalah, a disciple of Nahman Krochmal, friend to Moses Hayyim Luzzatto and Solomon Geiger; the glorious exploits of Shlomo Molkho—“Elijah the Prophet, who came to tell the world that the Messiah was seated before the gates of Rome, preaching God’s word, declaring that the Tiber would inundate the sinful city, and that Clement the Seventh was abandoning his palace in terror, was running away. . . .”⁴⁵ Young and ever so malleable Mordecai is also on the run—from one century to another—as he tries to keep the precious thread of Jewish continuity from snapping.

The crucible of Jewish continuity is Kotsk, the goal of Mordecai’s pilgrimage and the place of his longest sojourn. But his timing is disastrously off, since the rebbe has emerged from thirteen years of self-imposed isolation just long enough to blaspheme against God. And the more reclusive he becomes, the more the zaddik is beset by the lamed, the crazed, and the impoverished. Mordecai’s first encounter with one of Polish Jewry’s greatest religious personalities is most inauspicious:

The rabbi, a diminutive gray figure, with a beard so heavy that it obscured his face altogether, was at the window, his fists clenched, and was shouting to the crowd: “You oxen, you! Out of my sight! I’m no physician! I had hoped to be a doctor of souls, but you’ve turned me into a horse doctor. What do you want now?”⁴⁶

Nor do things improve once he is granted an audience with the rebbe. Mordecai discovers a misanthrope motivated solely by self-interest, a man preoccupied with death and the afterlife.

Kotsk is in its death throes, as is the rebbe himself. Not even the saintly and Christ-like figure of Reb Itche, who routinely brings solace to all the infirm, whether Jewish or gentile, and who throws himself at the Kotsker’s feet to demonstrate his fealty before the unruly crowd, will ultimately keep our impressionable hero loyal to Kotsk. Militating against the decision to stay is Mordecai’s growing attraction to the worldly and unhappily married Felice, followed by the grotesque sight of the community fighting over who will wash the zaddik’s corpse. Other anarchic forces have been unleashed upon poor Mordecai as well: a Sabbatian orgy organized by the rebbe’s own son and daughter-in-law; the insurrectionist fever once again taking hold among the Polish intelligentsia; the discovery of an exact analogy between “their” messianism and “ours.” Kotsk, in the end, offers a limited choice of Jewish spirituality, and becomes but a stepping-stone to the greater riches that lie in store for our hero in the salons of Poland and beyond.⁴⁷

Whereas for Peretz, the return to myth and historical legend signaled the growing distance—nay, the unbridgeable gap—between Jew and gentile, the opposite was true for Opatoshu.⁴⁸ From beginning to end, the novelist who made the New York melting pot his home after 1907 insisted upon there having been an absolute moral symmetry between the Jews and the Christian Poles. The credulous hero who “believed, as did the woodcutters,” that all belief systems were equally valid, would

eventually pick up a crucifix in the face of a Cossack attack, would stand in for a Polish serf being flogged, and would be hailed by the peasants as a latter-day Christ. The same hero who as a youth had no head for Talmud study would grow up to recognize that hasidim were the Essenes incarnate, and the Virgin Mary, a pagan goddess in Jewish garb. Against such a transhistorical backdrop, the hero's sojourn in Kotsk was of far less consequence than those mystical "threads" emanating from Poland's sylvan splendor. No wonder, then, that on both sides of the Atlantic the Yiddish edition of *In Polish Woods* sold an unprecedented 31,000 copies between its first printing in 1921 and its twenty-first, in 1947.⁴⁹ How comforting to believe that the Polish beech tree, cut down in its native habitat, would grow in another, "returning in a few generations."

Opatoshu's novel, and the trilogy of which it was to form a part, did much to make the history of the Jewish people, studied in the light of social, political and intellectual forces the world over, into a covenantal narrative. Whatever split, inspired by Durkheim, Freud and Proust, which might later be discerned between history and Jewish collective memory, was not in evidence among the readers of Yiddish literature between the two world wars.⁵⁰ Yiddish secular readers were perfectly willing to accept a guiding principle running through all of Jewish history, so long as those doing the guidance were not the male authority figures—the bearded rabbis and greasy *rebeim*—whom they had left so far behind. The desperate need to believe in a living Jewish past, rooted in a mythic, preindustrial landscape and answering the call of universal redemption, could be met only by expunging the arcane halakhic particulars of rabbinic Judaism and the extreme particularism of East European Jewish pietism.

Back to Peretz, then, to the zaddik as shorthand for messianic dreamer and apocalypticist, except that now, with the rise of real apocalyptic ideologies—Communism and Nazism—Peretz's followers made a choice between hope and fear. Sholem Asch (1880–1957), his chief disciple, wrote the first full-scale Yiddish biography of a saint, Yechiel the psalm-sayer, who, like Mordecai before him, honed his spiritual craft in the court of the Kotsker rebbe, becoming the progenitor of a new Judeo-Christian faith.

In its own way, *Der tilim-yid* (1933), translated into German as *Der Trost des Volkes*, and from there into English as *Salvation*, is a very subversive work.⁵¹ Though it takes its saintly protagonist from cradle to grave, there is no real character development. Yechiel is what he is almost from the moment of birth: a prerabbinic Jew who will countenance no mediation between himself and God, himself and suffering humanity, and who—like Jesus—addresses God in the language of psalms. The first miracle occurs to Yechiel in childhood when Elijah the Prophet appears to him at a fair; the second, when he finds a hidden crust of bread for the town fool by achieving *bitul hayesh*, the total annihilation of self; the third, when, through the recitation of psalms, he stops a Polish nobleman from shooting him dead, thus gaining Yechiel legendary status. Most wondrously of all, Yechiel acts as the spiritual catalyst in the birth of a girl to a childless couple. This not only comes close to superseding the Christian Nativity, but also constitutes an act of hubris for which he, the girl, and her parents must suffer greatly. A final miracle on the part of

Yecheiel, who meanwhile has become a rebbe himself, resolves the theological conundrum of the girl's legitimacy. Her decision to convert to Christianity in order to marry outside the faith tips the scales of heaven, and to prevent this from happening, Yecheiel's prayers take away her life on the very eve of the ceremony. To fully expiate his own sin, in the Christian logic of this Polish-Yiddish narrative, Yecheiel, too, must die.⁵²

Throughout, Yecheiel has only two spiritual mentors: the Kotsker rebbe, more awe-inspiring than in Opatoshu's rendering, but still little more than a reclusive, "Aristotelian" foil to Yecheiel's faith in the healing power of Psalms; and the shadowy Pitch Jew (he goes by no other name), who turns out to be a hidden Sabbatian. Asch is careful to distinguish between one form of antinomian behavior and another. It is one thing to challenge the Kotsker's emphasis on the primacy of Law, or to harness the untrammelled sexuality of Yecheiel's beloved and future wife, Reyzl, for spiritual ends; quite another to proclaim Shabbetai Zvi the true messiah. For Yecheiel—the rebbe of poor, downtrodden Jews—is the apotheosis of a true Christianity, fusing as he does the "universal" aspects of Jewish culture with the highest ideals of European humanism.⁵³

After Peretz, Berdichevsky, et al. had redefined Hasidism to mean "Jewish transcendentalism" or "Promethean struggle with the forces of darkness," it provided Yiddish writers with a succinct cultural code with which to address the question of spirit versus matter. Sholem Asch's goal in *Der tilim-yid* was to explore the psychological implications of a life dedicated solely to the spirit. And so, he invented Yecheiel. "Yecheiel's was no speculative mind," Asch tells us. "His own strength lay in his faith, a deep, inward, blind faith in God's goodness. . . . He believed . . . that there was no evil either in God or in His creation."⁵⁴ Despite his becoming a zaddik, a saintly public figure, which intensified the psychological struggle to achieve a state of oneness with the Godhead, the arena of struggle for Yecheiel, as for Reb Shloyme and the various incarnations of the "Kotsker Rebbe," remained a solitary one. "That is the purpose of man's life on earth," Yecheiel concluded, "to enrich his soul and bring it back to the throne of God's Majesty more noble and beautiful than when he received it."⁵⁵ Hence, Yecheiel's recourse to the book that first taught Jews—and Christians—how to talk to God. In almost homiletic fashion, Asch used the Book of Psalms as both proof-text and subtext of the whole novel.

But the debate over spirit versus matter was never an abstract philosophical question for the Jews of Eastern Europe, especially not in the 1930s, with Communism here, Fascism there, the European continent increasingly cut off from the North American haven, and Bundist here-and-nowism in fierce competition with Zionist utopianism. *Der tilim-yid* was therefore designed and understood to be a work of consolation that addressed the more immediate question of home versus homelessness. "What another nation calls homeland goes by the name of Torah for the Jew," Asch stated boldly in the Yiddish original, though he considered this too provocative for his German and English readers.⁵⁶ Hasidism, then, was the home of the spirit: solitary, movable, eternal.

Where such solace was not vouchsafed, Hasidism represented the very opposite—atavism, dynastic rule, a diaspora still living in the hoary Middle Ages. Prolonging the agony of superannuation, Polish Hasidism in interwar Poland was politically

aligned with the Polish Right. This contemporary reality does much to explain the satiric venom of I.J. Singer's *Yoshe Kalb* (1932), which features a portrait of the zaddik of Nyesheve that would have made Peretz blush.⁵⁷ A venal ignoramus, ironically named Reb Melekh (King), Singer's patriarch sets the plot in motion by marrying off his youngest daughter in order to make room for his own remarriage. In a grotesque replay of Peretz's "Between Two Mountains," Singer has the misnagdic Rabbi of Rachminevke meet his hasidic counterpart in Carlsbad:

The Rabbi of Rachminevke found his prospective relative insufferable. He was ashamed of him, ashamed of his wild voice and his wilder gestures, ashamed of the noisy way he sucked his cigar and spat on the floor, ashamed of his shapeless, unbuttoned satin *capote*, his unkempt beard and ear-locks, his indelicate language, and his whole vast body, covered with hair and reeking of sweat, cigar smoke, leather, food and drink.⁵⁸

Not since the feisty days of the Galician Haskalah were Jewish readers treated to a zaddik more earthbound than the Rebbe Reb Melekh.

Or a zaddik more corrupt. The moral bankruptcy and social disparity of the hasidic court, whose royal family take the European spas at the expense of their vassals, make Nyesheve resemble nothing so much as a New Testament version of Herod's temple. If for Opatoshu the hasidim were likened unto Essenes, for I.J. Singer they are the temple priests incarnate. To expose the hypocrisy and bring about the destruction of this rotting temple, there appears the ascetic and perpetually seeking figure of the rebbe's son-in-law, Nachum-Yoshe, one of many "homeless" heroes in Singer's oeuvre. That the eponymous hero is as psychologically flat as Opatoshu's Mordecai, however, considerably weakens the thrust of Singer's indictment. Ever the critical realist, I.J. Singer cannot imagine either a past where the supernatural was real or a present where a zaddik's true motives are inscrutable. The only usable past is parodic and perverse, featuring at best a latter-day Yoshke Pandre, the Yiddish folk-Jesus, an equivocal sinner condemned to wander in perpetual silence.⁵⁹

The rebellion of the young, be they the idealistic Leah, Khonon, Mordecai and Yechiel, or the pathological Nachum-Yoshe, presupposes a secular humanistic world order in which individual action counts for something and where the betterment of life on earth is a laudable goal. When Isaac Bashevis Singer abandoned the critical realism of his youth, he also repudiated the secular humanistic legacy of modern Yiddish culture. Returning to the scene of the literary crime—to the Polish shtetl, still governed by its rabbis and sometimes swayed by harbingers of the Messiah—he created a youthful protagonist who was utterly destroyed by being turned into an agent of redemption.⁶⁰

The medieval Polish shtetl of Goray, torn apart by the messianic heresy of Shabbetai Zvi, becomes Bashevis's fictional laboratory within which to enliven the terrors of history, which are uncannily similar to the moral and political crisis of today.⁶¹ The illusion of historicity in *Satan in Goray* (1933) is brilliantly sustained by several layers of stylization: by short, syncopated sentences; a heavily Hebraicized and archaic diction; by embedded rhymes, a richness of descriptive detail, a grotesque landscape redolent with demons, golems, messianic signs and portents. The characters, drawn from the rabbinic or monied aristocracy, are larger

than life and arranged in binary oppositions: Rabbi Benish Ashkenazi, his body and soul intact in the wake of the Ukrainian massacres, versus the broken and impoverished Eliezer Babad; Itche Mates, who abnegates his body and views sex in theological terms, as opposed to the charismatic and sexually active Reb Gedalye.⁶²

Standing in the eye of the storm is Rechele, her weird behavior psychologically grounded by virtue of her total isolation as a child, her special education, her suppressed sexuality. She is the first character whom Bashevis turns successfully into a metaphysical portrait. Instead of embodying the *shekhinah*, the feminine aspect of the divinity, as she herself imagines, she becomes the *kelipah*, the shell into which evil finds its way. Itche Mates is attracted to her because of her wildness; he sees in her the unclean vessel that must be purified. Manipulated by all, she is finally left to Satan.

The ending is a tour de force. Inspired by a seventeenth-century chapbook about an exorcism in the town of Korec, the storybook finale showcases Bashevis's stylistic virtuosity. More to the point, its pious formulae deliver the story's antimodernist message. Primed by all the data and detail to expect a resolution on the plane of history, the reader is left completely baffled. Whatever happens to the town proper? To the rabbis' sons? Does Reb Mordecai Joseph, the penitent sinner, indeed become the community's new spiritual leader, as this "marvelous" and patriarchal narrative suggests? Why does the arch-villain Reb Gedalye get off scot-free? For all the revealing facts about Rechele's psychological make up, how is it that her dybbuk has a biography of his own, totally separate from the Sabbatean heresy that presumably gained him entry to her body in the first place? By collapsing history and psychology into a moral parable, as the characters themselves might have done, the storyteller frustrates any secular, twentieth-century reading of the story, which in turn delivers the ideological punch: the only thing that can save society from being destroyed by its self-appointed prophets of the millennium is the artificial imposition of a moral order from above. So much, then, for the novel, a genre that expressed dynamism, change and confrontation with the future. The best that can be hoped for from Bashevis's point of view, given the corrupt state of humanity, is a future harnessed to an uncompromising past.⁶³

I.B. Singer's storybook dybbuk provides a useful closure to Yiddish literature of the interwar years not only because this period of unprecedented terror began with Ansky's dybbuk (albeit a lover in disguise), but also because the great destruction to follow acted as a kind of collective exorcism. The dream of Enlightenment, conceived in Goethe's Weimar, was purged in nearby Buchenwald. Once the surviving Yiddish writers committed to memory their memorial poems for the countless dead, it was time, for the last time, to revisit the study house, shtibl and synagogue of yore, not as symbolic settings for the crisis of faith and for youthful acts of rebellion, but as real places at the very center of Jewish particularism and Jewish genius. Thus, Jacob Glatstein, who as late as 1935 delighted in parodying the attempts of "Reb Yosl Loksh of Chelm" to reconcile all differences, reimagined himself as Reb Nahman of Bratslav in a series of dramatic monologues written between 1943 and 1953.⁶⁴ Significantly, it was not to the figure of the zaddik as poet-dreamer that

Bashevis Singer and Chaim Grade—the two major Yiddish prose writers to emerge after the war—turned, but to the hard-nosed halakhist. The return of the sober, mature and bookish rabbi called upon to adjudicate manifold problems in the here-and-now signaled a profound rethinking of the past.

Singer, never shy to voice his opinions, begins his first attempt at autobiographical memoir with a manifesto.⁶⁵ To set the stage for *Mayn tatns bezdn-shub* (*In My Father's Court*, 1956), he provides a genealogy of the rabbinical court, from Moses through the Men of the Great Assembly and the Sanhedrin to his own father, the penurious Rabbi Pinches Menahem Singer of 10 (and later 12) Krochmalna Street in Warsaw. More than being the longest lasting institution among the Jews, it became the crucible of Jewish particularity as well, for

The Beth Din could exist only among a people with a deep faith and humility, and it reached its apex among the Jews when they were completely bereft of worldly power and influence. The weapon of the judge was the handkerchief the litigants touched to signify their acceptance of the judgment.

This truest sphere of justice and morality, moreover, naturally encouraged the individual traits of each rabbi to come to the fore. “The Beth Din not only differed in every generation, but every Rabbi who participated in it colored it with his character and personality.”⁶⁶ In recalling episodes from his father’s court, Singer gives full voice to his restorative impulse. Beyond embodying the principles of longevity and individualism, the Beth Din, he foretells, “will be reinstated and evolve into a universal institution,” based on the concept “that there can be no justice without godliness.”

Chaim Grade (1910–1982) was another rebel who came in from the cold. He too signaled the decisive turn in his career—from present to recent past and from poetry to prose—with a statement of purpose, combined with a critique of the portrayal of rabbis in modern Yiddish literature. “Our only spiritual leaders,” he wrote in the preface to *The Agunah* (1961),

have either been characterized in a completely negative way, under the general, pejorative, label of “clergy”; or they have been described only in terms of externals (the beards, the kaftans and the gestures) but not separated into different types, as though following a formula that “all rabbis have one face”; or they have been removed from their bodies and appearances altogether in order to present them as symbols of good deeds or personifications of pure ideas; or they have become legendary heroes; or theatrical figures, decorative and pathetic.⁶⁷

Following this thumbnail sketch of the main Yiddish literary trends from the Haskalah until the Holocaust, which accurately summarizes this essay as well, Grade lays out his own overview of the Jewish past as an ongoing struggle between “the study house and the street”:

Since I spent my youth in the study house and in Lithuanian yeshivahs, I came to know well scholars and their human temptations, their frame of mind and way of thinking, their social circumstances and family life, and the ones of great faith for whom the world to come was a tangible thing, often truer than the world of their daily lives. I also came to know the neighbors on our poor street and their relationships to the students in

the house of study—sometimes full of courtesy and love, and sometimes at war with the students of the Torah and even with the Torah itself.

The novel that follows, set in post–First World War Vilna, recapitulates (perhaps unconsciously) the plot of *Satan in Goray*: two powerful and contrasting male figures wrestle for the fate of an orphaned young woman. In the contest between them, she is destroyed, and her death acts to purge the “street” of its baseless hatred. Unlike Singer’s concluding hellfire sermon, however, Grade allows the saintly Reb Dovid Zelter to upend the uncompromising and misanthropic Reb Levi Hurwitz. Grade also makes good on his promise, giving flesh and human feeling to these once-faceless rabbis. More than that, he shows how even for men with the purest of motives, the instinctual and egotistical drives come first, the halakhic rationale, second. No matter that a literature that once embraced the world entire now occupies a few impoverished city blocks. It can still lay claim to the universal drama of id versus superego.

After serving as jacks-of-all-literary-trades, the rabbinic elite of Eastern Europe finally came into their own as the shakers and makers of a meaningful Jewish past. In a sense, because of the Holocaust, every novel set in prewar Vilna or Warsaw or Lodz could be read as an historical novel, recreating a life that the Germans had consigned to oblivion. Grade’s achievement, then, was as symbolic as it was real. Beginning with *The Agunah* and culminating in his monumental *Tsemakh Atlas* (translated as *The Yeshiva*, 1967–1977), Grade placed the rabbis and their world in center stage. The rabbis and rogues who peopled *Satan in Goray* were still living in the shtetl, after all, and behaved more like characters in a romance than a novel, while Bashevis’s tales of the Warsaw Beth Din were just that: disparate episodes arranged in a very loose chronology. The rabbi regained full human stature when and only when he negotiated both city and town, the study house and the street, the courtroom and the bedroom.

Yiddish, of course, remained a natural vehicle for preserving the language and lore of prewar Lithuanian, Hungarian, and Polish Hasidism; to wit, Menahem Boraisha’s epic poem *Der geyer* (*The Wanderer*, 1933–1942); the exalted portrayal of *The Hasidic Kingdom* (1955) by eyewitness Boruch Hager (1898–1985), followed by *In the Throes of Redemption* (1969), and the masterful poetic essay by Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972), scion of two hasidic dynasties, on *Kotsk in Its Struggle for Truth* (1973).⁶⁸ But for the most part, the romance of Hasidism had played itself out alongside the various redemptive schemes that once held Yiddish culture in their thrall. To revise the secular humanistic foundations of modern Yiddish culture—and of Jewry as a whole—required that the *rov* and *mara deatra* occupy center stage. No longer serving as beacon of Enlightenment, as populist agitator, as prophetic visionary, as progenitor of a new ecumenical faith, or as catalyst for the spiritual rebellion of the young, the rabbi came to define that which was truly distinctive about the Jews: dispersed among the nations, they bore the signs of the covenant upon their hands and on the doorposts of their segregated houses, and in lieu of temporal rulers, they were guided by scholars noted for their piety and full-length beards. What distinguished the Jews, for better or worse, was

the somber and somewhat forbidding figure they cut in the world, as captured in those wooden statuettes that Polish peasants had been carving all along.

Notes

I should like to thank Abraham Novershtern for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this essay.

1. See Chone Shmeruk, "'Al 'ekronot ahadim shel tirgum mishlei leMendl Lefin," in his *Sifrut yidish bepolin: mehkarim ve'iyunim historiyim* (Jerusalem: 1981), 180–183.

2. See Joseph Dan, *Hasipur hahasidi* (Jerusalem: 1975); Gedalia Nigal, *Hasiporet hahasidit: toldoteha venoseha* (Jerusalem: 1981).

3. David G. Roskies, "The Medium and Message of the Maskilic Chapbook," *Jewish Social Studies* 41, no. 3–4 (1979), 275–290; Shmuel Werses, *Hatirgumim leyidish shel 'Ahavat z'iyon' le Avraham Mapu* (Jerusalem: 1989); Tova Cohen, "Hatekhnukah halamdant—zofen shel sifrut hahaskalah," *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 13 (1992), 137–169; Iris Parush, "Readers in Cameo: Women Readers in Jewish Society of Nineteenth-Century Eastern Europe," *Prooftexts* 14 (1994), 1–23.

4. Anon. (I.M. Dik), *Der yoyred* (Warsaw: 1855); reprinted in *Chulyot: Journal of Yiddish Research* 1 (1993), 43–49.

5. Shmuel Kab (pseud. for I.M. Dik), *Seyfer beys Avrom* (Vilna: 1865), 7.

6. Anon. (I.M. Dik), *Der siem hatoyre* (Vilna: 1868).

7. Sir Walter Scott had distinguished between two kinds of romance narrative: "that which, being in itself possible, may be a matter of belief at any period; and that which, though held impossible by more enlightened ages, was yet consonant with the faith of earlier times." See his *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, vol. 3 (376), as quoted by Alexander Welsh, *The Hero of the Waverly Novels* (New York: 1968), 21–22.

8. See Dik's anonymously authored *Sipurey mihagoen bal hamekhaber toysfes yontef zal* (Vilna: 1864), 48.

9. See, for example, AMaD (pseud. for I.M. Dik), *Der shivim moltsayt* (Vilna: 1877), 46. The novel-romance includes a lengthy excursus on the economic and cultural woes of Polish Jewry in the pre-partition period. For another expression of Dik's pro-tsarist, anti-Polish sentiment, see his *Der soldatske sin (The Conscript's Son)* (Vilna: 1876), also published under the AMaD trademark.

10. See Dik's "Mayse ger tsedek: di geshikhte fun vilner ger tsedek Graf Pototski," published from a manuscript in *Di yidische velt* (Vilna), no. 6 (June 1913), 43–58. A German translation appears in *Das Buch von den polnischen Juden*, ed. S.J. Agnon and Ahron Eliasberg (Berlin: 1916), 61–79.

11. Yitzhak Leybush Peretz to Sholem Aleichem, 17 June, 4 and 18 July 1888, in *Mikhtavim: kol kitvei Y.L. Perez*, ed. Shimshon Meltzer, 10 vols. (Tel-Aviv: 1966), vol. 10B, 212–221. For a Yiddish translation of these important letters, see *Briv un redes fun Y.L. Perets*, ed. Nachman Meisel (New York: 1944), nos. 74–76.

12. On Heine's influence, see Peretz's letters to Pinsky and Yehoash, ca. 1907, in *ibid.*, nos. 139–140. On Sheyndelev the local rhymster, see Jacob Shatzky, "Perets-shtudyets," *YIVO-bleter* 28 (1946), 44. The father of modern Yiddish melodrama, Shloyme Ettinger (1801–1856), was a native of Zamosc, as was Ephraim Fishlsohn, author of the antihisidic play *Teyater fun khasidim*. See *Historishe shriftn fun YIVO* 1 (1929), 623–693.

13. "Reb Khaninc ben Dosa (a talmudishe zage)" (1891), in Peretz, *Ale verk*, vol. 1, *Lider un poemen* (New York: 1947–1948), 38–42. Only the Marxist critic D. Kurlyand seems to have recognized the parodic intent of this poem, as of "The Golem," discussed below. See "Tsu der frage vegn legendare syuzhett in Peretscs verk," *Sovetishe literatur* (Oct. 1940), 126–128.

14. "Der goylem" (1894), first published in Peretz, *Dertseylungen, mayselekh, bilder: ale verk fun Y.L. Perets*, vol. 2, 310–311. Quoted here in Ruth Wisse's translation from her *The I.L. Peretz Reader* (New York: 1990), 130–131.

15. See "Meh hayah Gordon, balschan o meshorer?" (1896), reprinted in *Kol kitvey Y.L. Peretz*, vol. 10, 161–200, esp. 175. For a discussion of this essay, see Chone Shmeruk *Peretses yiesh-vizye: interpretatsye fun Y.L. Perets* Bay nakht oyfn altn mark (New York: 1971), 101–106. For Peretz's later identification of poetry as prophecy, see Shmeruk's "Harkeriyah lenavi: Schneour, Bialik, Perez veNadson," *Hasifrut* 2 (1969), 241–244.

16. See "What Our Literature Needs" (1910), trans. by Nathan Halper in *Voices from the Yiddish*, ed. Irving Howe and Eliczer Greenberg (Ann Arbor: 1976), 25–31.

17. "Oyf der tshernovits'er shprakh-konferents," *Zikhroynes, briv un redes: ale verk fun Y.L. Perets*, vol. 11, 295.

18. The quote is from Hirsh Dovid Nomberg's superb memoir, "Isaac Leibush Peretz As We Knew Him," trans. by Lucy S. Dawidowicz, in her *The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe* (Boston: 1968), 295.

19. I.L. Perets, "Dos yidishe lebn loyt di yidishe folkslider" (1901), in *Literatur un lebn: ale verk*, vol. 7, 129–157. On the provenance of this essay, see Shmuel Zanvl Pipe, "Di zamlungen yidishe folkslider fun Y.L. Perets," *YIVO-bleter* 12 (1937), 286–290; for an ethnographic critique, see Judah Loeb Cahan, *Shtudies vegn der yidisher folksshafung*, ed. Max Weinreich (New York: 1952), 104–120.

20. See Jacob Shatzky, "Yehude Leyb Cahan (1881–1937): materyaln far a biografye," *Yorbukh fun Amopteyl fun YIVO* 1 (1938), 9–38.

21. See Nomberg, "Isaac Leibush Peretz as We Knew Him," 295–96. Also see Mark W. Kiel, "Vox Populi, Vox Dei: The Centrality of Peretz in Jewish Folkloristics," *Polin* 7 (1992), 88–120.

22. Nomberg, "Isaac Leibush Peretz as We Knew Him," 296.

23. Kiel, "Vox Populi."

24. Robert M. Seltzer, "The Secular Appropriation of Hasidism by an East European Jewish Intellectual: Dubnow, Renan, and the Besht," *Polin* 1 (1986), 151–162. On Dubnow in Polish, see Shatzky, "Perets-shtudies," 52.

25. Micah Joseph Berdichevsky, "Nishmat hasidim," first published in *Mimizrah um-ima'arav* 4 (1899), 55–64. Quoted here from David C. Jacobson, *Modern Midrash: The Retelling of Traditional Jewish Narratives by Twentieth-Century Hebrew Writers* (Albany: 1987), 23. For Berdichevsky's impact on Peretz's circle, see Nomberg, "Isaac Leibush Peretz as We Knew Him," 294–295. For a convenient summary of their mutual influence, see Nachman Meisel, *Yuskhokh Leybush Perets un zayn dor shrayber* (New York: 1951), 338–347.

26. See Peretz's autobiographical letter to Israel Zinberg, 3 Dec. 1911, in Meisel (ed.), *Briv un redes*, no. 259. For Peretz's reaction to real-life hasidim, see Nokhem Oyslender, "Peretses 'Shtet un shtetlekh' [1902]," *Tsaytshrift* (Minsk) 1 (1926), 69–70.

27. "Tsvishn tsvey berg," *Der yid*, no. 40–41 (1902); reprinted *Khsidish: ale verk*, vol. 4, 103–117; trans. by Goldie Morgentaler in Wisse (ed.), *The I.L. Peretz Reader*, 184–195.

28. See Yudel Mark's "An analiz fun Y.L. Peretses shprakh," *YIVO-bleter* 28 (1946), 342; "The Language of Y.L. Peretz," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 4 (1949), 76–77.

29. H.D. Nomberg, "Di revizye fun Peretses shafn" in his *Gezamlte verk*, 9 vols. (Warsaw: 1930), vol. 8, 104–107. This "revisionist" essay by one of Peretz's closest associates was the point of departure for my own understanding of Peretz.

30. Y.L. Perets, "Di goldene keyt" (1907; 1912–1913), reprinted in *Dramatishe verk: ale verk*, vol. 6, 102–179. There is no translation into English of this enormously influential play.

31. Chone Shmeruk, *Peretses yiesh-vizye*, 39–40; Abraham Novershtern, "Moyshe Kulbaks 'Meshiekh ben Efrayim': a yidish-modernistish verk in zayn litararishn gerem," *Di goldene keyt* 126 (1989), 188. On the thorny question of whether or not modern Jewish messianism represents a radical break with the past, see Eli Lederhendler, "Interpreting Messianic Rhetoric in the Russian Haskalah and Early Zionism," in his *Jewish Responses to*

Modernity: New Voices in America and Eastern Europe (New York: 1994), ch. 2 (originally published in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 7, *Jews and Messianism in the Modern Era: Metaphor and Meaning*, ed. Jonathan Frankel [New York: 1991], 14–33).

32. See Arthur Green, *Tormented Master: A Life of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav* (University, Alabama: 1979).

33. See “Songs of Reb Leivi Itzhok Berditchever” in Chaim Kotlyansky, *Folks-gezangen* (New York: 1954), 15–43. Cf. *Sefer kedushat levi hashalem* (Jerusalem: 1964), and for the briefest of excerpts, Louis Jacobs, *Hasidic Thought* (New York: 1976), 116–121.

34. See Dan, *Hasipur hahasidi*, 195–220; Ada Rapoport-Albert, “Hagiography with Footnotes: Edifying Tales and the Writing of History in Hasidism,” *History and Theory Beiheft* 27 (1999), 119–159.

35. For a fuller interpretation of the play, see Ruth R. Wisse, “A Monument to Messianism,” *Commentary* (March 1991), 37–42.

36. On S. Ansky and the making of *The Dybbuk*, see David G. Roskies’s introduction to S. Ansky’s *The Dybbuk and Other Writings* (New York: 1992) and *idem*, “S. Ansky and the Paradigm of Return,” in *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era* (New York and Cambridge, Mass.: 1992), ed. Jack Wertheimer, 243–260. On *The Dybbuk* against the backdrop of Ansky’s rehabilitation of the Haskalah, see *idem*, “The Maskil as Folk Hero,” *Prooftexts* 10 (1990), 219–235. Also see the contributions of Corinne Ze’evi-Weil and Benjamin Lukin in *Back to the Shtetl: An-Sky and the Jewish Ethnographic Expedition, 1912–1914*, ed. Rivka Gonen (Jerusalem: 1994), 13–40.

37. See Alter Katsizne, “Der dukes” (1925), in his *Gezamlte shriftn*, vol. 1 (Tel Aviv: 1967), 16–114; Moyshe Kulbak, “Yankev Frank” (1923), in his *Ale verk*, 3 vols. (Vilna: 1929), vol. 3; Aaron Zeitlin, *Yankev Frank* (Vilna: 1929); Chone Shmeruk, *The Esterke Story in Yiddish and Polish Literature: A Case Study in the Mutual Relations of Two Cultural Traditions* (Jerusalem: 1985).

38. Mendele Mocher Sforim (pseud. of Sholem-Yankev Abramovitch), “Petiḥtah” to *Bayamim hahehm* (1897), in *Kol kitvei Mendele Mokher Sefarim* (Tel Aviv: 1966):255; trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin as “Of Bygone Days,” in *A Shtetl and Other Yiddish Novellas*, ed. Ruth R. Wisse, 2nd rev. ed. (Detroit: 1986), 262. I am indebted to Prof. Marcus Moseley for identifying the real-life counterparts in Reb Shloyme’s fictional salon. For more on Abramovitch’s changing views on nationalism and history, see Dan Miron and Anita Norich, “The Politics of Benjamin III: Intellectual Significance and Its Formal Correlatives in Sh. Y. Abramovitch’s *Masoes Benyomin Hashlishi*,” in *The Field of Yiddish: Studies in Language, Folklore, and Literature, Fourth Collection*, ed. Marvin I. Herzog, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, et al. (Philadelphia: 1980), 1–115.

39. Abramovitch, “Petiḥtah,” 259; in English version, 272.

40. *Ibid.*

41. See the discussion of these works in David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1984), 167–183.

42. Compare Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd rev. ed. (London and New York: 1983).

43. Y. Opatoshu, *In poylishe velder*, 21st ed. (New York: 1947); *In Polish Woods*, trans. Isaac Goldberg (Philadelphia: 1938).

44. Opatoshu, *In poylishe velder*, 38; in English version, 37.

45. *Ibid.*, 258; 299.

46. *Ibid.*, 155; 179.

47. For partisan reactions to the novel’s historicity, see Nachman Meisel, *Yoysef Opatoshu: zayn lebn un shafn* (Warsaw: 1937), ch. 4, and Pinkhes Zelig Glikzman, *Der Kotsker rebe* (Piotrkow: 1939; photo-offset ed., Israel: 1972), 68–72, 149–150.

48. On Peretz, see Magda Opalska and Israel Bartal, *Poles and Jews: A Failed Brotherhood* (Hanover and London: 1992), 114–115. Opalska and Bartal note “the complexity and outstanding artistic merits” of Opatoshu’s work as compared to “earlier interpretations of the insurrectionist theme.” See their discussion on pp. 9, 117–119.

49. I cite the data on the verso of the New York edition published by R.J. Novak in 1947.

For an exact publication history, including translations of the novel into several languages, see Jacob Shatzky, *Opatoshu bibliografye* (New York: 1937). Opatoshu's contemporary appropriation of the past was enthusiastically endorsed by historian Isaac Schipper in his review of "the newest Yiddish historical novels." See Schipper's "Oyfn veg tsu di urbilder fun der yidisher neshome," *Varshever shriftn* (1926–27), 9 pp., separate pagination. For Mordecai's excursions in comparative history and anthropology, see *In poylishe velder*, 203, 235. At other times, he is privy to elaborate historiosophical dreams.

50. Herein lies my fundamental disagreement with Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, London and Philadelphia: 1982). For a fuller statement of my own position, see *Against the Apocalypse*, ch. 10.

51. Sholem Asch, *Der tilim yid*, serialized in the Jewish daily *Forward*, 1932–1933; first pub. Warsaw: 1934; cited here from New York: 1946; photo-offset ed., 1952; *Der Trost des Volkes*, trans. Siegfried Schmitz (Zurich: 1934); and *Salvation*, trans. Willa Muir and Edwin Muir (New York: 1951). My student Michael Krutikov has prepared a detailed comparison of the three editions. His findings do not corroborate Asch's claim, in the preface to the English edition of 1951, that "essential" chapters omitted back in 1934 "because of a conviction that at that time they would not be understood by the general reader" were restored in the new edition. In fact, there are only slight differences between the English and German versions, both of which expunge "earthy," supernatural and otherwise particularist elements of the Yiddish original. A complete translation of this important novel is in order.

52. In the German and English versions, Yechiel is not altogether certain whether he encountered Elijah at the fair. Similarly, both versions omit the whole episode with the derelict orphan-and-fool, Moyshe-khaver-nar. I am indebted to Ruth Wisse for her insights on the Christological thrust of the novel.

53. See Hannah Berliner Fischtal's "Sholem Asch and the Shift in His Reputation: *The Nazarene* as Culprit or Victim" (Ph.D. diss., the City University of New York, 1994), for a discussion of how Asch turned the hasidic-*rebbe*-as-Jesus into Jesus-as-Jew, and why the Yiddish establishment hailed the one while vilifying the other.

54. Asch, *Tilim-yid*, 458; in English version, 315.

55. *Ibid.*, 472; 324.

56. *Ibid.*, 241; cf. the English version, 169.

57. I.J. Singer, *Yoshe Kalb: roman*, 3rd ed., in his *Geklibene verk* (Warsaw: 1937); trans. Maurice Samuel as *Yoshe Kalb* with an introduction by Irving Howe (New York: 1988). Welcoming the publication of this novel as one "that appeals to the religious instinct," Aaron Zeitlin, in contrast, denied any intended slur on the contemporary Orthodox establishment. See Zeitlin's review of *Yoshe Kalb* in *Globus* 6 (Dec. 1932), 72–79.

58. Singer, *Yoshe Kalb*, 13; in English version, 10.

59. See Anita Norich, *The Homeless Imagination in the Fiction of Israel Joshua Singer* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: 1991), 24–34, and Mordecai Strigler, "Yoshe Kalb der ershter," his introduction to *Georemt mitn vint: historisher roman fun yidishn lebn in Poyln* (Buenos Aires: 1955), 18–25.

60. For a more complete description of this turn in I.B. Singer's career, see David G. Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1995), ch. 8.

61. Y. Bashevis, *Der sotn in goray*, serialized in *Globus*, Jan.–Sept. 1933; published with a foreword by Aaron Zeitlin (Warsaw: 1935); 2nd ed., *Der sotn in goray a mayse fun fartsaytns un andere dertseylungen* (New York: 1943); the latter reissued in a photo-offset edition (Jerusalem: 1972). The novel was superbly translated by Jacob Sloan as *Satan in Goray* (New York: 1955).

62. On the stylistic features of the novel, see Chone Shmeruk, "Monologue as Narrative Strategy in the Short Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer," in *Recovering the Canon: Essays on Isaac Bashevis Singer*, ed. David Neal Miller (Leiden: 1986), 99–101; Dan Miron, "Passivity and Narration: The Spell of Bashevis Singer," *Judaism* 41, no. 1 (1992), 14–16. On the grotesque aspect of this novel, see Maximillian E. Novak, "Moral Grotesque and Decorative Grotesque in Singer's Fiction," in *The Achievement of Isaac Bashevis Singer*, ed. Marcia

Allentuk (Carbondale: 1969), 44–63. For an interpretation of the novel against the backdrop of contemporary events in Poland, see Seth L. Wolitz, “*Satan in Goray* as Parable,” *Proof-texts* 9 (1989), 13–25. See also Bashevis’s comments on the dearth of historical novels in Yiddish in his review of Joseph Opatoshu’s *Pundeka retivta* in *Globus* 15 (Sept. 1933), 86–88.

63. For the *Mayse fun a ruakh in korets*, which served as Bashevis’s source, see Max Weinreich, *Bilder fun der yidisher literaturgeshikhte* (Vilna: 1926), 254–261. See also Weinreich’s chapter on Shabbetai Zvi in *Shturem vint* (Vilna: 1927), 79–161, and Avraham Rubinstein, “Goray and Bilgoraj: The Literary World of Isaac Bashevis Singer and the Historical-Social World of Polish Jewry,” *Ex Cathedra* (Ramat Gan: 1982), 49–82. (Weinreich’s role in reclaiming a usable past for the secular Yiddish intelligentsia has not been fully appreciated.) Abraham Novershtern reads this pietistic ending as Bashevis’ way of repudiating Yiddish modernism, which from its very inception adopted an apocalyptic stance. See “Tsvishn morgnzun un akhris-hayomim: tsu der apokaliptisher tematik in der yidisher literatur,” *Di goldene keyt* 135 (1993), 111–135. On the incompatibility of the novel with the ethos of storytelling, see Dan Miron, “Domesticating a Foreign Genre: Agnon’s Transactions with the Novel,” *Proof-texts* 7 (1987), 1–27.

64. Jacob Glatstein, “Rabbi Yussel Luksh of Chelm,” trans. Nathan Halper, in *A Treasury of Yiddish Poetry*, ed. Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg (New York: 1969), 246–256; *idem*, “The Bratslaver to His Scribe,” trans. Leonard Wolf, in *The Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse*, ed. Irving Howe, Ruth R. Wisse and Chone Shmeruk (New York: 1987), 440–457. For more on Glatstein, see Ruth R. Wisse’s essay on pp. 129–147 of this volume.

65. Y. Bashevis, *Mayn tatns bezdn-shtub* (New York: 1956), originally serialized in the *Forward*. For an abridged translation, see *In My Father’s Court*, trans. Channah Kleinerman-Goldstein, Elaine Gottlieb, and Joseph Singer (Philadelphia: 1966). Four additional chapters appear in *An Isaac Bashevis Singer Reader* (New York: 1971), 285–313. No detailed comparison has yet been done of the two editions. See, however, Norich, *The Homeless Imagination*, ch. 6.

66. Singer, *Mayn tatns bezdn-shtub*, preface.

67. Chaim Grade, *Di agune: roman* (New York and Los Angeles: 1961), 5–6. I cite two thirds of this important preface, as translated by Michael Stern, because it does not appear in the authorized translation by Curt Leviant of *The Agunah* (New York: 1974). No full account of Grade’s radical years has yet been written. For now, the best sources are Ruth R. Wisse, “In Praise of Chaim Grade,” *Commentary* (April 1977); and Abraham Novershtern, “Yung Vilne: The Political Dimension of Literature,” in *The Jews of Poland Between the Two World Wars*, ed. Israel Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, et al. (Hanover and London: 1989), 393–398. For the historical background relevant to Grade’s novels, see Emanuel Etkes, “The Relationship Between Talmudic Scholarship and the Institution of the Rabbinate in Nineteenth-Century Lithuanian Jewry,” in *Scholars and Scholarship: The Interaction Between Judaism and Other Cultures*, ed. Leo Landman (New York: 1990), 107–132.

68. Menahem Boraisha, *Der geyer: kapitlen fun a lebn* (New York: 1943); Borekh Hager, *Malkhus khsides* (Buenos Aires: 1955); *idem*, *In geule unru* (Tel Aviv: 1969); Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Kotsk in gerangl far emesdikeyt*, 2 vols. (Tel Aviv: 1973).

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