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HAYA BAR-ITZHAK

PIONEERS OF JEWISH ETHNOGRAPHY AND FOLKLORISTICS IN EASTERN EUROPE

Translation by Lenn Schramm

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH CENTRE OF THE SLOVENIAN
ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS

LJUBLJANA 2010

To the blessed memory of Alan Dundes
The Doyen of Folklore Studies.

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PREFACE

This volume presents some of the most important theoretical contributions of the pioneers of Jewish folklore studies in Eastern Europe.[1]

To date, the few scholarly treatments of Jewish ethnography and folklore studies in Eastern Europe have focused mostly on the collection of folklore materials, the collectors, and the institutions, whose achievements were truly impressive.[2] But even when Jewish folklore studies in Eastern Europe were still in their infancy, some authors made important contributions to the theoretical side of the discipline.[3] The present volume focuses on these contributions.

Because of the languages in which they were written, the bulk of these works are not accessible to most students of Jewish folklore today. The discussion of these early folklorists and the translations of some of their key writings, presented here, are intended to remedy this deficit in part and to rescue their work from undeserved oblivion.

Chapter 1 looks at the beginnings of Jewish folklore studies and ethnography in Eastern Europe and its pioneers. The years before World War I and the interwar period, which saw the emergence of Jewish folklore studies in Eastern Europe, were a time of change and upheaval in general, and for Jewish society in particular. Because these processes were influenced not only by historical events, but also by ideological currents and the movements they produced, the latter's influence on folklore studies needs to be considered. Most of the pioneers of Jewish folklore studies in Eastern Europe were affiliated with one of three ideological currents: (1) the stream that sought to solve the problem of the Jews through their integration, as full citizens, into the dominant nationality of the country in which they lived; (2) Zionism, which saw the solution in the rebirth of the Jewish nation and of Hebrew culture in Eretz Israel; and (3) several movements that advocated a national solution for the Jews in the Diaspora.

All of the pioneers of Jewish folklore studies, whatever their affiliation, shared a recognition of the importance of Jewish folk culture. The difference between them was expressed chiefly in the language in which they chose to write. Those who advocated integration wrote

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[1] In this book "Eastern Europe" refers to territories that are currently part of Poland, Russia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Belarus, and Romania.

[2] The most important book on this topic is that by Itzik Gottesman (2003), which deals with folklore and Yiddishism in Poland and focuses on the pioneering collectors of folklore in Warsaw and Vilna and the institutions that coordinated their work. Goldberg-Mulkiewicz (1989) concentrates on Jewish topics in Polish ethnography.

[3] I have written on this contribution in Chulyot, a journal of Yiddish culture. See Bar-Itzhak 1999, 2000, 2002.

in the non-Jewish vernacular. The Zionists wrote in Hebrew.[4] For both groups, their decision entailed translating folklore that circulated in Yiddish. In this way, their collection and study of folklore was enlisted in the service of their respective ideologies.

Those who transcribed folklore materials and published their work in Yiddish were Yiddishists, who were affiliated with various movements that advocated a national solution in the Diaspora and saw the Yiddish language as the unifying element of the modern Jewish nation. For them, too, folklore studies served their ideology (Gottesman 2003, xvii–xxiii).

Chapters 2 through 7 are devoted to individual scholars and their contributions, with a translation of one of their key works. My choice of authors and essays was guided by three criteria: (1) the importance of their contribution to the discipline; (2) representation of the various genres of folklore; and (3) representation of the various ideological currents of the day.

Chapter 2 is devoted to S. An-Ski (Shlomo Zanvil Rappoport), the most important ethnographer of Eastern European Jewry and the head of the first ethnographic expedition. An-Ski, who had left the Jewish fold for a time, saw Jewish folklore as the symbolic language of Jewish history. His article, "Jewish Ethnopoetics," published here, deals with folk literature. It was written and first published in Russian, and soon after in Yiddish,[5] the two languages in which he published his works.

Chapter 3 is devoted to Y.L. Cahan, a collector and scholar of Eastern European Jewish folklore who continued to work through YIVO (the Institute for Jewish Research), then headquartered in Wilno (Vilna), even after he settled in the United States, and to write in Yiddish. The article published here in translation deals with Yiddish folksongs.

Chapter 4 looks at Alter Druyanow, a leading Zionist who wrote in Hebrew. He made a major contribution to the study of Jewish folklore in Eastern Europe as editor of *Reshumot*, a journal of Jewish memoirs, ethnography, and folklore, and especially to the study of Jewish humor.

Chapter 5 turns to Regina Lilienthal, one of two Jewish female folklorists[6] who wrote in Polish and were active in the Polish ethnographic community. Her article on the evil eye, presented here, deals with folk beliefs and customs. Originally written in Polish, it was first published in a Yiddish translation by Nehama Epstein.

The last two chapters focus on individuals who are generally not identified as folklorists. Chapter 6 offers a contribution to the study of ethnography and folklore from the historical perspective, by the great historian of Polish Jewry, Majer Bałaban. Bałaban's involvement with folklore covered many areas: material culture, folk art, and legends of Polish Jews. He wrote in Polish, German, Russian, and Yiddish. His article included here (originally in Yiddish) examines the history of Saul Wahl, the Jew who, according to legend, was king of Poland.

Chapter 7 presents a contribution to folklore studies by the Yiddish poet and author Itzik Manger. Manger, whose writing drew heavily on Jewish folklore, also contributed to the theoretical side of the discipline in the essay "Folklore and Literature," published here. He considers

[4] It should be recalled, though, that there were variations among the different Zionist parties. Po'alei Zion supported Yiddish as the language of the working class. One pioneer collector of Yiddish folklore, Pinhas Graubard, was a member of Po'alei Zion.

[5] Translated by Zalmen Rejzen.

[6] The other one, Giza Frenkel, was active in a later period. After Word War II she immigrated to Israel where she continued her work.

the reciprocal relations between the two fields, highlights the greatness of modern Yiddish literature because it nurtures this attachment, and criticizes Hebrew literature for severing its link to Jewish folklore.

As noted, each chapter also includes a major article by one of the pioneers of Jewish folkloristics. The articles were not easy to translate. They were written in various languages and sometimes required a two-stage translation. This task has been admirably performed by a talented translator, Lenn Schramm, to whom I can never sufficiently express my gratitude.

This volume originated in my conversations with the late Prof. Alan Dundes of the University of California at Berkeley. He encouraged me to undertake the project, which he thought was of utmost importance. I dedicate the result to his memory.

I would also like to thank everyone who helped bring the project to a successful conclusion: the S.O. Sidor Foundation, for its generous support for the translation; the Fulbright Foundation and the Pennsylvania State University, who made it possible for me to complete work on the project; and the President's Fund, the Rector, and the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Haifa, for their encouragement and support.

Finally, boundless thanks to my husband, Zeev Bar-Itzhak, without whose encouragement and support this book could never have been completed.

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNING OF ETHNOGRAPHY AND FOLKLORISTICS IN EASTERN EUROPE – A SURVEY

The collection of folklore and the birth of folklore studies in Europe were a product of Romanticism and even more so of the emergence of national movements. In the nineteenth century, the European peoples who were still ruled by the large empires but dreamt of independence had to demonstrate their national identity on the cultural plane, since no one doubted that they were living on their land. Folklore, which circulated in the national language and was considered to reflect the authentic national culture, was yoked to the service of the national ideology. Nationalists went out to the countryside and villages to collect folktales for publication and wrote songs in imitation of what they found there. An integral part of their work was linguistic, because they had to render the folk vernacular into literary language. They decided which dialect would serve as the basis of the literary language and defined a standard orthography. This led to the publication of the first grammars and dictionaries in several languages, including Grimm's German dictionary[1] and Dall's Russian dictionary.[2] Both Grimm and Dall drew on folk literature; anthologies of folk literature were published to serve as raw material for lexicographers. Publishing houses, scientific academies, and folklore institutes were founded to pursue these tasks. Thus organized and institutionalized studies of folk literature in particular, and of folklore and ethnology in general, date to this era of national awakening. Most of the research institutes, archives, specialized publishing houses and periodicals, university departments, scientific academies, and museums founded then still exist today. Folk literature, which constituted the foundations for a national literature, attracted particular attention. Ethnographic materials as customs, beliefs, and the like – were deemed of lesser value by the generation of rationalists raised on scientific principles and relegated to the realm of the exotic or superstitious. Scholars and politicians of the period saw folklore as a model of the past on which the present could be based and the future erected. The Greeks looked to their classical Hellenic roots, the Finns to the primeval era reflected in the epics of the *Kalevala*, the Germans to their Teutonic antecedents, and so on. Folklore materials that circulated among the people were carefully collected with this goal in mind.

A number of important anthologies should be mentioned here. Jacob Ludwig Carl Grimm (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Carl Grimm (1786-1859) published in 1812 a collection of fairytales *Kinder und Hausmärchen* and a second volume in 1815. A second edition of *Kinder und Hausmärchen* was published in 1819-1822. In 1816 they published a collection of German leg-

[1] The Grimm started to work on the German dictionary, the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* in 1838, an extensive dictionary that is still considered the standard reference for German etymology.

[2] Vladimir Dall's *Explanatory Dictionary of the Live Great Russian Language* was published in 1863-1866 in 4 volumes.

ends *Deutsche Sagen*. In the Russian Empire, the Finns were the first to begin collecting their folk literature. In the early nineteenth century, Elias Lönnrot (1802-1884) collected fragments that he assembled and published in 1835-1836 as the *Kalevala*. This immediately became the greatest cultural treasure of the Finnish people, expressing its national identity and culture. At his initiative, the Finnish Literary Society, which still exists and maintains a large archive of folk literature, was established.

The various Slavic peoples published a number of periodicals devoted to folklore and ethnography. In Poland, the most important collector was Oskar Kolberg (1814-1890), who published dozens of volumes of material that he gathered in collaboration with scholars from all the provinces of Poland. In the Ukraine, folk literature was collected by the great national poet Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861).

The best-known figure who came from the Ottoman Empire to the Austro-Hungarian Empire was Vuk S. Karadžić of Serbia (1787-1864), he laid down the principles of phonetic spelling still followed today. The folk epics he published, both prose and poetry, are classics on a par with the anthologies of the Brothers Grimm.

In the Ottoman Empire, the pioneering collection of 665 Bulgarian and Macedonian folk songs was published by the Maldinov brothers, Dimitar Maldinov (1810-1862) and Konstantin Maldinov (1830-1862), in Zagreb in 1861.

Jewish society in Eastern Europe was influenced by the prevailing ideologies in the countries where they lived. Romanticism and resurgent nationalism affected the Jewish intelligentsia, too, and awakened an interest in Jewish folklore similar to the new interest that the peoples of Europe were evincing in their own folk traditions.

But contemporary ideologies took on a unique guise in Eastern European Jewish society, a direct consequence of the Jews' social and political situation during this period of change, upheaval, and revolutionary ferment. The efforts of Jewish thinkers and activists focused on achieving emancipation, of the sort the Jews had received in Western Europe, alongside an unremitting struggle against antisemitism. The campaign for emancipation was accompanied by constant attempts to prove the Jews' loyalty to and integration with non-Jewish society and to demonstrate patriotic feelings for the countries in which they lived. Most of them did not believe, however, that this entailed turning their backs on Judaism and its spiritual treasures. These circles included a handful of pioneering folklorists who published in the vernacular (especially in Poland); notable among them were Benjamin Wolf Segel, Henryk Lew, and Regina Lilienthal, one of whose essays is published in this volume.

Benjamin Wolf Segel is a good example of how emancipation ideologies influenced folklorists. Zalman Shazar described Segel as "a lone and passionate Jewish intellectual" (Shazar 1955, 129). Segel (1866–1931), who was born in Rohatyn, grew up in Lwów in western Galicia. In his writings he fought strenuously on two fronts: facing the outside world he combated antisemitism, standing vigil over the honor of the Jews of Poland and Galicia and venting his wrath on all who tried to harm them. One of his major achievements on this front was his fight against *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.* On the internal front he battled the supporters of Jewish national ideologies, both Zionists and Yiddishists. Emancipation was his heart's desire; he fervently believed that a Jew could be at home in Poland and its culture, just like the author and literary critic Wilhelm Feldman and the poet Julian Tuwim. For Segel, emancipation did not mean assimilation, an idea he loathed. Eliminating the barriers between Poles and Jews

did not have to lead to the latter's surrendering their identity as Jews. Even after emancipation was achieved, he thought, ample room would remain for autonomous Jewish intellectual activity.

Segel's worldview shaped his method and work in Jewish folklore. On the one hand, he was a fervent admirer of Jewish folk culture and an energetic collector; his writings reflect the broad interests of one who deals with many genres, including folktales, folksongs, proverb, beliefs and customs, and folk medicine. On the other hand, he published in Polish and German. Because much of his work appeared under pseudonyms, including Bar-Ami ("son of my people": mainly in the Polish-language Jewish periodical *Izraelita*), B. Safra, Dr. Schipper, Dr. Ze'ev, and B. Rohatyn, his vast contribution has not yet been recognized. Few know that Segel collected and interpreted parts of the famous anthology of proverbs published by Ignatz Bernstein. On several occasions he served as guest editor and wrote a large part of the content of the monthly *Ost und West,* edited by Leo Wintz (Shazar 1955, 177).

Segel's work appeared in a number of periodicals – *Urquell, Ost und West, Globus, Mitteilungen zur Jüdischen Volkskunde, Wisła, Lud,* and *Izraelita* – as well as in the publications of the Anthropological Commission of the Academy of Arts in Krakow. In the last of these he published a fascinating anthology of Galician Jewish folktales and folksongs, all of them in Polish translation except for one story, which was printed in Yiddish transcribed in Latin characters (Segel 1893).[3]

Another pioneer who published in Polish was Henryk Lew. Because his work, like that of Segel and Lilienthal, is associated with the general climate in Poland with regard to Jewish folk culture and the main periodicals on ethnography, we will consider them here as well.

As noted by Olga Goldberg-Mulkiewicz (1989), an interest in traditional Jewish culture first emerged among major Polish writers of the nineteenth century, notably Eliza Orzeszkowa and Bolesław Prus, who wrote on Jewish topics. Polish literary and artistic circles were fascinated by the individuality, complexity, and exoticism they attributed to Jewish culture.

Polish ethnography began by collecting the traditional culture of the peasants and emphasized its Slavic elements. As mentioned above, Oskar Kolberg (1814-1890) published many volumes on the folklore of the various regions of Poland, but the Jewish element in his work is negligible. Interest in Jewish ethnography emerged before the First World War in the circles affiliated with two Polish ethnographic journals, *Wisła* and *Lud*.

Wisła was published in Warsaw. Its editor, Jan Karłowicz, published studies conducted in other countries about ethnic minorities that lived in Poland. Because he believed that Jewish folklore should be studied by persons who were familiar with Jewish culture and languages, he encouraged Jewish scholars to collect folklore materials and publish them in *Wisła*. He was delighted that *Wisła* could publish Samuel Adelberg's Polish translation of the proverbs collected by his father-in-law, Ignatz Bernstein,[4] to which Adelberg added new material of his own (Adelberg 1890).

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[3] For more on Segel, see Bar-Itzhak 2004, 94–95; Schwarzbaum 1968, 5, 14, 74, 109, 150, 157–158, 181, 224, 292, 318, 323, 343, 473. For Segel's work on the Jews of Galicia, see Segel 1983, 201–331; on Hasidism, ibid., 304–312, 508–521, 677–689; on folk medicine, Segel 1897, 49–69; on folktales, Segel 1897, 21–22 and Segel 1899, 20–26; on death and burial customs, Segel 1899, 25–29; and on the Angel of Death, Bar-Ami 1905, v, 42–44.

[4] First published in Yiddish in *Der Hoyzfraynd* (1895).

Lud, founded in 1897, about a decade after *Wisła*, was the journal of the Ethnographic Society in Lwów. Its editor, Antoni Kalina, also declared his intention to treat Jewish ethnology on the pages of his journal (*Lud* 4 [1898], 346).

As for the works of the pioneering Jewish folklorists who wrote in Polish, special note attaches to the Polish-language weekly *Izraelita,* which represented the polonizing Jews. Its editor starting in 1897, Nahum Sokolow, opened its pages to folklore materials. He believed that the Jewish intelligentsia had to renew its acquaintance with the masses and urged abandonment of the maskilic strategy of keeping the people at arm's length. Sokolow, not yet a Zionist, wanted to rescue folk traditions; he called for organic change in Jewish life, in a manner that would not infringe the people's sensitivities. Sokolow's approach led to the drafting of a program for Jewish folklore studies, published in *Izraelita* in 1901 by Henryk Lucjan Kohn.

Although *Izraelita* had no pretensions to scholarship, the interest in ethnographic materials led it to publish studies on the history of Jewish communities, lifestyle, customs, and similar topics.

The journalist Henryk Lew was the moving spirit of all three periodicals.[5] He launched his project to collect folklore materials by publishing a questionnaire, first in *Izraelita* (*Izraelita* 32 [1897], 1) and later in *Wisła*. The questionnaire covered six areas: beliefs and stories, folksongs and poetry, customs and traditions, folk medicine and superstitions, and folk notions and ideas (Goldberg Mulkiewicz 1989, 19–21).

Lew had a regular ethnography column in *Izraelita*; although it did not publish readers' letters, it did report their names, the subjects on which they wrote, and Lew's evaluation of the materials they had submitted.

When Lew moved to Paris, Segel took over the ethnography column, under the pen name Bar-Ami. *Izraelita* published several series of articles on folktales, religious tales, and folk medicine, along with studies of shtetl and discussions that reflected the views of writers, such as the exchange between Henryk Lew and Segel on customs and beliefs related to death and burial.

Segel, Lew, and Regina Lilienthal published in all three venues. Segel and Lilienthal also contributed to the publications of the Anthropological Commission of the Academy of Arts in Krakow. In addition to collecting and discussing folklore materials, these three pioneering folklorists helped spur widespread interest in Jewish ethnography among Jewish and Polish intellectuals.

Several different streams of nationalism spread in Eastern European Jewish society during the course of the nineteenth century. The Zionists advocated the Jews' return to Eretz Israel and the establishment of a national home there. Other movements championed solutions that involved Jewish autonomy in their countries of residence. The ideological preferences of the various movements influenced their attitude toward Jewish ethnography and folklore as well.

For the Zionists, Eastern European Jewish folklore, which circulated in Yiddish and was an expression of Jewish life in the Diaspora, could not serve the ideological goal of rejecting Diaspora traditions in favor of a revival of the ancient national culture in Eretz Israel. We should recall that for Jews, enlisting folklore in the service of nationalism had a different mean-

[5] A short list of his publications: on beliefs and superstitions: Lew 1905, 30–31; on folk medicine: Lew 1896, 35–48, 1897, 38–49; on food: Lew 1897, 31; on the question of Jewish folklore: Lew 1897, 8; Lew 1897, 14–19; Lew 1897, 558–561; on proverbs: Lew 1898, 318–336, 551–559, 768–772; on Jewish humor: Lew 1898; on death and burial customs: Lew 1899, 17–23.

ing than it did for other European peoples who aspired to self-determination and needed to collect and study their folklore as a means of substantiating their national identity. The Jews did not need to prove that they had a national culture, since its greatest treasures had been written down for centuries. Nevertheless, some of the pioneers of Jewish ethnography and folklore in Eastern Europe were fervent Zionists who, no less than their colleagues from other ideologies, felt a great love for Jewish folk culture. On the other hand, their Zionism affected their work in that it led them to publish folklore materials, both new anthologies of ancient folklore and collections of the folklore of Eastern European Jews, originally in Yiddish, in Hebrew.

The most important contribution to folklore studies was made by the "national poet," Hayim Nahman Bialik (1873–1934). Bialik's link to Jewish folklore was manifested on three levels: (1) his use of Jewish folklore in his poetry and narrative fiction; (2) his program to collect and preserve the outstanding exemplars of Jewish literature over the generations; and (3) his co-editorship of the journal *Reshumot,* an anthology of Jewish memoirs, ethnography, and folklore.

Bialik was attracted to Jewish folklore in his earliest poetry, in works such as "The Queen of Sheba" and "Jacob and Esau," which are based on the aggadah. His fascination with folksongs led him to attempt to write Hebrew lyrics modeled on them – he called them "quasi-folksongs." Between 1907 and 1909 he published five such works in *Ha'Shiloah,* and another eight in *Ha'Olam* in 1910 (Shamir 1986).

During the year (1904) he spent in Warsaw as literary editor of *Ha'Shiloah,* Bialik forged close ties with I. L. Peretz, the author who encouraged attention to folklore and brought Yiddish to the center of the cultural stage in Poland. Bialik also translated stories by the Brothers Grimm and by Hans Christian Andersen into Hebrew, adapted and wrote folktales collected in *Va'yehi ha'Yom,* and produced a volume of children's poems, some of them based on Yiddish folksongs.[6]

As noted, Bialik devised a project for cultural revival in Eretz Israel, a compilation program (Tohnit Ha'Kinus) to collect and preserve the best literature of past generations in Hebrew translation. With regard to folklore, he edited and published, with his friend Yehoshua Hone Rawnitzki, *Sefer Ha'Aggada* (The Book of Legends), a collection of retold tales from classical Hebrew and Aramaic sources intended to promote the revival of the Hebrew new culture. The compilation project was also to include folklore, including materials that circulated orally. In his address to the national conference of the Association for Hebrew Language and Culture, held in Kiev in 1910, he proposed publication of a Hebrew-language monthly to serve as a venue for Jewish folk literature, which would "collect all the sayings, conversations, and witticisms, gathering them so they can serve as the basis for the literary efforts of the future" (Bialik 1935, 1, 12).

To a large extent *Reshumot* (about which more later) can be seen as the realization of this program. Nevertheless, despite his attachment to Yiddish and to Jewish folklore, Bialik chose to write in Hebrew. In this he was motivated – in addition to his Zionist ideology and the influence of Ahad Ha'Am – by the fervent belief that Yiddish was doomed. Consequently whatever

[6] It is possible that Bialik's strong attachment to Yiddish language influenced his attraction to folklore. Bialik also wrote poetry in Yiddish, spoke Yiddish with his colleagues, seasoning it with many folk expressions (Gliksberg 1953, 171), wrote letters in the language (Werses 2008, 35), and even defended it against hostile attacks as the language "in which our ancestors and our ancestors' ancestors spoke for many generations.."

was written in that language, whether folk culture or literary works by prominent Yiddish authors, had to be translated into Hebrew in order to survive and inspire future readers and authors.

Itzik Manger, who highlighted the importance of Yiddish literature because of its links with folklore and considered Hebrew literature to have deliberately severed its connection with folklore, so that it was no longer an organic expression of the life of the Jewish people, wrote that Bialik, with his intimate knowledge of Yiddish folk literature, was the last "Jewish" poet to write in Hebrew.[7]

It is important to mention the contribution of M.Y. Bin Gorion (Berdyczewski) to the study of Jewish folklore. Bin Gorion published several anthologies of Jewish folktales in Hebrew that were translated by his wife, Rachel Bin Gorion Ramberg, to German and published in Germany (Bin Gorion 1913-1927; 1916-1923; 1939-1945; 1956; 1976).

Another pioneer of Jewish folklore studies in Eastern Europe and after that in Eretz Israel, a Zionist through and through, was Alter (Asher Abraham Abba) Druyanow (1870–1938), who is represented in the fourth chapter of this book. His contribution to the study of folklore took the form of collecting Eastern European Jewish folklore and especially the anthology *Sefer ha-Bedihah ve-ha-hiddud* (Book of jokes and witticisms), in which he made a major contribution to the theory of Jewish humor. In Odessa in 1918 he also spearheaded the founding of *Reshumot,* along with Bialik and Rawnitzki.

All of Druyanow's work, including *Reshumot,* was in Hebrew. The title pages of volumes 1–4 of *Reshumot* list him as the editor, "in association with" Rawnitzki and Bialik. The first volume was published in Odessa, by the Moriah publishing house, and reprinted in Tel Aviv by Dvir. Five more volumes, until 1930, appeared under the Dvir imprint only. Druyanow withdrew from the project after volume 4; volumes 5 and 6 were edited by Bialik and Rawnitzki.

The goal of *Reshumot* was made quite clear in the editors' preface to volume I, namely that it was an organ for research and study of the life of the people and its folklore, and for the collection and assembly of such materials. The editors hoped thereby to involve the general public, from whom was required "not excessive expertise and no particular literary talent, but a measure of understanding of the subject, some warmth towards it, and a little good-will".

The editors appealed to anyone who held the people and its culture close to their hearts to send subject-matter to *Reshumot*. The sentences opening volume I describe the trials and tribulations of publication, and express the editors' commitment to carry on. The appeal to readers is emotional, ending with the declaration: "We must make haste to deliver from the teeth of annihilation everything that can be saved". The periodical was planned to contain six sections: Ways of Life, Faith and Religion, Language and Literature, Art and Poetry, Historic Documents, and Miscellaneous. Each section had its particular subdivisions. For example, under Ways of Life there was a place for accounts of remote communities, famous people, livelihood and crafts of Jews, special foods, and dress. The details of the sections and the areas of interest were printed at the beginning of every volume of *Reshumot*.

The structure of the volumes of this first series was alike in all of them, including features on the Diaspora, memoirs, customs, texts, and letters. The slight differences arose from the

[7] It may also be interpreted as the last Yiddish poet to write in Hebrew. For more on this subject see Chapter 7, on Itzik Manger.

nature of the subject-matter that was collected and assembled. Volume III is exceptional: it is entirely devoted to the decimation of the Jews of Russia, principally Ukraine. Druyanov dedicated this volume to Bialik on his fiftieth birthday.

The second cycle of *Reshumot* (*Reshumot* – New Series) appeared from 1945 to 1953. The editors were Yom-Tov Levinsky and Dov Shtok (Sadan), except for the sixth and final volume, which was edited by Levinsky and Yohanan Tversky. The new series too was published by Dvir.

It should be noted, however, that some Zionist folklorists published their work in Yiddish. Pinhas Graubard (1892-1952), one of the Warsaw circle that gathered around Noyekh Prilutski, published songs of thieves, prisoners, and prostitutes in the most important collection produced by the Warsaw folklorists, *Bay undz yidn*, edited by M. Vanvild. He also edited an anthology of literature and folklore (1914) and, along with Shmuel Lehman, published Yiddish folksongs in the Frischmann jubilee volume (1914).

We must not omit folklorists who were affiliated with the religious Zionist party Mizrachi. Rabbi Judah Leib Avida (pen name: Yehuda Elzet; 1887-1962) was active in Poland in 1910-1920, and after that in Canada and South Africa, and, after 1949, in Israel. He published in Yiddish (on prayers, 1918; on the human body, 1920; proverbs, sayings, and anecdotes, 1918–1920; on trades and tradesmen, 1920; and on food, 1920) as well as in Hebrew (on customs, in the journal *Reshumot*, 1918).

Rabbi Yeshayahu Zlotnick (1892–1943) published a three-volume *Folklore Humash* (1937–38), a lexicon of Jewish wisdom (1930), and festival folklore (1930).

As mentioned the Zionist vision was not the only expression of the Jewish national awakening in Europe. There were other Jewish national movements, including Folkism, Bundism, and Territorialism, which had in common a fondness for the Yiddish language and a romantic view of it as embodying the ethos of the Jewish people.[8] In this respect we are dealing with a phenomenon that students of nationalism like Benedict Anderson (1983), Ernst Geller (1983), and Eric Hobsbawm (1990), who assumed the existence of one imagined community for each national movements, have ignored. As Itsik Gottesman rightly noted, the Jews of that age entertained a multiplicity of imagined communities and not only Zionism, to which these scholars generally refer (Gottestman 2003, XII).

The term *Yiddishism* does not represent a political party, though it is occasionally used in this fashion and was current even before the term received its definitive meaning at the Czernowitz Conference of 1908. That conference aimed at giving the Yiddish language a respectable status and resolved that Yiddish was a national language of the Jews.

Yiddishism was a secular ideology that saw the Yiddish language as the factor unifying the Jewish people and having the potential to guarantee its survival. It is difficult to point to a single person or event that marks its beginning. But even if we cannot pin down its origins, its key theoreticians are readily identifiable. The most important may have been Chaim Zhitlowsky (1865–1943).

Zhitlowsky was born in Vitebsk, White Russia. He began his political career as a Russian populist, and later helped found the Social Revolutionary Party in 1880s in Zurich. He was among the first of the Russified Jewish socialists to "return to his people" and in so doing

[8] The topic of Yiddishism and the study of folklore was discussed widely by Itzik Gottesman. (Gottesman 2003).

placed the language of the people at the cornerstone of a new alliance of socialism and Jewish nationalism. After the pogroms of 1903 Zhitlowsky turned to territorialism after finding the Bund's program too internationalist in its approach. He became associated with the seimists, a socialist Jewish group which sought some measure of cultural autonomy as part of its program, while arguing against any immediate solution. Zhitlowsky's arrival in the United States in 1904 was the crucial event in the formation of a secular Yiddish culture there. The earliest Yiddish schools in America called 'National-Radical' schools, were founded by his followers in the then evolving Labor Zionist Party. In Eastern Europe all Yiddishist intellectuals considered him their mentor.

For Zhitlowsky the Jews were essentially a Diaspora nation; he believed that the Yiddish language could serve as a substitute for the Jewish religion and make it possible for Jews to develop a new secular culture. In terms of the history of Jewish folklore, Zhitlowsky's views were key for they held that to understand the 'folkslebn', the folklife of the Jews one needed to use, to study and appreciate the language of the folk. Another important voice in favor of secular Yiddish culture was that of Simon Dubnow (1860–1941). In 1907, Dubnow founded the Folkist Party in Russia, which included many Yiddishists in its ranks. He viewed the Jews' dispersion in the Diaspora as the highest level of development of nationalism. In their Diaspora the Jews maintained national unity without territory, based exclusively on the historic consciousness of the people (Dubnow 1958). For Yiddishists, of course, this idea was congenial. Many of the key Yiddishists of the next generation, such as Nakhum Shtiff, the initiator of YIVO, were active in this party. Dubnov's emphasis on autonomy, self-sufficiency and national institutions surely inspired the founding of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in 1925 which would lay the foundation for Yiddish folklore studies for the fifteen years.

Although this nationalism based on language originated among Jewish intellectuals, it was influenced by the non-Jewish environment and especially by Polish nationalism. This movement, which began after the last partition of Poland in 1795, adopted the Polish language as a key element, elevated into a symbol of national independence by the linguistic repression that followed the carving up of Poland by the great powers (Coleman 1934, 155-172).

Obviously the problem that Jewish folklore represented for Zionism did not exist for Yiddishists. On the contrary: folklore in Yiddish was bound up with the study of the present. Following Johann von Herder, Yiddish folklorists believed that its language is the supreme achievement of every nation and that the most important thing a people creates in this language is its folklore, which expresses its pristine spirit. For the Yiddishists, philological and folklore studies were a means to bond with the masses.

Even before the First World War, Yiddish folklorists rang up impressive achievements. But their most intensive activity took place between the two world wars. Their crowning achievement was the work of the ethnographic commission set up by YIVO (the Yiddish Scientific Institute).

As noted by Itsik Gottesman (2003, XVII), the earliest folklore research inspired by the Yiddishist ideology can be found in *Der Hoyzfroynd,* a periodical edited by Mordekhai Spector. In 1889 he published an article by Joseph Judah Lerner on Yiddish folk songs. In his introduction, Lerner crossed swords with the Zionists and the assimilationists who had made Yiddish their punching bag. The core of his argument is the controversy with the anti-Yiddish intellectuals (a controversy that would later resurface in M. Vanvild's introduction to the major

publication of the Warsaw folklorists, *Bay undz Yidn* 1923). They maintained that Yiddish did not permit the expression of profound or lofty thoughts or sentiments and therefore could not be the language of great poetry. To refute this idea, Lerner presents a number of folk songs (which he seems to have collected in Odessa). He shows that anyone who ignores folk songs is turning his back on the crown jewels of Jewish art. Here folk songs are enlisted in the struggle on behalf of the Yiddish language in order to prove that there is a people that speaks Yiddish and creates commendable art in its language.

In 1895, Spector's journal published the impressive list of 2,000 proverbs collected by Ignatz Bernstein. Ignatz Bernstein published an expanded version of his anthology of Yiddish proverbs in 1908. The introduction, which explains his method of classification, is in a foreign language (German). Bernstein intimates that by collecting the proverbs he viewed himself as helping in the birth of the national consciousness of the Jewish people.

Isaac Leibush Peretz, renowned as the greatest Yiddish author and a key figure in Jewish Warsaw, anchored folklore firmly at the center of the national movement when he began collecting Yiddish songs in 1890 and urged his friends to do likewise.

At the turn of the-century (1901), the historians Saul Ginzburg and Pesach Marek published their important anthology, *Yevreyskiye narodnye pesny*. This is a scholarly work with the text of the songs in Yiddish transcription, although the annotations are in Russian. Ginzburg and Marek's introduction includes a whiff of Yiddishism in its praise for the Yiddish songs created by the masses and support for the struggle of the Yiddish language to coexist with Hebrew.

In 1908, at the Czernowitz conference, I. L. Peretz maintained that the hasidic story marked the beginning of modern literature in Yiddish. Peretz's influence was, as noted, weighty. Some credit his influence with An-Ski's return to his people and the massive push given to the study of Jewish folklore (see chapter 2).

In 1912, Y. L. Cahan (1881–1937) published a collection of Yiddish folk songs with their melodies (see chapter 3).

Two other events of importance for Yiddish folklore studies took place before the First World War. The first – in 1913, Shmuel Niger edited and published *Der Pinkes,* the first collection of scholarly essays and articles devoted to Yiddish philology. Yiddish folklore occupied a prominent place in it, with three essays on the subject. The second – the ethnographic expedition headed by S. An-Ski and funded by Baron Guenzburg operated between 1912 and 1914 (when the war put an end to its work). Its members traveled through small towns in the Ukraine and collected a vast quantity of folklore materials (see chapter 2).

The activity of Yiddish-oriented folklorists between the two world wars was diverse. Their activity was focused in Warsaw and Vilna (then part of Poland). Because this topic has been treated at length by Gottesman (2003) I will be brief here.

The Warsaw group centered around the philologist, attorney, politician, and folklorist Noyekh Prilutski (1882–1941), who published the *zamelbikher* (collections) of folklore material collected by himself and his associates (Prilutski 1912). He also co-edited the *Arkhiv* of ethnographic materials with Shmuel Lehman (Prilutski and Lehman 1924–1933) and published folksongs in Yiddish (Prilutski 1911, 1913).

The most productive collector in Prilutski's circle was Shmuel Lehman (1886–1941), whose work was published by Prilutski, Graubard, and Vanvild. In 1921 he published the col-

lection *Arbayt un Frayhat* (Labor and Freedom), edited by M. Vanvild. In 1923 he put out collections of *Purimshpils*, children's folklore, and thieves songs in the most important collection produced by the Warsaw folklorists, *Bay undz yidn*, edited by M. Vanvild (the pen-name of Yoseph Dikshtein, 1889–1942, who also used the pseudonym Leib Kava).[9] In 1922 he published folklore related to the World War in the Vilna-based *Lebn,* edited by Moshe Shalit. In 1928 he published thieves' songs, with melodies, edited and published by Pinhas Graubard. In 1926 he published thieves' love songs in *Landoy bukh* (1925).Lehman continued to collect folklore even in the Warsaw ghetto.

Another member of Prilutski's circle, between 1909 and 1912 (when he emigrated to New York) was A. Almi (Elia Chaim Scheps) (1892–1968), who was considered to the biographer of the group's activity. His most important contribution consisted of stories about the Polish rebellion of 1863, which he recorded from his grandmother, Chaya Scheps, and from Shlomo Hirsch Likerman; they first appeared in *Moment* in 1910 and 1911 and were later republished in volumes in Yiddish (1927) and Polish (1929).[10]

Another collector was the so-called "people's poet," Hershl Danilevitsh (1882–1941), who published soldiers' songs, riddles, and anecdotes in *Bay undz Yidn,* already mentioned. He also published seven songs of heder boys in *Reshumot* (1930).

The Historical Ethnographic Society was established in Vilna in February 1919 by An-Ski; after his death, on November 8, 1920, the group took his name. This society made a major contribution to the study of Jewish folklore and ethnography in Eastern Europe. At An-Ski's suggestion it steered clear of politics and focused on collecting materials related to Jewish archaeology, ethnography, history, and art.[11] In 1922 it established a number of sections: music, folklore, history, art, an An-Ski section, a cataloguing section, and literature and community books section. It also set up a museum, library, and archives. The folklore section was headed by the educator Shloyme (Shlomo) Bastomski. Other key figures were Khaykl Lunsky and Isaac Broides. After the establishment of YIVO in 1925, the Society transferred its library and archives to the new institute, while YIVO's museum collection was transferred to its museum, directed by Moshe Shalit. In 1928, materials collected by An-Ski arrived from Russia; the An-Ski museum was established in 1932. Between 1937 and 1939 the Society also published a periodical, *Fun noents ove* (from the recent past).

The most productive folklore collector was Shloyme Bastomski, who constantly emphasized the link between folklore and education. In 1919 he published *At the Source: Yiddish Proverbs, Sayings, Aphorisms, Expressions, Similes, Blessings, Wishes, Curses, Vehement Curses, Omens, Folk Remedies, and Folk Beliefs*. In 1922, a collection of folksongs as an appendix to *Pinkes: To the History of Vilne during the years of war and occupation*. In 1925 he edited a collection of legends about the Baal Shem Tov. He also served as editor of two popular periodicals for children that included folklore materials: *Der khaver* and *Grininke beymelekh*.

The institution that achieved the most impressive results, despite the constraints that accompanied its work was namely, YIVO. The establishment of the Yiddish Scientific Institute was a natural and inevitable part of the activities in interwar Jewish Poland. That country had

[9] Vanvild's introduction has been translated into Hebrew and published in the periodic *Chuliyot* 9, 357-361.

[10] I have translated this collection into Hebrew and hope to publish it with commentaries in the near future.

[11] In this regard it continued, to a large extent, the work of its predecessor, the Vilna Society of Lovers of Jewish Antiquities.

become the center of autonomous Jewish culture. Alongside traditional religious life there was an attempt to create an autonomous and secular Jewish culture, based on Yiddish as a national language, as the foundation for national autonomy. Jewish culture blossomed despite the adverse conditions. This was manifested by the existence of a thriving Jewish press, a Yiddish theater that reached the pinnacle of its success, a Jewish film industry, and of course original Yiddish literature. There was also a network of Jewish schools that represented a spectrum of ideological approaches.

The goal of the YIVO Institute, established in 1925, was to organize learned research into various areas of Jewish culture while providing an appropriate setting for research and publication and setting uniform standards for scholarly work.

In keeping with its Yiddishist ideology, the Institute tried to deal with contemporary phenomena among the Jews. Folklore received prominent attention at YIVO. In keeping with the Yiddishist ideology that folklore was in the service of the language, an ethnographic commission was set up as part of the philological section on October 27, 1925, shortly after YIVO itself was founded. The commission's main goal was to organize the collection of Jewish folklore "wherever the Yiddish language is alive," in the words of Chaim Chayes, its secretary. The task was seen as extremely urgent, both because of the reigning principle of folkloristics in that era, which held that a large and properly catalogued archive was a precondition for any scholarly work in the subject, and because of the fear that material was vanishing as a result of the changes taking place in Eastern European Jewish society and had to be rescued now or never.

The commission decided to set up a network of volunteer collectors *(zamlers)* throughout Poland and, if possible, other countries, affiliated with Yiddish cultural institutions, mainly schools. Announcements about the collectors' network were made in meetings, periodicals, and Institute bulletins.

The following example comes from *Yugnt Veker,* the organ of the Bund youth organization, published in Warsaw. "The [YIVO] ethnographic commission issues a fervent call to all lovers and friends of Yiddish folk art, especially teachers in all the Jewish schools, and young people all over: Help us collect the treasures of Yiddish folk art! In the cities and towns, places where the Yiddish language is alive! … Don't allow them to be lost."

The commission published monthly questionnaires on various folklore topics and asked the collectors to focus on the set theme. But it allowed them freedom of action in collecting other items.

If we look at this project today we cannot miss its audacious scope, especially for a newly established institution beset by economic difficulties and considering that the members of the ethnographic commission had no formal training in folkloristics and were all autodidacts in the subject. Their ambition was a direct result of the enthusiasm and sense of mission that informed them.

These proved infectious. A network of hundreds of volunteer collectors grew up. To give some idea of the scale of their labors, consider that within a year the archive contained some 15,000 items. By 1927 it had grown to 20,000, by 1928 to 50,000, and by 1935 to 100,000 items.

The commission's work was marked by a personal relationship with the collectors. It maintained a lively correspondence with them, was attentive to their needs, and did everything possible to assist them. This treatment increased their motivation; so did the fact that the col-

lectors' names were published in the YIVO bulletin. The commission organized competitions for the best shipments of folklore materials. Later some of the collections were published by YIVO.

The collectors' sense of participation was manifested in various projects they suggested to the commission. They set up collectors' groups in various places and proposed a folklore lending library and ways to expand the circle of informants. From the correspondence with collectors we can learn about their desire to increase their knowledge about the field in which they were working. In the wake of pressure from below, in February 1929 the ethnographic commission published a 32-page manual, *What is Jewish Ethnography?* written by N. Vaynig and Ch. Chayes and sent out to all the collectors.

The manual invokes the same arguments to justify the collection of Yiddish folklore as were used to defend the Yiddish language. In other words, folklore, the field most intimately identified with the Yiddish-speaking masses, had become a metonym for Yiddish culture in general.

In 1929, the ethnographic commission convened a conference of 14 leading collectors. Responding to an explicit request made at that meeting, the next year it organized a special course for collectors, with Y. L. Cahan of New York as the principal lecturer.

We should emphasize, however, that the commission drew a strict distinction between collectors and scholars. What would be done with the materials collected was left up to the scholars of the future – an approach that incidentally solved problems of the commission members themselves, that could not deal with the research at the time.

YIVO provided a mantle of scholarly respectability to folklore studies in its series *Filologishe Shriftn,* which included work on folklore starting with its very first volume, a festschrift for Dr. Alfred Landau. The ethnographic commission's end product was the anthology *Yidishe Folklor,* published in 1938, and edited by Cahan (who had died the previous year).

The collection of Yiddish folklore is usually noted as YIVO's most important accomplishment. There is no doubt that it was an impressive achievement realized in a very short period. The materials collected are diverse, though oral and written folklore predominates, in keeping with an ideology that saw folklore as serving the Yiddish language.

It is impossible to wind up this survey of the collection and study of Yiddish folklore without mentioning what was done in the Soviet Union. When the Bolsheviks seized power in late 1917 the Jews of Russia were granted equal rights. The years that followed were extremely difficult for the Jews with regard to religious observance and private property; there were many arrests during the 1920s and executions in the 1930s, especially of Jews who were politically active. On the other hand, after the Revolution the Jews suddenly had opportunities that had been closed to them in the past. With regard to Jewish folklore in Yiddish, the watershed was the Soviet decision on the nativation of the Yiddish-speaking Jews of the former Pale of Settlement. The authorities encouraged the establishment of Yiddish institutions, such as Yiddish-speaking Party cells, trade unions, schools, and cultural institutions. The Yevsektsia – the Jewish branch of the Communist Party – was established in 1918 and operated until 1930. Of course the regime exploited these institutions for its own purposes, namely, to conduct propaganda among the Jews. But Jewish activists and Jewish scholars, especially folklorists, took advantage of the opportunity to conduct research. In the late 1920s and early 1930s Kiev became the center of Yiddish folklore studies in the Soviet Union. The musicologist Moses Be-

regowski (1892–1962) established the Jewish Music Archives in that city. He and his colleagues collected Yiddish folklore in the major towns, such as Odessa and Kiev, and in the small towns of Volhynia, Podolia, and Galicia. Between 1922 and 1929 Z. Kiselgof led an expedition to collect Jewish folklore in Belorussia. Some of these collections were housed in the Ethnographic Museum in Leningrad. In 1936, the last Jewish ethnographic expedition of the Soviet era, led by Beregowski, visited Jewish agricultural collectives in Nikolayev province and recorded Yiddish folksongs and folktales.

An anthology of Soviet Jewish folksongs, edited by Beregowski and Itsik Feffer, was published In 1938, under the title *Yiddish Songs from the Soviet Union*. Another collection, edited by Y. Dobroshev and Y. Yuditsky, was published in Moscow.

Any discussion of these publications must reckon with the fact that Soviet ideology dictated the collectors' treatment of folklore. The Soviet Jewish folklorists were guided by the need to show that the study of Jewish folklore could uncover the latent socialism that had existed among the Jews even before the Bolshevik revolution and prove that the Jews had supported the revolution itself. Consequently, they emphasized materials that mocked the Czarist regime, on the one hand, and the rabbis, on the other. Folklore materials that supported Soviet policy were transcribed, while those critical of it were not, both because informants were afraid to transmit them and because of the researchers' own attitudes.

After the Second World War Beregowski began collecting Yiddish folklore from the war years. But in 1948 the Institute for Jewish Proletarian Culture in Kiev was shut down, putting an end to the study of Yiddish folklore in the Soviet Union.

CHAPTER II

S. AN-SKI (S.Z. RAPPOPORT) THE ETHNOGRAPHER OF THE JEWS AND HIS "JEWISH ETHNOPOETICS"

The long essay by S. An-Ski (Shlomo Zanvil Rappoport, 1863–1920), "Di yidishe folks-shafung," which appears here for the first time in an English translation, was originally published in 1908 in the Russian periodical *Perezhitoye,* which was the organ of the Jewish Historical and Ethnographic Society of St. Petersburg. In the Yiddish translation by Zalmen Rejzen it became the centerpiece of volume 15 – devoted to folklore and ethnography – of An-Ski's collected writings (An-Ski 1925).

In this essay, part of the vanguard of the study of Eastern European Jewish folklore at the start of the twentieth century, An-Ski coined the term "ethnopoetics," which has become central to modern folklore studies (Noy 1982, Roskies 1992).

Dov Noy has drawn on the essay in his article about An-Ski's place in Jewish folkloristics (Noy 1982, 1994). David Roskies (1992) has treated it in the context of An-Ski's return to Judaism – a spiritual return through folklore – which he sees as a special case of the general paradigm of the return to Judaism by leading cultural figures of the early twentieth century.

The essay embodies An-Ski's credo about various topics in the study of ethnography and folklore. To understand their significance we should first briefly survey An-Ski's approach to Jewish folklore, which makes sense only against the background of his life and the dramatic changes in it.[1]

We may assume that An-Ski first became interested in Jewish folklore as a child, in his native town of Chashnik, in Belorussia, and later in Vitebsk. In his writings, An-Ski frequently mentions items of folklore he remembers from his childhood and youth. In this essay, for example, he writes, "I too heard these songs [quoted by Orshansky] in my youth and still remember them."

When An-Ski left the Jewish milieu in 1888 and decided to settle in Yekaterinoslav, and later when, in the spirit of Russian populism *(narodnichestvo)* he went to live among coalminers, he began studying Russian folklore. During his years as a political exile in Paris he gained an acquaintance with European and especially French folklore (Roskies 1992).

The Russian populism that shaped his worldview, his life among the Russian masses and study of their folklore, and later his acquaintance with European and French folklore studies provided the tools that shaped his views of Jewish folklore. He saw the latter as a means to uncover modern Jewish life and as the symbolic language of Jewish history.

The watershed in An-Ski's life, which heralded his return to Judaism, evidently took place in 1900, after the death of Piotr Labrov (1823–1900), the theoretician of *narodnichestvo,*

[1] For a detailed chronology of major events in An-Ski's life, see Safran 2006, xv–xxix.

whom An-Ski served as secretary. Many have inquired into the reasons for this reorientation and concluded that it involved a combination of factors, including the pogroms in Russia in 1905–1906, the amnesty granted to the exiled radicals and their return to Russia, the changes taking place in Jewish life all over Europe – namely, the organized Jewish movements – and the new periodicals that dealt with contemporary affairs (Lunski 1920; Zeitlin 1921; Shatsky 1951; Noy 1982, Roskies 1992). It seems to me, however, that Roskies is closest to the mark when he writes that none of these can explain his decision to focus on Jewish folklore, because the Russian populism that brought An-Ski to folklore in the first place was fundamentally universal. What was required was the catalyst provided by the work of I. L. Peretz.[2] An-Ski, who was always attracted to the aesthetic element in Jewish tradition, attests that he was strongly impressed by his first encounter with Peretz's writings in 1901 (An-Ski 1928). Here he discovered, for the first time, that it was possible to draw on folklore and express modernism and European sentiments in Yiddish. All this led An-Ski to return to the Jewish people and to Jewish folklore as the pinnacle of this return.

In 1906 An-Ski began fifteen years of engagement with Jewish folklore, which ended only with his death in 1920. Most of the activity was conducted in Russia (1906–1918) and some in Poland (1918–1920).

An-Ski began the work that would make the study of Jewish folklore possible by setting up a network of Jewish culture institutions. The Jewish Historical and Ethnographical Society of St. Petersburg, founded in 1892 with the assistance of Shimon Dubnow and the Association for Folk Music in St. Petersburg, began a new burst of activity in 1908 (the year the essay was published), marked by the founding of the Jewish monthly *Yevreiski Mir* (Jewish world) and the appointment of An-Ski as its literary editor. With the support of the various societies, An-Ski launched a lecture tour through the Pale of Settlement; his focus was on Jewish folklore, but he also dealt with Yiddish language and literature and various ideological topics (Shalit 1929, 311–314). Later, in 1919, he founded the Historical and Ethnographic Society in Vilno.[3] During the last year of his life he was trying to establish a similar group in Warsaw.[4]

The zenith of his folklore research was the ethnographic expedition that set out on July 1, 1912 – known at the time as the Guenzburg expedition after Baron Horace Guenzburg, and today universally referred to as the "An-Ski expedition." He related to the expedition as his life's mission and saw it as a project of Jewish national scope. The expedition, in which An-Ski worked with a group of scholars and fieldworkers (Trunk 1982, 229–245),[5] visited some 70 Jewish communities in Volhynia and Podolia and collected Jewish folklore, including stories, songs, and proverbs, and documented and collected items of material culture and folk art.

According to An-Ski's 1915 letter to the editor of *Evreiskaia Starina*, the expedition brought back more than 2,000 photographs of synagogues and ornaments, Jewish historical buildings, monuments and gravestones, and individuals; some 1,800 stories, legends, sayings,

[2] On Peretz's contribution to the study of Jewish folklore, see Kiel 1992.

[3] On the legacy of An-Ski and the Historical-Ethnographical Society in Vilna, see Kuznitz 2006, 320–345.

[4] The group of YIVO collectors in Warsaw also bore his name (Noy 1982).

[5] The members of the expedition included Solomon Yudovin, Joel Engel, Zinovii Kisselgof, Abraham Rechtman, Itzhak Pikengur, and Samuel Schaier.

and the like were transcribed; more than 1,500 folk songs and 1,000 melodies were recorded; 50 old manuscripts and ledgers were retrieved; and more than 700 items, almost all of them antiques made of silver, brass, and wood (spice boxes, Hanukkah menorahs, Sabbath lamps and candlesticks, Torah finials and breastplates), as well as items for daily use, were collected (Bowlt 2006, 315).

Selected items from the expedition's treasures were exhibited in St. Petersburg in 1914 and in the Petrograd Museum in 1917 (closed after the revolution and reopened in 1923 as the only Jewish museum in Soviet Russia). In 1929, when the authorities accused the Jewish Ethnographic Society of engaging in counterrevolutionary propaganda and shut it down, many items were transferred to the Mendele Moikher Seforim All-Ukrainian Museum for Jewish Culture in Odessa, which had opened in 1927. In 1926 the ethnographic department of the Russian Museum catalogued items that An-Ski had deposited for safekeeping in 1917. In 1930 these items, along with others from An-Ski's collection, became the Ashkenazi Jewish collection of the Leningrad Municipal Ethnographic Museum; they were damaged during the bombardment of Leningrad in 1941. In 1952, the silver ritual objects were transferred from the former Jewish Museum in Odessa to the Historical Museum in Kiev. Documents, manuscripts, recordings, and texts were sent to the Institute of Proletarian Jewish Culture in Kiev; in the 1990s they were transferred to the V. I. Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine. Other materials are scattered in archives, libraries, and museums in St. Petersburg, Kiev, Minsk, and Moscow. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the ritual objects have been on display in the Russian Ethnographic Museum. Between 1992 and 1995 some of the An-Ski collections were exhibited in Amsterdam, Cologne, Frankfurt, Jerusalem, and New York (Lukin 2006).

Even though this was the first fieldwork in the study of Jewish folklore that applied the research tools of modern folkloristics, An-Ski was clearly motivated by more than mere scientific curiosity. It is hard to reject Roskies' conclusion that An-Ski's personality played a central role and that only his physical return to his people had the power to transform the theory he had acquired in his earlier life into practical activity and convert the archaeologist delving into the treasures of the past into an inspired missionary. A direct result of the expedition's labors was the folklore questionnaire about life-cycle events, which goes under the name of the Russian Jewish ethnologist Lev Sternberg (1861–1927). The questionnaire comprises 2,087 questions, divided into five sections, ranging from conception to death.

At the same time, An-Ski was writing down and formulating his theory about Jewish folklore. An-Ski's most important articles (including the one presented here), reprinted in volume 15 of his collected writings, reflect his attempt to treat all the genres of Jewish folklore and to develop a comprehensive theory about it. He deals with legends about blood libels, Jewish folk songs, children's songs, charms and oaths, riddles, proverbs and sayings, and legends about synagogues. The weakness of his articles is that most of them were published *before* the expedition, when only scanty materials had been collected in the field. In practice, the only material available to him came from the two anthologies published until 1901: Ginzburg and Marek's collection of 367 Jewish folk songs and Ignaz Bernstein's collection of 4000 proverbs and maxims (see capter 1). Nevertheless, these publications, despite its ambitions to generalize and summarize without an adequate material basis, may console us for An-Ski's premature death and the fact that he was never able to realize his hopes of publishing a volume to sum up the work of the expedition and the material it collected.

The essay "Jewish Ethnopoetics," which was written in 1908, before the ethnographic expedition was even contemplated, reflects the diverse areas that An-Ski considered to be essential for the study of folklore and ethnography.

(1) The need to interest the intelligentsia in Jewish folklore. An-Ski begins by criticizing the apathy about this expression of the national character and outlook of the Jewish people. He does mention the first stirrings of interest in the study of Jewish folklore, in the article by Ilya Orshansky (1846–1875), a Russian-Jewish attorney and journalist who gained prominence for his efforts on behalf of Jewish emancipation in Russia and insisted on the scholarly and social importance of the study of Jewish folklore, as well as the anthologies assembled by Ginzburg and Marek and by Bernstein (see above). But the paucity of what existed attested to the vast treasures that had not yet been collected and written down.

(2) The need for ethnographic work to collect folklore in the places where it is still alive. An-Ski lists the names of the Russian Jewish scholars who made major contributions to the ethnography of other nations, including Dall, Schein, Sternberg, Krol, Bogoraz ("Tan"), and Jochelson, but kept their distance from Jewish folklore. "The Jewish people are still waiting for their own ethnographer," he complains. He concludes the introductory section of the essay with the call, "the time has come to create Jewish ethnography!" – a call that would be realized four years later, when he set out at the head of the ethnographic expedition and became the Jewish ethnographer himself.

(3) The need for scholarly induction to produce a theory about the distinct features of Jewish folklore. The crux of the article is a discussion of this question of Jewish ethnopoetics, which expresses the spirit of the Jewish people and its preference for spiritual perfection over physical might. An-Ski endeavors to support his thesis as follows:

First he offers a historical survey of Jewish folklore, from the Bible to his own time. He points out that whereas the Pentateuch preserves traces of an ancient aggressiveness and bellicosity, these disappear among the prophets. The talmudic attitude toward physical bravery is quite negative. Among the examples he cites are the legends about Alexander the Great, which highlight wisdom, justice, and mercy, whereas the battles are passed over in silence and physical prowess is treated with a tinge of irony. Later Jewish folklore retains this proclivity for spirit over matter; the purpose of human life and human happiness are to be found in spiritual perfection and in a pious life focused on Torah study. An-Ski brings examples from various genres, such as proverbs and maxims (e.g., "the Torah is the best merchandise"), tales, legends, and songs. The ideal image of the Jewish man is the scholar. He is known for his physical weakness, as "thin, delicate, silky, quiet as a dove, and so on"; the ultimate praise is that someone was "a soul without a body."

He observed the same tendency in the Jewish folklore of his own era, when people were abandoning the Torah and religious tradition, except that religious learning is replaced by the secular grail of a European enlightment. Nevertheless, An-Ski acknowledges that there are other veins in this modern folklore, too, such as a willingness to take up arms to defend human dignity.

Next he examines the various genres – legends, tales, songs, proverbs and maxims, and compares certain aspects of folk songs and folktales. For example, An-Ski shows how the figure of Elijah the Prophet has one image in legends and tales and another in folksong. In the former, he always appears in disguise, which are many and diverse. His role is that of deliverer

and redeemer, or of a scholar who teaches or studies Torah with those who merit his presence. In folk songs, by contrast, his role is national. He does not appear in disguise and his main role is to entreat for the return of the Jewish people to their land and to proclaim the approaching redemption.

An-Ski goes on to emphasize the distinctive features of Jewish folklore in the more general context of European folklore. Jewish and European folklore share the same paradigms; the difference between them lies in the content: the unmistakable veneration of physical strength in European folklore versus the spiritual orientation of Jewish folklore. To the heroic epics of Europe he contrasts the spiritual might of the Jewish hero, who acts by speech rather than by the sword. The Jewish hero can lay waste to cities, destroy armies, and subdue wild animals by the force of his words alone. Instead of the duels between paladins of European epic, the *tzaddik,* the righteous man or wonder-working rabbi, battles against the evil inclination.

In hasidic folklore, the knight-errant gives way to the itinerant rebbe who travels through towns and villages, generally in the company of his closest disciples, like the knight's squires and pages.[6] His mission, however, is not out to save damsels in distress, but to ransom captives, redeem the souls of sinners, fight against evil spirits, and so on. An-ski parallels the chivalric tournaments of European folklore with the accounts of the public theological disputations imposed on the Jews by their Christian overlords.

The place of the simpleton or fool of European folklore (the *durachok* of Russian folklore), who is eventually revealed to be wise and resourceful, is taken in Jewish folklore by the hidden *tzaddik* (the *nister*), who can act where the great ones prove powerless.[7]

An-Ski examines two central motifs associated with space and time. A common theme of European folklore is the sudden appearance of a palace or castle in an isolated spot (forest or steppe) or a hero who builds a palace overnight. In European folklore, this motif involves knights, witches, and beautiful princesses. In Jewish folklore the *dramatis personae* are the Patriarchs, Elijah, angels, and *tzaddikim.* Another central motif of European folklore, the "shortcut" or "rapid motion," where it is accomplished by means of material objects such as seven-league boots, is implemented in Jewish folklore by the force of the *tzaddik*'s spirituality and his words or thoughts. Generally it is not the hero who moves swiftly, but the ground beneath him.

The essay, which makes such vigorous points about Jewish folklore, is not lacking in methodological difficulties. An-Ski does rely on textual analysis, but it is not always clear *which* texts are being analyzed. He does not document the folk material. Because the essay was written before the fieldwork of the ethnographical expedition, it is far from clear what material he is relying on, other than the two anthologies mentioned above.

He frequently makes sweeping generalizations. In particular, the article makes no distinction between legends and fairy of wonder tales.

Nevertheless, contemporary students of Jewish folklore cannot help being impressed by An-Ski's scope, sensitive analysis, and intuition. Many of his ideas have been verified by later scholars who applied the scientific methods developed since his time.

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[6] See also Bar-Itzhak, 1987.

[7] See also Noy 1959, 34-45; Bar-Itzhak 1978, 62-68.

By virtue of his contribution to locating folklore and ethnography at the center of the intellectual discipline of Judaic studies, to seeing fieldwork as the basis of folkloristic endeavors, and his attempt to develop a theory of Jewish folklore, even if it does not always rest on solid foundations, An-Ski is the keystone of Jewish folklore studies to the present day.

Jewish Ethnopoetics

S. An-Ski

Dedicated to my sister and friend Sarah Rappoport

A people's poetry depicts, vividly and in clear relief, the hidden inner world of national life, to which we are admitted neither by the pen of the diligent historian nor by the sharp eye of the chronicler. (Ilya Orshansky)

Go out and see what the people do (BT Eruvin 14b)[1]

One may boldly say that there is no other people who speak about themselves so much and know themselves so little as the Jews do. For many years, endless debates and passionate quarrels have been conducted in the Jewish press about the very essence of Jewishness, about peoplehood, about nationalism, about the great spiritual heritage, about national cultural values, and so on. On the other hand, among the Jews it is hard to find any genuine interest in Jewish culture, or concern for its preservation and future growth. There is not even a minimal conscious aspiration to study the national worldview and the national peculiarities of the Jewish people. We do not have any important cultural institutions, and our literature in all three languages (Yiddish, Hebrew, and Russian) lacks any material foundation. The handful of periodicals and two or three publishing houses – if they manage to survive – do so only thanks to the material support of private individuals or public and party institutions. We have almost no literary societies, no literary fund. Not only do we lack scholarly editions of our leading authors, in general we don't even have collected editions of their works or detailed biographies of many of them. Furthermore, we do not have a historical journal or a literature of memoirs, nor even serious monographs about the most important periods of our social and cultural life over the last century.

Our intelligentsia display even greater apathy in matters of Jewish ethnography and folklore, that treasury of folk art which provides the only way to discover the Jewish national character and to penetrate to the depths of the worldview of the Jewish people and its ethnographic-cultural and moral lineaments.

When we do touch on this topic, on the pages of our journals, it is generally addressed to others rather than to ourselves, not for self-knowledge but for self-defense, out of the need to free the Jews of some pain of some malevolent guilt, to deny some slander. It appears as if the Jews have no need for self-knowledge. It is enough for a Jew to know a few off-the-cuff Jewish sayings and jokes in order to consider himself to be knowledgeable and big expert in "Jewishness."

No one will deny that the ethnography and especially the folklore of an ancient civilized people that has been wandering for 2000 years among many civilized nations of the Aryan race may well be marked by great wealth and variety and have immense social weight. Nevertheless, much less has been done in the study of Jewish ethnography than in the ethnography of some tribe that is still on the level of semi-savagery. No few outstanding ethnographers have emerged among the Jews in Russia, but none of them has devoted time to studying Jewish ethnography. The well-known ethnographer, collector of Russian proverbs, and author of the *Explanatory Dictionary,* V. Dall,[2] who is of Jewish origin, did not write even two lines about Jewish ethnography. The same thing can be said about the collector of Russian folk songs, P. V. Schein.[3] The contemporary Jewish ethnographers, L. Y. Sternberg,[4] M. A. Krol, V. G. Bogoraz (Tan),[5] and V. I. Jochelson, who spent their best years in the Siberian tundra and were compelled by circumstances to devote themselves to the study of savage and half-savage nomads, the Buriats, the Yukagirs, the Gilyaks, the Chukchi, and others. But the Jewish people are still waiting for their own ethnographer.

More than 40 years ago, Ilya Orshansky,[6] who was perhaps the first to mention the question of Jewish folk art in the press, noted the unusual scientific and social importance of the study of Jewish folklore. Has anything been done in this area in almost half a century? If we leave out a number of insignificant articles published in periodicals and newspapers during that period, or more precisely during the last decade, we have been enriched by a total of two more or less important collections of folk songs and proverbs,[7] which contain about 400 songs (including variants and fragments) and about 4,000 proverbs.[8] This is all we have from the richest lode of Jewish folklore. Not only has nothing been published. No attempt has even been made to collect and record the folktales, legends, parables, spells, superstitions, and so on.

But the matter must not be delayed. Every year, and even every day, the most precious pearls of folk art are being lost. The older generation, that which preceded the cultural revolution, is departing this world and taking with it to the grave a millennia-old heritage of folk art.

The following note tells us something about the rapidity with which works of folk art are forgotten and vanish into oblivion.

In his articles, Orshansky includes, among other things, excerpts from very well-known folk songs, from the "Song about Death," from a satirical song about rich men who have lost their wealth, from the song about the two brothers (which closely resembes the "poem about a rich man and Lazar"), and others. I too heard these songs in my youth and still remember them. I can confirm without hesitation that about 30 years ago these were very popular among the masses of the people. But these songs are no longer to be found in the anthology of Ginzburg and Marek, whose contents were collected by some 50 persons all over Russia. We may conjecture that by the beginning of the twentieth century, 20 or 25 years after I heard them, they have been forgotten.

Our task today is to organize without delay the systematic collection of the works of folk art, of the monuments of the Jewish past, and to describe Jewish lifestyles over the generations. This task is not partisan, but national and cultural, and the best forces of our people must be mobilized and unified for it. The time has come to create Jewish ethnography!

1

The Nature and Character of Jewish Folk Poetics

Missing from Jewish art – not only the folk poetics but also the ancient national art (in the form in which it has come down to us) – are all those motifs of the folk lyrical art of the other civilized nations. In the most prominent ancient works, the fruit of the Jewish folk genius (the Pentateuch and Early Prophets) we can still discern fragments of the prehistoric epic and sagas. The epic is totally missing from the later examples of folk national art, including contemporary folklore; there are no heroic epics, no mention of heroic legends and songs of heroes, no poems with a warlike-patriotic spirit. There is no trace of what might be even slightly similar, in form and content, to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the Scandinavian sagas, the Russian heroic poems, the German *Niebelungenlied*, the French *chansons de geste,* and so on.

The motifs of idealization of physical bravery, of enthusiasm for the devil-may-care spirit of battle, of songs of panegyrics for the mighty deeds of the knights and their victories, are totally alien to Jewish national and folk poetics. We may say that the entire world of venerating and praising physical strength that celebrates its own prowess was alien to Jewish folk art.

The reason for this phenomenon lies chiefly in the fact that Jewish folk poetry derives from a totally different source than the folk art of the other civilized nations. All the folklore created among Christian peoples is rooted in the *pagan element,* which is based on the principles of materialism, struggles among the forces of nature, and the cult of personality. By contrast, Jewish folk art is imbued with *the idea of the oneness of the creator,* an idea that is fundamentally hostile to every form of war, allow no cult of personality, and elevates spiritual perfection above material achievement and, all the more so, above physical might.

Among the European peoples who had reached a high cultural level, more or less, by the time they embraced the Christian faith, the monotheistic philosophy encountered the pantheon of national gods of the traditional cult, the formed pagan worldview, and the consolidated pagan legend. If the masses gave up the national gods and the pagan cult, after stubborn and difficult opposition, not once over the course of several generations, they nevertheless preserved their loyalty to the pagan legend and the pagan worldview. These became the foundation stones for literary folk art in the form of tales, legends, beliefs, spells, customs, and to a certain extent also songs. The only influence of the Christian idea on contemporary European folklore is that the latter assimilated Christian names and events from Christian history and absorbed a number of legends that are woven with Christian colors but have remained fundamentally pagan.

Utterly different was the development of Jewish folk art. The Jewish people, who gave the world the idea of monotheism, accepted the new cult during the dawn of its cultural and national life, even before the nation had had time to create its own national pantheon, pagan worldview, and pagan legends. It is true that the Jewish masses were long unwilling to be satisfied with an abstract and spiritual god and went in search of concrete and material deities. This quest is symbolized by the biblical legend about Rachel, who stole her father's idols (Genesis 31:34). The masses who had only recently left Egypt voiced their demand to Aaron: "Come, make us a god who shall go before us" (Ex. 32:1). Afterwards too, for centuries, despite Moses' stern warnings and despite the fierce anger of all the prophets, at encounter with pagans the Israelites were swept away by their cult and its rites. They prostrated themselves before Dagan, Baal, Astarte, Molech, and many

other idols. But in Jewish eyes, all the pagan deities remained nonetheless *elohim aḥerim*[9] – "other gods"; their transient adoration did not leave behind any substantial imprint in Jewish art, nor does it seem to have had a significant influence on the Jewish world view. Ultimately the monotheistic cult became the national cult of the Jewish people and the only source of its folk art.

The second reason for this phenomenon lies in the extraordinary and unique patterns of Jewish national life during the last two thousand years. Because the Jewish people lost their land and independent statehood and wandered scattered among other nations, persecuted and powerless, it lacked a fruitful seedbed for its own sagas. Nor was there any reason to be thrilled by the bravery and victories of conquerors, of the heroes and knights of other peoples.

These two circumstances led to the almost total absence of the motif of heroism from Jewish folk art. We find instead its antithesis, motifs imbued with a disposition to prefer spiritual (intellectual and moral) perfection to material and physical might, however strong and powerful it may be.

The first product of the Jewish national genius was undoubtedly the Pentateuch. The vestiges of heroic sagas incorporated in it were repainted by authors of the prophetic age in different hues than the original. The Lord God of Hosts, *ish milḥamah* – the Warrior – turned into *el raḥum ve-ḥanun* – the "merciful and compassionate God." Fundamentally, however, the Pentateuch is imbued with a negative attitude towards material and especially physical might and an idealization of spiritual perfection. Many biblical passages that antedate the prophets are marked by a conspicuous tendency to present the side that is weaker in body but stronger in spirit as the victor, in almost every confrontation between individuals or nations. Abraham with a handful of his slaves overcomes four kings (Genesis 14). Jacob overcomes his brother Esau, who is stronger than him. While crossing the wilderness the Israelites destroyed tribes of giants, led by the titanic Og king of Bashan. Little David overcomes the giant Goliath.[10] And so on.

But all these victories over powerful armies or famous champions are attributed, not to the might and bravery of the victors, but exclusively to the outstretched arm of God. Moses constantly reminds the people that "God delivers their enemies into their hands." He cautions the people: "Lest you say to yourselves, 'My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me' " (Deut. 8:17) – for only fools think that. The intelligent person must understand that "How could one have routed a thousand, / Or two put ten thousand to flight, / Unless their Rock had sold them, / The Lord had given them up?" (Deut. 32:30). What is more, in most cases not only were these victories won with help of God, but He himself won them, with the rather thin participation of the Jewish army.

These hallmarks of Jewish art appear with even greater clarity and consistency in the prophetic writings than in the Pentateuch. Most of the prophets lived in ages when the Jewish people had to fight desperate wars against the armies of conquerors. Force of arms was needed not merely to preserve national independence but even to assure physical survival. Nevertheless, they did not arouse the people with their prophecies and encourage their martial spirit, summoning them to struggle and lauding the deeds of the brave and mighty in the killing fields, as was frequently done in such circumstances by the poets of the other nations. Instead, they applied the full vigor of their mighty rhetoric to return the people to the faithful service of God and warned them against the terrible punishments for their transgressions and sins in prophecies of the gravest defeats, destruction, slavery, and disgrace. It went so far that the greatest of the prophets, Jeremiah, was almost put to death for weakening the people's will.

The Prophets never stopped admonishing the Jews in the name of God: "Thus said the Lord: / Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom; / Let not the strong man glory in his strength; / Let not the rich man glory in his riches. / But only in this should one glory: / In his earnest devotion to Me. /For I the Lord act with kindness, / Justice, and equity in the world; / For in these I delight – declares the Lord" (Jer. 9:22–24).

Sometimes the Prophets do describe brave and powerful heroes. But they do this only in order to frighten the sinners and lawbreakers. The prophet Joel, who is describing the advent of "a day of darkness and gloom, a day of densest cloud blank," proclaims: "Spread like soot over the hills / A vast, enormous horde – / Nothing like it has ever happened, / And it shall never happen again / Through the years and ages" (Joel 2:2). Another prophet, Habakkuk, describes the Chaldeans as mighty heroes and has God declare: "For lo, I am raising up the Chaldeans, / That fierce, impetuous nation, / Who cross the earth's wide spaces / To seize homes not their own. / They are terrible, dreadful; / They make their own laws and rules. / Their horses are swifter than leopards, / Fleeter than wolves of the steppe. / Their steeds gallop – their steeds / Come flying from afar. / Like vultures rushing toward food, / They all come, bent on rapine. / The thrust of their van is forward, / And they amass captives like sand. / Kings they hold in derision, / And princes are a joke to them; / They laugh at every fortress, / They pile up earth and capture it" (Hab. 1:6–10). The prophet concludes this description with the following typical call: "You, O Lord, are from everlasting; / My holy God, You never die. / O Lord, You have made them a subject of contention; / O Rock, You have made them a cause for complaint. / You whose eyes are too pure to look upon evil, / Who cannot countenance wrongdoing, / Why do You countenance treachery, / And stand by idle / While the one in the wrong devours / The one in the right?" (Hab. 1:12–13).

If the prophets, especially the greatest among them, steeped in an atmosphere of unending wars, domestic quarrels, and mutual destruction of neighboring tribes and peoples, devoted the bulk of their prophecies to fire and sword and foresaw invasions, destruction, and slavery, their personal ideals were by contrast imbued with a profound humanism, an aspiration with all their soul for light, equity, peace, and social justice. Whenever they managed to divert their eyes from the dark reality and to look into the depths of the future, they saw a totally different world, founded on the principles of fraternity, justice, and absolute peace, not only among human beings, but also among the beasts and animals (Isaiah 10:2 and 4; 11:6–10; Ezekiel 39:9–10; Hosea 2:20; Micah 4:3–5; Zechariah 9:10).

2

If such a negative attitude toward martial might, heroic strength, and valor on the battlefield carried the day in national art during the normal independent life of the Jewish nation and also when the Jews defended their independence or hoped to restore it by force of arms, how much the more so did this negative attitude gain strength in a later period when the people, exiled from their land to the Diaspora, had lost every hope of returning to their lost homeland by their own efforts. The idealization of spiritual perfection, juxtaposed against brutal and cruel physical power, which had formerly stemmed from internal moral sources, was now imposed by the external circumstances of life. The gradual loss of martial skills and the profound recog-

nition of their impotence systematically erased from Jewish art every reference to warlike valor and martial heroism. Already in talmudic literature we find very few stories or discussions of war, victory, and defeat. This literature is preoccupied with one single task: to consolidate and fuse the people with spiritual bonds, precisely because it has lost its political and territorial organization. The Talmud devotes very little space to the political events of its time, even if they are directly relevant to the Jews. It focuses on the life of the past, recounts again and again the legends of the Bible, expounds them, brings them closer to the people's understanding, and in particular amplifies their dimensions in order to endow the personalities and events of the Bible with a vast and impressive character. Only in this context does the Talmud cite a few legends of heroes. All of these have a particular trait: the titans and heroes of the Talmud are noted mainly for their gigantic physiques, sometimes also for their immense strength; but they are not bellicose or bloodthirsty, and the source does not linger on their heroic actions. According to a talmudic legend, Adam was a colossus whose head reached the heavens, while the width of his body stretched from one end of the world to the other (BT Avoda Zara 8).[11] According to another talmudic legend, in ancient times, before the flood, all human beings were giants; they could stride across the entire world in a matter of moments; when they encountered century-old oak forests they plucked them up by the roots as if they were grass. When lions and tigers attacked them, they felt their bites no more than mosquito sting. The wives of these titans gave birth to six children at once, and the infants who had only just emerged from their mother's womb stood on their feet without delay and broke out in games and dances. What is more, they immediately began to speak in the Holy Tongue (Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer 22:2).[12]

Moses, too, was a giant, but he is described as such only to highlight the unnatural height of the archetypal titan, Og king of Bashan. Moses was 10 cubits tall, and his sword was 10 cubits long, and when he encountered Og he sprang and jumped to height of 10 cubits – but struck no further than the giant's ankle.[13]

The Talmud describes Jacob's sons, especially Simeon and Judah, as mighty heroes. It is said that when Joseph ordered the arrest and imprisonment of Simeon – before he had revealed his identity to his brothers – 70 soldiers fell on him with drawn swords. Simeon replied with a fierce bellow; they all immediately fell to the ground and their teeth were shattered, while Joseph and his servants fled in terror (Genesis Rabbah 91).[14]

If talmudic legend describes biblical personalities as implausible giants, in order to highlight the grandeur, holiness, and unshakable constancy of the biblical dogma, the Talmud's own attitude to heroic strength and martial valor is at least as negative than that of the Pentateuch and prophetic books.[15] This is particularly conspicuous in the well-known talmudic legends about Alexander the Great, whom the Talmud treats not merely with reverence but even with awe. These legends present the great conqueror exclusively as an extremely wise man, a ruler who practices justice and mercy. The representatives of various nations appear before him to press their suits; he issues a just ruling. We are told that Alexander used to convoke the Jewish scholars and pose questions and riddles to them. On the other hand, the legends pass over his heroic victories in total silence and even treat them ironically. Thus for example:

> He came to a country entirely of women and was going to make war on them. They said to him, "if you kill us, people will say, 'he slew women'; if we kill you, people will talk about 'the king who was killed by women."

He said to them, "bring me bread."

They brought him golden bread on a golden table.

"Do people eat gold in your country?" he asked.

They said to them, "if you wanted bread, did you lack bread in your own place, that you got up and came here?"

When he left that place he inscribed on the city gate: "I, Alexander of Macedon, was a foolish king until I came to the country of Africa and learned counsel of women."[16]

In the Talmud, as in the Bible, moral and spiritual perfection are presented as the supreme human virtue. This virtue finds expression in observance of the commandments and study of the law – the Torah. According to the Talmud, only the holiness of God comes before the holiness of the Torah, which is "the daughter of God," created before the world and destined to survive past the end of the world. Even God Himself studies the Torah. Thus it is perfectly clear that the holiness and greatness of the Torah pass naturally to those who study and learn it. The great sages who diligently penetrated the Torah, reached the degree of the angels, became immortal, gained a store of power to create and destroy worlds, to resurrect the dead, and so on. But this spiritual power is the antithesis of the brutal material and physical strength and is utterly incompatible with it.

It is written in the Talmud: "Why was the Torah given to Israel? Because they are fierce. The Holy One Blessed Be He said: these are worthy to be given the religion of fire. For had the Torah not been given to Israel, no nation or tongue could have withstood them" (BT Betzah 25b).

No less typical is the legend about the famous sage Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish, known in his earlier life [as a gladiator] by the name Resh Lakish:

Once Rabbi Johanan was bathing in the Jordan. Resh Lakish saw him and jumped in after him into the Jordan.

Rabbi Johanan said to him: "Your strength is meant for Torah."

He replied: "Your beauty is meant for women."

Rabbi Johanan said to him: "If you repent I'll give you my sister, who is even lovelier than I am."

He accepted. He tried to jump back out and get his clothes but could not do so.

[Rabbi Johanan] read to him and taught him and he became a great man.[17]

3

Contemporary Jewish folk art – tales, legends, songs, parables, superstitions, sayings, proverbs, and so on, produced by the people itself, as well as works that penetrated it and won great popularity – are generally identical in their external forms to the folklore of other peoples. But when it comes to the inner content one can discern that Jewish folklore – the narrative folklore, which has chiefly a didactic nature, the popular ballads, which are chiefly lyrical,

and even the folklore of everyday morality, as expressed in proverbs, sayings, and anecdotal parables – is penetrated through and through with the same motifs, the same tendencies, and the same moods as the biblical and talmudic productions. Even though a long interval – fifteen hundred or two thousand years, or even longer – passed between the two, contemporary folklore retains its intimate and vital connection to the biblical and talmudic propensity and the legends incorporated in them, as if created exclusively under the influence of this ancient literature.

At the outset we should note that in modern folklore we most often encounter tales and songs based on biblical themes. Even the characters are taken from the Bible and to some extent from the Talmud. Among the most common themes of Jewish tales is that of the old man and his wife to whom a son is born only in their old age; also common is the theme of the exiled brother who somehow becomes intimate with the king and is later reunited with his father and brothers; the young man who escapes the seductive wiles of the master's wife; the man who is swallowed by a fish; and so on. The standard characters in the tales and songs are the patriarchs, prophets, and several of the most popular talmudic sages.

The most beloved hero of folk tales and talmudic legend is the prophet Elijah. Ignoring the biblical account of Elijah's ascent to heaven (2 Kings 2:11), Jewish folklore does not describe Elijah as a thunderer who flies the heavens in a flaming chariot, as Christian folklore does. In Jewish legend he is usually portrayed without any special halo, in various guises – sometimes as a merchant and sometimes as a soldier, sometimes as a peasant and sometimes as a carter, sometimes as a wayfarer and sometimes as a beggar. Sometimes he disguises himself as a thief or a fallen woman. His mission is only a benefactory one: to warn Jews of impending danger, to save the God-fearing man from distress. He brings money to the needy and even teaches some how to evade the clutches of the angel of death. In an old story that was incorporated into the cycle of hymns for the Sabbath table, the prophet Elijah reveals himself to a poor man in the marketplace and proposes that he sell him – Elijah – as a slave and keep the money for himself. In another story we find that a pious young man encountered Elijah plowing a field, with one hand grasping the plow and the other holding a sacred book. "For whom are you plowing"? the young man asked him. Replied Elijah: "I am plowing, sowing, and reaping the harvest for the indigent people who study the Torah." Sometimes Elijah himself teaches some righteous man the secrets of Torah; frequently he appears as a guide in Paradise and Hell. Even more frequently he disguises himself as a carter and by means of a "shortcut" conveys the righteous man to his destination in an instant. This legend became the basis for the saying, "It's good to travel when Elijah is sitting in the driver's seat."

Much more infrequently, and in more solemn circumstances, the figures of the Patriarchs and other biblical characters appear in these tales. They are almost never disguised when they come to the world of sinners and mix in with the current of life. Sometimes they appeal to God in especially critical moments and intercede on behalf of the Jews. Most often they come to help people in years of drought and get the rain to fall (but this happens only when those in need come and pray for it at their graves). Sometimes they appear to a righteous man in his dreams and disclose the deep secrets of Torah. In general, however, their role is limited to materializing before the eyes of the righteous man and spending the Sabbath with him. This motif recurs in many variations in dozens of stories. Usually the Patriarchs appear to the righteous man as follows: A God-fearing man is traveling somewhere through a thick forest, hurrying to

reach his home before the arrival of the Sabbath. Suddenly he loses the path and wanders here and there until evening falls. As the Sabbath descends, he suddenly finds a magnificent palace in the heart of the forest. The pious man enters the first room, continues into the second room and the third room, but does not encounter a living soul. Each room is more beautiful than the one before, full of gold, silver, and precious stones. Finally, in the seventh chamber, he spies an old man with a long white beard, sitting in a golden armchair. Before him, of course, lies a holy book. Another old man is moving about, serving him (generally this is the prophet Elijah, sometimes Eliezer, the steward of the patriarch Abraham). The guest is received cordially. His hair and beard are dressed with a perfumed comb and he is led off to immerse himself in a fragrant pool. All sorts of food and drink are brought to the table, with a variety of flavors (sometimes there is a reference to a thousand dishes, but they are not material but purely spiritual). The guest is led to a bed on golden wheels, the pillow embroidered with pearls and the coverlet of purest gold. Seven other old men appear for morning prayers and are called to the Torah by name: Rabbi Aaron the Priest, Rabbi Moses the Levite, and so on – Rabbi Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Solomon. At the conclusion of the Sabbath, the palace vanishes with its inhabitants as if it had never been. There remains only Elijah the prophet, who accompanies the pious man to show him the way out of the forest, and tells him that he had the merit of celebrating the Sabbath with the Patriarchs.

Sometimes, too, the matriarchs appear in these tales: Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. Sometimes, instead of the Patriarchs, the pious man in the forest meets King David holding his harp and hears him playing and singing and even dancing. Sometimes he encounters the prophet Jeremiah, who composes lamentations about the destruction of the Temple. Sometimes a figure from the Bible or the Talmud – Reuben, Moses, Aaron, Rabbi Simeon Bar Yohai – appears to a simple and unlettered but God-fearing man, and during the course of a single night teaches him the entire Torah, the seven lores, the seventy languages, and so on. There is even a legend about how our teacher Moses comes to Moses Maimonides to thank him for writing his books.

The prophet Elijah and the Patriarchs appear in a totally different light in folk ballads. Their role in these songs is purely national. They take part in the giving of the Torah or appear as advocates for the Jews, coming before God to ask Him to restore His people to their homeland.

In general, the folk ballads identify the prophet Elijah with the Messiah son of David; he does not appear disguised as a carter or wayfarer, but as the counselor of the Master of the Universe, come to announce the redemption to the Jews.

Here is one of these ballads:

Let me tell you a tale,
A tale that is truly joyful!
It begins with a Jewish king.
The Jewish king had an only daughter.
She was our Torah.
For a thousand years the king journeyed in search
Of a match for his daughter.
He went to the gentiles;

They sent him away like the sinners.
He turned to the eminent lords;
They replied with lies and excuses.
Hearing the excuses and lies
God boiled with anger;
Elijah the prophet appeare
And offered the Torah to the Jews.
They were delighted with the Torah
And after three days erected a wedding canopy. (Ginzburg and Marek, No. 2)

In another song the prophet Elijah announces the redemption from exile:

The prophet Elijah stands on a tall ladder
And blows loudly on the trumpet:
'Return to your land,' he will say.
'You have wailed and cried enough.' (No. 32)

And in another song:

The prophet Elijah (or the messiah son of David) sits in the place of honor,
Dressed in robes of silver and gold.In his right hand he holds a goblet,
And recites a blessing over the whole land. (No. 12)

The prophet Elijah appears in the role of a master counselor and herald, while the Patriarchs play more dignified roles.

God had agreed to give the Torah to the Jews. But how should he do this? By whose hands should he convey it? The folk song describes this in the dialog of a father and daughter about a potential groom:

"My daughter, dear and beautiful, Adam is walking around in the world. He is walking and walking and walking. Take him to be your dear groom and husband."

"No, father, no, it cannot be, Adam cannot be my husband."

"Tell me, why not?"

"Because he has the sin of the tree of knowledge! That's why I want to stay with you, as a daughter living with her father, until I grow up.

After that the Torah-daughter refuses to accept Noah, because of his "sin of wine" (or, according to another version, because Ham will be his son). She rejects Abraham because he "will have a concubine" (according to another version, because Ishmael will be his son). She turns down Isaac, because of the "sun of Esau." She rejects Jacob, because of the "sin of [marriage with] two sisters" (according to another version, because he will have a very large family); Aaron, because of the sin of the Golden Calf; David, because of the sin of Bathsheba; Solomon, because of his thousand wives. But when God proposes Moses, she replies: "Yes, Father, yes!

That is possible! I want our teacher Moses to be my husband! He will sit in heaven for 40 days and can support me" (No. 5).[18]

In other songs from this cycle, all of them written in the Russian-Polish dialect, an ardent prayer is addressed to the Patriarchs, asking them to appeal to the Master of the Universe to return the Jews to their land.

Abraham, Abraham, Abraham,
You are our old man;
Isaac, Isaac, Isaac,
You are our grandfather;
Jacob, Jacob, Jacob,
You are our father;
Why don't you pray,
Why don't you pray,
For us to the Lord God?
That our house be built,
That our land be redeemed;
We would be taken to our land,To our land would we be taken,
To our land would we be taken.

Next comes the turns of Moses the shepherd, Aaron the pastor, the prophet Samuel, King David, and so on. The song concludes with God's reply:

Son, son, son, son,
The house will be built
The land will be redeemed
You will indeed be returned to the land,
"And let us sing a new song, Hallelujah" (No. 15).[19]

Another song lauds the deeds of the Patriarchs as the opposite of those of the crude Esau.

Old Abraham, grey Abraham,
Why are you so sad?
You've taken your son to the *akeida* ["binding"; i.e., to be sacrificed],
And all your efforts were in vain.
Isaac, Isaac, our father,
Was tied like a ram;
The angels began to cry;
God ordered to let him go.
Jacob, Jacob, our father,
Was herding the sheep for fourteen years,
Was herding the sheep for fourteen years:
Seven for Rachel, seven for us.

Moses, Moses, our teacher,
Was born in a happy hour,
Was born in a happy hour,
Led us out of Egypt.
Aaron, Aaron, the priest,
Was dressed like a gentleman.
He held saucepans and a censer in his hands
And stopped death.
Esau, Esau, our uncle,
Does not miss a single tavern;He drinks vodka all out
And pawns his trousers. (No. 352)

I have myself recorded (in Vitebsk province) a song that describes the birth of the prophet Samuel in this version and language:

Hannah got up early,
Oh, early early-oh,
She roused her servants
Oh, good servants:
"Get up, get up, my good servants,
Light the candles,
The candles from Jerusalem.
In the meantime I will turn aside
And give birth to a son who will be a *talmid hokhom* [a scholar]."
Thus the prophet Samuel was born in an auspicious hour.
Hannah swaddled him in a band of silk.
Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah were the midwives;
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob our father were the godfathers;
Moses, Aaron, David, and Solomon – were the sponsors.
The Holy One Blessed Be He and his angels called him Samuel the prophet.[20]

Turning to another realm of folk art – proverbs, sayings, similes, and so on – there too we find a wealth of biblical images, maxims, and expressions. We can say without hesitation that popular Yiddish is full of references to the Bible, along with its spirit and that of the Talmud. The biblical images and phrases that have became common among the Jewish people since ancient times serve as classical idioms denoting all sorts of less clear phenomena. We can hardly find a concept, whether in the area of morality or other types of representation, without a parallel to a biblical image.

Spiritual qualities, virtues and defects, are related to biblical characters: as handsome as Joseph; as humble as Moses; as wise as Solomon (or, if one wishes to be ironic, "the wise son from the Haggadah"); as resplendent as the appearance of the High Priest;[21] as beautiful as Esther; so beautiful one can make a blessing on her.

On the other hand, they used to denote defects: as foolish as Lemech; as drunk as Lot; as dishonest as Laban; as coarse as Esau; as evil as Haman; as foolish as Ahasuerus; as wicked as

Titus; a sinner like Jeroboam son of Nebat; as rich as Korah, as poor as Dalphon[22] (Haman's second son); and so on.

The same applies to other concepts: as immense as Gog and Magog; as high as Rome (or as Haman's gallows); as huge as Og King of Bashan; as long (or as dark) as the exile; as old as Terah (or Methusaleh); as small as the yod in Vayzata (Haman's tenth son);[23] as difficult as the splitting of the Red Sea; and so on.

Out of a 4000 proverbs and sayings published in the anthology of I. Bernstein,[24] more than 300 derive from the Bible or Talmud, or are based on biblical or talmudic material. An even larger number include biblical or talmudic idioms. These sayings are built on paronomasia or arbitrary distortion of Hebrew words and phrases and are thus almost completely untranslatable. We shall give examples of only a few, the easiest to translate: we agreed on Rachel your younger daughter – and in the end we got Leah the elder; he's as busy with her as God with the Torah;[25] he holds it like a Jews holds the Torah; he showed up after the Torah was given (that is, too late); a straight path leads from Marishkin Garden to Jerusalem; if they don't want to give to Jacob, they'll give to Esau;[26] as profitable as Esau's bargain; it wouldn't help, even if the Exilarch came from Babylonia;[27] etc.

4

Contemporary folk art has not only absorbed patterns, images, and terms from the Bible; it is penetrated through and through by the same orientation and fundamental tendency as the ancient national art: namely, that the only purpose of life and supreme happiness of every mortal on earth is spiritual perfection, a life of piety and a intellectual development embodied in the perpetual study of the Torah. This perfection gives a person universal power, elevates him to the divine level, and lays low before him the most immense material and physical forces, which are synonymous with vulgarity and stupidity.

The heroic element and motif of the earthly battle of physical and material forces is totally absent from the original tales and songs, as well as from folk texts. Even in obviously borrowed tales and legends (such as "Centura-Ventura," "The Story of the Three Brothers," "Bobe Mayse," "The Story of the King's Daughter," "The Seven Thieves," etc.), this element is softened and blurred.

Most of the Jewish tales, especially those for children, open, instead of with the traditional, "there lived an old man and his wife" or "there lived a king and queen," with the words, "once upon a time there lived a rabbi and his wife" – whence the aphorism, "the rabbi and his wife are a complete story, the rabbi without his wife is half a story, and the wife without the rabbi isn't a story at all." Most of the legends, even some of the borrowed ones, have been attached to the names of various wonder-working *tzaddikim* [i.e., rabbis and hasidic rebbes]. The chief motif in almost all the legends, and in a majority of the tales as well, is woven around the human aspiration for the Torah, the struggle against material conditions for the possibility to devote oneself totally to study, and a description of the spiritual power of those who were able to penetrate to the deepest secrets of the Torah.

"The Torah has no bottom." "The Torah is as broad as the ocean." "The Torah is the best merchandise." "The place of Torah is the place of wisdom"; and so on: so go the Jewish sayings. The same tendency is the common thread of all the tales and legends.

The intimate connection between the Jew and the Torah begins even before his birth. According to Jewish folk belief, all Jewish souls were present at Mount Sinai and witnessed the giving of the Torah. Whence saying, "My soul too was at Mount Sinai." When the fetus is still in its mother's womb, an angel comes and teaches it the entire Torah; but just before it is born he gives it a blow on the nose and the baby forgets everything. Whence the saying, applied to an unusually clever child, "the angel forgot to hit him in the nose." But there are some exceptional Jewish souls that do not forget everything or that have the power to quickly recall what was forgotten. Someone who is destined to be a *tzaddik* is born by virtue of a miracle. He is almost always the son of elderly childless parents who have long entreated God to give them offspring. Then a message comes to them, in a dream or waking state, delivered by the prophet Elijah or some righteous man, that they are going to have a son who will be "the light of the Torah." Sometimes the future *tzaddik*, the hero of the story or legend, begins to utter prophecies or disclose deep mysteries immediately after he is born (sometimes he is "taken back" as a result). Generally, however, the *tzaddik* develops gradually. He grows like the hero of a Christian tale, not from day to day but from hour to hour, not only in his physical qualities, but also in his spiritual power. At the age of three he already knows the entire Bible; by seven, the entire [oral] Law; and at the age of ten he is already giving sermons in which he reveals hidden secrets of the Torah. Thereafter he continues to learn throughout his life all the secrets of the Tora[28] – on his own or under the supervision and guidance of an angel, of Elijah the Prophet, or of his own father, if he is a scholar. It is this Torah study that gives the *tzaddik* his supernatural power: he sees what will be; he knows everything that is done in heaven and on earth; by uttering the Ineffable Name or prying he can work miracles and wonders, even resurrect the dead or destroy the world. When the *tzaddik* learns Torah, he is surrounded by a halo, bright light, flames, or pillars of fire, the air around him is redolent with the fragrance of spices, and so on.

But the unlimited spiritual power of the *tzaddik* is proportional to his physical impotence. Physical weakness is presented as a necessary quality of the *tzaddik*, who does without all the pleasures and luxuries of this world, who fasts for weeks, and so on. Legend can offer no greater praise for a *tzaddik* than the note that he "was a soul without a body."

Not only is heroism based on physical power absent from the original stories and legends; they explicitly emphasize that physical power, a love of war, and martial ardor are not the accouterments that Jews fight with. Jews have more effective weapons: prayer, fasting, crying, and tears. In the legend about the Egyptian pasha who levied an impossible tax burden on the Jews and required them – on pain of death – to pay the entire sum within ten days, we are told that the Jews ran to their houses of study and began to cry and call to the Master of the Universe. The legend adds a moral: "Because this alone is the Jews' weapon: when the sword is directed their neck, they run to the synagogue, pour out their bitter hearts and rivers of tears, and God helps them."

Another legend tells how the Sultan of Damascus went out at the head of a large army to do battle against the Shah, whose kingdom contained many Jews. The Shah summoned the Jewish rabbi and told him as follows: "I have a plan! I will prepare for war with my army and our weapons, but I will not be able to overcome the powerful sultan of Damascus. So I'm asking you Jews to employ your weapons, too: pray, cry out to your God – and he will protect us." Even in such borrowed tales as "The Story of the Three Brothers," where we have giants, cyclopes, anthropophagi, enchanted castles, metamorphoses worked by enchanted horse hairs – there

is also always a Jewish lad, a diligent student of the Torah, who is magically transformed into a helmeted knight in armor, riding an enchanted steed who flies above the treetops. Before he goes out to do battle with the giant he turns and addresses the king: "With the help of Him in whose hand is might, who brings down the great and raises up the small, I am going out to defeat the giant and his army. Do you not know that there is a tiny mosquito before whom the most powerful lion trembles? Know, Your Majesty, that is not the powerful who triumph. God is a warrior; and if it is His will to deliver victory to someone, it matters not at all whether he comes at the head of a large army or of a small one."

In another legend, which recounts in general terms the story of Judith and Holofornes, the Jewish army's attack on the enemy is described as follows: "When they call realized that Holofornes had been killed, the Israelite heroes burst forth from the citadel and called out loudly: '*Shema Yisrael!*' " (Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One).

We find the same motifs in folksongs. In songs, too, the pinnacle of values is occupied by the Torah. It is sung of not only as "the daughter of God," but also as bearing in itself the greatest human happiness, in all circumstances of life and in all ages from cradle to grave.

When a mother puts her son to sleep she sings to him:

> The boy will study Torah.
> They will take him to school
> He will write holy books,
> And if God wills he will become a good Jew." (No. 61)

In another song, a mother tries to persuade her infant that he ought not to whine and cry, because when he grows up he will be a great talmudist, he will be his parents' pride and joy, and before he marries he will already know to give rulings on questions of religious law.

A daughter was promised that her groom would study Torah: "He will learn Torah, he will write holy books, and Sarah'le [or whatever her name was] will become a righteous Jewess" (No. 67).

One should not look in a Jewish lullaby, of course, for anything about "your father, the veteran warrior, hardened in battle," or about life on the battlefield, when the future warrior will "bravely put his foot in the stirrup and take a rifle in his hand." If something like this is mentioned, it is only to frighten the wailing child:

> The old men and women are sitting outside,
> With their broad swords, with sharp pikes:
> Any child they find crying
> They will grab at once and throw in the well." (No. 63)

When the child grows up and is ready to start school, a song comes and offers advice:

> Go, my child, go to school,
> Learn Torah in order,
> From reading Hebrew through the Gemara.
> This will save you from all harm and trouble.

Run, my child, run to the rabbi,
Who will give food to your soul,
Run, my child, run and learn
And respect him like God.
God's commandments are sweet as honey,
His Torah protects us, just as water protects the fish.
In its right hand is life in the world,
In its left, honor and wealth." (No. 121)

A girl who dreams about her groom, too, cannot imagine any quality more wonderful than Torah scholarship.

"If my mother were kind" – she dreams – "she would arrange my betrothal; she would travel to Wilkomir and bring me back a young man: black hair, blue eyes, and able to learn Torah. Because the Torah is important, he will have to study day and night; he will write me a note and be a good Jew" (No. 245).

Another girl dreams about a lad with long side curls and black eyes. A third dreams about a groom with golden hair. But all of them add: "May he be suited to learning the holy Torah." A girl's loftiest dream about herself is to be a rabbi's wife.

The best years of the boy's life are cut short: he must detach himself from the Torah to be conscripted into the (Russian) army. Folk songs respond to this situation in dozens of elegiac songs. In Russian folk literature, too, we find no end of sad songs about conscription. In the Jewish folk song, however, the fear of military service has a special character. The Jewish recruit is not terrified by the discomfort and pressures of army life, but because he knows that in the army he will not be able to learn Torah and observe all the laws of the Jewish faith.

One of the new-recruit songs goes like this: "When I was five they took me to school; and now I have to ride a horse. When I was ten I studied Bible with Rashi's commentary; and now I have to eat groats from a kettle" (No. 45).[29]

In another song we have a confrontation: "When the dear holy Sabbath comes, I would like to get up early and go to the synagogue. But here comes the drill-sergeant, the rabbi,[30] and yells: 'go out and train!' " (No. 347).

The same motif recurs in dozens of songs:

It is better to sleep on hard boards
Than to call a Russian soldier "uncle."[31]
It is better to wear a tallis and skullcap
Than a soldier's hat.
It is better to learn Gemara for 20 years
Than to bear this suffering.
It is better to study the Tosefot and Maharsha[32] for 20 years
Than to stand guard for half an hour." (No. 49)

And, concludes the song, "it is better to learn God's Torah than to shoot a gun" (No. 45).

In Jewish folk song there are of course no epic or lyrical descriptions of battles and wars.[33] When war is mentioned in a song, the focus is on the suffering it causes:

We were also at Plevna and in the Balkans;
We suffered many terrors and troubles there.
We crossed the Danube – may this never happen again;
Our bodies turned to dust there." (No. 331)

Jewish folk songs generally express a deep sense of disgust and even disdain with war and weapons.

A young girl's song explains:

A girl who takes herself a soldier
Isn't worth a farthing;
Going, going to Sebastopol
Like an ox to the slaughter.
A girl who takes herself a soldier
Isn't worth a three penny bit;
Going, going to Sebastopol,
Straight into the first fire!" (No. 51)

Another recruits' song expresses this even more fiercely: "I would rather be lying ten feet underground than carrying . . . a saber" (No. 45).

The other divisions of Jewish folklore – proverbs, sayings, anecdotes, parables, and so on – agree fully with the tales and folk songs with regard to physical force and bellicosity.

Among the religiously minded Jewish masses one can distinguish a feeling of loathing and disgust for physical force, which is considered to be an inappropriate quality for a Jew. To the typical Jewish attributes, "thin, delicate, silky, quiet as a dove," and so on, are opposed, as a symbol of coarseness and dullness, "red like Styopka,"[34] "healthy like a goy, like Khariton."[35] Folk speech makes a sharp distinction between the typical traits of the Jew and the typical traits of the non-Jew: "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau" (Gen. 27:22). "May God protect me from the might of a *goy* and mind of a Jew." "A Jew fights his mind and shoots with his look," and so on. Anecdotal parables spare no one and show mercy for nothing; among them are hundreds of jokes that ridicule the Jew's lack of warlike qualities. Particularly widespread were jokes about the Jewish thief, who holds up a wealthy merchant in the forest with the terrifying cry, " I'm a thief!" When the petrified merchant replies, "*Gewalt,* what you want of me?" the thief answers beseechingly, "Give me alms!" There is a jest about a squad of Jewish soldiers: When the battle starts, the officer calls out, "I hereby honor such-a-one son of such-a-one with the first shot." To which the honoree replies, "I am not inclined, I give up [the honor]!" And so on. These jokes and witticisms are meant to highlight, not Jewish cowardice, but the Jew's profound disdain for physical conflict.

If we turn to the folk art of the recent period – the age of *Sturm und Drang* and the struggle between fathers and sons, when young people turned their backs on the Torah and religious tradition – the still-fluid folk songs as well as the parables continue the trend that characterized the folk art of earlier generations. The only difference is that the Torah has been replaced by secular knowledge (the Haskalah), which is given the same epithet – "daughter of God" – and is wrapped in almost the same aura as the Torah of Moses before it.

Instead of the rabbi or *tzaddik* we have a student, doctor, professor, or writer. All the same, there is still hatred and scorn for power, the violence of the authorities and the wealthy. The only way in which the new melody differs sharply from the older folk art is in its conspicuous accent on civic feelings, awareness of human dignity, and willingness to defend it with arms. Instead of abject and impotent prayer-lamentation, contemporary folk songs teach the severe injunction:

> My son, if somebody
> Offends you by spitting,
> Give the foe a deserving answer:
> Spit back with lead!

5

As we have already seen, Jewish national and folk art differs from the folk art of other peoples in its forms, character, and orientation.

Nevertheless, when we take a close look at works from the Jewish folklore of tales and songs, we can easily spot fundamental motifs identical with those in the poetic folk art of other peoples, but in another domain and in other forms.

Despite the great difference among peoples, their national character and cultural level, the psychology of the masses is almost the same in every place. In their poetic works, the masses have always revealed an inclination to gross idealization and even deification of their beloved heroes, an aspiration to depict grandiose scenes of struggle, to describe miraculous phenomena and rapid transformations. On this point the Jewish masses are no different from any others. Despite the attempts over many centuries to create a God "to go before them," the adamantine monotheistic dogma rejected any attempt to bring God down from heaven to earth, to represent Him as a material being in the image of an idol or titan, or to model human heroes in His image. Consequently the Jewish masses attained this in a different fashion: they created a human being in the image of God and stretched a bridge between him and his God – the Torah. In this way the Jewish masses found a way to create the same motifs, on a different basis and in other forms, as other peoples did, to describe titans and heroes, scenes of battle and conflict between human beings, as well as wondrous phenomena and transformations, expressing even elements peculiar to European folklore. The only difference is the background. Whereas in European folklore all these motifs appear against the background of material and physical might, in Jewish art they are shown against the background and in the domain of spiritual power only.

Jewish folk art, as stated, does not depict heroes endowed with physical power who can uproot and overturn a pillar as tall as "from earth to heaven" or "to split a mighty oak with an arrow shot from a bow" or to swallow at a single gulp "a huge goblet, containing half a bucket of green wine" or to clear themselves "paths and avenues" through the enemy camp by virtue of an enchanted sword, etc. On the other hand, in Jewish folk art we find heroes as mighty as this, if not more so, but with spiritual strength, who act not with the sword but through a word and the power of the spirit.

Already in the Talmud we find heroes like this. In the Ethics of Fathers (2:10) we read: "Warm thyself before the fire of the Sages, but be heedful of their glowing coals lest you be burned, for their bite is the bite of a jackal and their sting the sting of a scorpion and their hiss the hiss of a serpent, and all their words are like coals of fire."

This symbolic characterization of the spiritual hero is entirely in keeping with the realistic descriptions in the Talmud. The talmudic warrior-sage can destroy an entire kingdom and annihilate vast armies with a single word; he wrestles not only with giants but also with infernal spirits and even with the terrible Angel of Death himself. Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai, who lived in a cave for thirteen years, acquired a miraculous power in his stare: "Every place he set his eyes on was burned up at once." "Even the birds turned to piles of bones in mid-flight." The people around him were saved from death only because their eyelashes had grown to reach the ground.

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, like many other talmudic Sages, was acquainted with, often met, and wrestled with the Angel of Death.

> Rabbi Joshua ben Levi was totally righteous. When his time came to leave this world, the Holy One Blessed Be He said to the Angel of Death, "Do whatever he asks you."
>
> He went to him and said, "your time has come to leave this world, but I will do anything you ask me."
>
> When Rabbi Joshua heard this, he said, "I would like you to show me my place in Paradise."
>
> He said, "Come with me and I'll show you."
>
> He said, "Give me your sword so you won't terrify me with it."
>
> Without delay he gave him his sword and two of them travelled until they reached the walls of Paradise. When they reached the walls of Paradise, right outside the wall, the Angel of Death took Rabbi Joshua and set him on the wall of Paradise. "Look at your place in Paradise," he told him.
>
> Rabbi Joshua ben Levi jumped from the wall and fell into Paradise, but the Angel of Death caught him by the hem of his cloak. "Come out of there," he told him.
>
> Rabbi Joshua took an oath by the Divine Name that he would not come out. And the Angel of Death was not permitted to enter there.
>
> The ministering angels said to the Holy One Blessed Be He, "Master of the universe, look what the son of Levi has done – he has taken his place in Paradise by force."
>
> The Holy One Blessed Be He replied, "Go examine whether he has ever taken an oath and violated it; if so, he too will be violated."
>
> They went and checked and said, "he has never broken an oath in his life."
>
> The Holy One Blessed Be He said to them, "If so, he shall not leave there."
>
> When the Angel of Death saw that he could not get him out, he said to him, "Give me the sword."
>
> But Rabbi Joshua didn't want to give it to him, until a heavenly voice spoke out, "Give him the knife, because human beings have need of it."

Rabbi Joshua said to him, "swear to me that you won't show it to people when you are taking a person's soul." . . .

He swore to him and he gave it to him."[36]

But there were also Sages who did not heed a heavenly voice. One of the most interesting legends in the Talmud recounts the great debate between Rabbi Eliezer ben Horcanus and the other Sages. It runs like this:

Rabbi Eliezer says it is ritually pure, but the Sages hold that it is ritually impure. Namely, a "serpentine" furnace. What does "serpentine" mean? . . . That it was girded with rings and made impure.

They taught: On that day Rabbi Eliezer answered all the answers in the world but they did not accept his opinion.

He said to them, "if the law is as I say, let this carob tree prove it." The carob tree jumped a hundred cubits from its place.

They said to him, "we don't accept proofs from a carob tree."

He said to them, "if the law is as I say, let the aqueduct prove it." The water in the aqueduct flowed backwards.

They said to him, "we don't accept proofs from an aqueduct."

He said to them, "if the law is as I say, let the walls of the house of study prove it." The walls of house of study tilted precariously.

Rabbi Joshua reproved them. He said to them, "if scholars are having a dispute about the law, what concern is that of yours?"

Out of respect for Rabbi Joshua the walls did not fall; but out of respect for Rabbi Eliezer they did not straighten up again, and they are still standing at an angle.

He said to them, "if the law is as I say it is, let it be proven from heaven."

A heavenly voice issued forth and said, "why are you arguing with Rabbi Eliezer? The law is always as he says!"

Rabbi Joshua jumped up and said, "The Torah is not in heaven. For since the Torah was given at Mount Sinai we do not heed a heavenly voice."[37]

The other Sages excommunicated Rabbi Eliezer ben Horcanus because he refused to obey the majority.[38]

In another place we read about Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa:

Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa owned some goats. "Your goats are causing damage [to our fields]," his neighbors told him.

He said to them, "if they're causing damage, may bears eat them. But if not, tonight each one will carry a bear home in its horns."

That evening, each one returned home with a bear in its horns.[39]

And thus everyone realized that his neighbors had slandered him.

Quite similar motifs can be found in our contemporary folk art. The heroes of the tales and especially the legends who bear the names of famous *tzaddikim* – miracle workers – have

almost unlimited power. Their words can destroy cities or annihilate hostile armies. Their fiery glance strikes dead all who refuse to believe in their power. Wild beasts of the forest submit to them like lambs, and even come up to them submissively and offer their backs so the *tzaddikim* can ride to whatever destination they choose. The wonder-working Rabbi Israel Ba'al-Shem-Tov, known as "the Besht," was traveling through the forest in bitter frost with a group of his disciples. When the Besht touched a tree with his finger it immediately turned into a bonfire, and they all warmed themselves by its flames. Another time, when this Besht was arrested and locked up behind padlocked iron gates, he ordered his driver to hitch up the horses and start off. When the horses reached the barrier the "gateposts, together with the gates, rose into the air so the Besht could pass through safely." Once a thief attacked the Besht in his sleep and even raised his ax above his head. Just then someone grabbed hold of the thief and beat him so badly that he was left prostrate on the ground, unconscious. When he regained consciousness he himself told the others what had happened to him.

But especially typical is the following legend:

> Once the Besht arrived in the town of Poznań. His horse bolted into a street that Jews were forbidden to enter, on pain of death.
>
> The only exception was one Jewish tailor who lived on that street. The Besht stopped alongside the tailor's house, went inside, and immediately began to pray with great concentration and crying. When the Christians heard the cries they came and surrounded the tailor's house, imperiously demanding that he hand over the person who had penetrated the forbidden area. When the tailor, who behaved as had Lot once upon a time, refused to convey the man to the villains, they picked up rocks and began to hurl them and pound at the door in order to break in.
>
> Then the Besht opened the door, went out into the street, and looked at the attackers. In the twinkling of an eye a commotion broke out among them and they began fleeing in horror, trampling on one another and breaking arms and legs. People collected from all over the city to watch the heroes running away and crying out for help, flying from a lone Jew who was not even pursuing them.
>
> Later, when the fugitives were asked what had terrified them, they replied: "It seemed as if alongside the Jew were standing fiery lions, tigers, bears, and serpents, their mouths gaping wide to swallow us. It seemed to us that they were pursuing us and flames of scorching fire were shooting out to burn us."

Perhaps also the following legend:

> Once a tavernkeeper yelled at the *tzaddik* Zusya of Anipoli. It was bitterly cold outside, but he threw the *tzaddik* out of the house. And all this because he annoyed him with his sermons. Zusya stood up to pray and a storm began raging. The wind broke down the fence and sent the roof flying off the inn. Hail began raining down and shattered the window panes and broke the dishes in the inn; even the tavernkeeper's hand was broken by its blows.

Like the talmudic sages, the heroes of our contemporary legends believe that they do not have to heed a heavenly voice. They treat God without formalities, as one equal treats another. The rabbi of Brody, Isaac Horowitz, once had to judge the suit brought by the heirs of a certain Jew against a man whose signed promissory note had been found among their later father's papers. Even though "the dead man was present and asserted that he had indeed received the money," the rabbi ruled in favor of the heirs. "The words of the dead are meaningless for me! Nor will I obey a heavenly voice," said the rabbi. "The Torah is here now, on Earth, and I must rule as is written in it."

Especially typical is the following legend:[40]

> The Romanian king issued a cruel order against the Jews. When a devout Jew, a certain Rabbi Faivel, who used to sit learning Torah in the house of study day and night, found out about the decree, he was very upset. Without delay he ran at midnight to the local rabbi, the great *tzaddik* Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhansk.
>
> "Rabbi!" He called, "I've come here to make a complaint. In the holy Torah the Jews are called 'the servants of God." The servants of one master should not have to suffer on account of the decrees of another master. Why, then, do the Jews have to suffer the decrees of the Romanian king? Please, Rabbi, declare your verdict!"
>
> "You are right, my son," replied Rabbi Elimelech. "Come back tomorrow and I will look in the matter. One does not judge at night."[41]
>
> On the next day three great *tzaddikim* came to Elimelech, including the rabbi of Opatov. Rabbi Elimelech summoned Rabbi Faivel and ordered him to present his case.
>
> "Today I don't have the same inspiration I had last night," said Rabbi Faivel.
>
> "I hereby endow you with the power of speech!" said Rabbi Elimelech. Then Faivel repeated the complaint he had recited the previous night.
>
> "We have a custom," said the rabbi of Opatov, "that when the parties have finished making their case, we separate them. Accordingly you, Rabbi Faivel, must leave. And you too, Master of the Universe, as the opposing party – you too have to leave. But because your Greatness extends throughout the universe, we allow you to remain. Know, however, that there is no favoritism before us and we will judge according to the law."
>
> The four *tzaddikim* discussed the case for a long time. Was it indeed permitted for the Romanian king to issue a cruel decree against the Jews? In the end they ruled that he did not have such a right. They supported their decision with statements from the holy writings, wrote it down, and signed their verdict.
>
> Three days later the decree was rescinded.

One of the most common motifs in heroic epic, single combat between two warriors, appears in Jewish folks song as the contest between a *tzaddik* and a sorcerer, between the representatives of the divine power and the diabolic power. Here we present one of these tales, which apparently later came to be associated with the name of the Besht.

Once the Besht, accompanied by his disciples, came to a roadside inn. He went inside and saw that the house was lit up with many candles. The landlord was walking back and forth, looking sad and depressed. The Besht asked him why he was so distressed. The inn keeper told him as follows: "My wife has born me several sons, and each died right before the circumcision, at midnight, without any visible reason. And now my wife has given birth to our fifth son, and the circumcision is tomorrow. I'm afraid that tonight at midnight the infant will breathe his last."

The Besht told him not to worry. He stationed two man alongside the boy's cradle, gave them a sack, and told them to hold the mouth open, right next to the cradle. They must guard vigilantly throughout the night. The moment something fell into the sack they must tie it up and rouse him, the Besht, from his sleep. The Besht instructed his disciples to pray all night.

Midnight came. The candles began to flicker and go out. The disciples prayed with increased concentration and the candles did not go out. At that moment a black cat entered and ran over to the cradle, but on the way he fell into the open sack. The men in charge of the sack tied it shut and woke up the Besht. He told them to beat the sack and its contents with sticks and then to throw it outside. And so they did.

The child survived. The next day his circumcision was celebrated with great joy.

When the ceremony was over, the innkeeper took a cake and, in accordance with local custom, carried it as a present to the lord of the manor in his palace. The servants told the innkeeper that the lord was ill. But the sick lord, when he heard that the innkeeper had come to visit, told them to show him in.

"Are there any strangers in your house?" he asked him.

The innkeeper replied that just then a *tzaddik* was staying with him and, what is more, that the *tzaddik* had saved his infant son from death.

"Tell your guest that I ask him to come to me," the lord replied. "I wish to speak with him."

The innkeeper was afraid that the lord might harm the *tzaddik*, heaven forbid. But the Besht smiled and dismissed the innkeeper's fears and immediately went to the lord without any fear. When the latter saw him, he said: "Last night you caught me by surprise and I didn't have time to prepare for the attack. That's no trick at all! If you want to contend against me, let us go out to the field and then we will see who is stronger." (This lord was in fact a sorcerer; every time he turned into a black cat and came to strangle the innkeeper's infants.)

"It was not my intention to fight with you," the Besht replied. "I merely wanted to save the baby. But if you wish, I will not evade coming to wrestle with you. I will gather my disciples, and you yours. We shall meet a month from now and find out who is stronger – you, with your magic, or I, with God's name on my lips."

Exactly one month later the two camps met in the field: on one side, the sorcerer with his disciples; on the other, the Besht with his. The contest began. The Besht drew two circles around himself. Then he arranged his disciples in a third

circle and ordered them not to take their eyes off him. Should they see his face change color, they must exert themselves harder and think only about repentance. The sorcerer, too, drew a circle around himself and his disciples, and began dispatching wild animals against the Besht. The animals shot forward with fearsome roars and fell upon the Besht. But the moment they reached the first circle they vanished immediately.

The contest continued in this fashion throughout the day. Every second the animals gave way to new ones, but none of them managed to penetrate the first circle. Finally the sorcerer sent against the Besht a herd of angry boars, spouting flames from their nostrils. With savage motion they fell upon and jumped over the first circle. The Besht's face changed color. His disciples intensified their thoughts of repentance; when the boars reached the second circle they vanished.

The sorcerer repeated this three times, but the boars could not penetrate the second circle. At last he turned to his opponent and said, "I no longer have the strength to fight against you. I know that in a little while you will kill me with your look and I will take leave of life."

The Besht replied, "had I intended to kill you, I would have done so a long time ago. But I want you to comprehend the power of our God. Look up at the sky."

The sorcerer raised his eyes toward the sky. At that very moment two hawks swooped down and pecked out his eyes. The sorcerer was blinded and could no longer work his spells.

6

Jewish life, of course, offered no ground for the production of *chansons de geste,* with all the motifs woven into them, including the intrepid deeds of knights, heroic tournaments, and the like. But a close examination of the folk art of the *hasidim* – their tales and legends about various *tzaddikim* – shows that it contains the same motifs as the *chansons de geste* – though on a spiritual basis, of course.

The hasidic rebbes – the *tzaddikim* – just like knights, travel through towns and courts, usually accompanied by a full retinue of their followers – their *hasidim* – like the squires and pages who accompanied the knights. These legends express the purpose of these travels somewhat vaguely as "redemption of captives" – a purely imaginary topic that fits in well with the chivalric nature of their activity. The legends never talk about attempts by *tzaddikim* to free real prisoners or captives. On the other hand, there are many stories about *tzaddikim* redeeming the souls of sinners from hell or purgatory, how they tear them from the claws of evil spirits, wrestle on their behalf with demons, raise a commotion in heaven, demanding justice. Along with souls they also redeem prayers that did not reach their destination or were intercepted by the Evil Sprit and bring them to the heavenly throne. These legends are incredibly similar to the tales of chivalry.

While the Besht was praying, armies of the dead used to gather and beg him to work for them a *tikkun-neshama* (a "cure" for their souls) and deliver them to paradise. During his travels he always provided such a "cure" for souls reincarnated in birds, fish, and various animals.

The wonder-working Rabbi Isaac Luria, known as the ARI, saves the sinful dead whom demons, disguised as bulls, are trampling underfoot. But when the soul of an informer, in the guise of a raven, comes to him, squawking and pleading that he, too, be "cured" with a *tikkun,* he chases him away.

Especially typical is the story about the Besht's visit to heaven:

> On the Day of Atonement, during the *neilah* service,[42] he stood still and silent in front of the lectern for two full hours, motionless, his face reflecting a painful struggle. Later, when he was asked what had been going on, he told them that he had been informed that the Accusing Angel[43] was prevailing over the Jews in heaven, so he had gone there. When he arrived and entered the heavenly tent he found prayers that had been cast aside and lying there for 50 years. "Come with me," he told them, and continued walking toward the great gates from which the path leads directly to the heavenly throne. These gates were as large as the entire world. Suddenly an angel came flying by, closed the gates, and sealed them with a lock as large as a city.
>
> The Besht went to his own rabbi, who had passed away and was in heaven, and cried out: "My master! The Jews are liable to suffer terrible disasters, but I cannot enter and entreat God on their behalf! Please help me open the gates. I would not intervene were the danger not so great."
>
> The rabbi went to the gates but was unable to open them. He turned to go away.
>
> But the Besht cried out to him: "Master! How can you abandon me in such evil times?"
>
> The rabbi led him to the palace of the Messiah. When the Messiah saw them coming, he turned to the Besht and told him: "Don't cry out! Here is a sign. Use it and the gates will open for you!"
>
> When the gates opened and the Besht passed through them, bringing the prayers with him, all the spheres were filled with such joy that its force alone sufficed to nullify the indictmen[44] against the Jews.

Tzaddikim continue their struggle on behalf of the souls of sinners even after their own deaths.

One *tzaddik* had a dream. In his dream he saw that the holy Rabbi Mikhele, who had died not long before, was standing in front of the gates of paradise and not entering. The *tzaddik* thought that they were not letting him in, and accordingly began fasting and praying to God on behalf of Rabbi Mikhele. But then Rabbi Mikhele appeared in his dream and told him, "there is no point to your fasting. I myself do not want to enter paradise. I have requested that they bring me from hell a number of souls, which I intend to transfer to paradise. But they replied that it was impossible. I don't want to enter paradise without them. I insist that those souls be delivered to me from hell."

There are also parallels to chivalric tournaments, in the form of debates about religion, which were conducted in similar public ceremonies. These debates are one of the favorite motifs of Jewish folk tales. The disputations (generally between a rabbi and the pope), intended to

determine whose is the true faith, were held, just like chivalric tournaments, in the presence of the king, queen, and courtiers, and with almost the same festive ceremonies.

Without an independent sovereign existence, the Jewish masses could not create legends about kings, praise good and wise emperors, grandees and statesmen, in song and story. Nevertheless we cannot say that these motifs are totally absent from Jewish folk art. Because there was no basis for them in the present, the folk art of the masses turned to ancient historical motifs and presented heroes such as Moses, Joshua son of Nun, King David and his warriors, and especially King Solomon. In addition, the mighty kings of half-borrowed Arab tales were turned into Jews, and their kingdoms into Jewish kingdoms. In folk ballads, the motif of the Jewish king appears only infrequently, it is true, but it is found. For example:

> It happened once upon a time
> (The story is not at all happy) –
> The story begins
> With a Jewish king.
> The King had a queen
> And the queen had a vineyard. . . .[45]

Or:

> Once upon a time it happened like this –
> A man abandoned his young wife;
> He traveled through the vast forests
> Until he reached a town
> Where he saw a Jewish King
> And his heart leaped with a joy."

In the folktales, the Jew is usually the viceroy rather than the king. According to the common motifs of Jewish folk tales, the emperor grants someone who did him a great boon, not half his kingdom, but half his power (which is more spiritual). In many cases the Jew holds the destiny of the state in his hands as the king's privy counselor. Usually he is actually a poor man whom no one knows and lives somewhere on the outskirts of the city, in a ramshackle hut. But in difficult and decisive moments the king or prime minister comes to him for his wise counsel or assistance.

This motif is found in the Talmud, in the legend about Antoninus and Rabbi Judah the Prince. Antoninus respected Rabbi Judah, to the point that he offered to serve as his footstool. But he kept his efforts to learn Torah from Rabbi Judah absolutely secret. An underground passageway led from the emperor's palace to Rabbi Judah's house, which Antoninus would traverse at night in the company of two slaves. To keep the slaves from reveal the secret, he would kill one of them outside the door of Rabbi Judah's house and the other when he returned to his palace (BT Avoda Zara 10b).

In folk tales, the same well-known *tzaddikim* and righteous men appear as the privy counselors of kings. There are many legends about Rabbi Leib ben Bezalel,[46] known as Gur-Aryeh,

the favorite of the "king of Prague," who called him "my Leibel." Many more legends are attached to the name of Maimonides, "the greatest physician in the world." The following legend is typical:

> Rabbi Eliezer, a God-fearing man, was taken prisoner by the Tatars, who sold him as a slave to some far-off land. One of the most important ministers bought him and gave him as a present to the viceroy, who made him his personal attendant.
>
> One day, the king of that country had to go to war. He asked the viceroy for advice. But the viceroy could not provide suitable advice and king was very angry with him. The viceroy went home depressed and did not eat or drink. Rabbi Eliezer asked them why he was so unhappy. At first he did not answer him; but when his slave kept urging him he told him the reason for his depression.
>
> Rabbi Eliezer prayed, and was informed from heaven what advice the viceroy should give the king. Rabbi Eliezer conveyed this to his master, who went to the king and told him.
>
> The king understood at once that someone had coached his viceroy. "Your words," said the king, "conceal superhuman wisdom. You must have attained this counsel by means of sorcery." Then the viceroy admitted that he had heard the advice from his personal attendant. The king summoned Rabbi Eliezer and appointed him as his counselor.
>
> One day the king sailed with his ships to attack a strong fortress. Rabbi Eliezer sailed with him in the ship. From heaven he was told that it was very difficult to capture the fortified castle because any ship that approached it was shattered to bits. He advised the king to put condemned prisoners in a boat and send them to the fortress. The moment the boat drew near the fortress it broke up and sank. The king recognized Rabbi Eliezer's wisdom and asked for his advice on conquering the fortress. Rabbi Eliezer advised what he advised and the fortress was captured. Then the king made Rabbi Eliezer his viceroy.[47]

7

In fact, Jewish folk tales also contain most of the other – non-heroic – motifs found in European folklore. But all of them are marked by the same qualities, and in all of them, spiritual replaces material power.

One of the favorite heroes of European folklore is the simpleton (the *durachok* of Russian folklore), dressed in tatters, generally lying on the stove or sitting behind it, seemingly unequipped to do anything serious, and serving only as a target for the ridicule and jests of his wise brothers and all the neighborhood. In fact, however, the appearance is false. It turns out that the "fool" is wiser, more agile, and more quick-witted than all the wise ones. He solves the emperor's riddles, he finds the magical bird, discovers the enchanted amulets, marries the beautiful princess, and also receives half the kingdom as her dowry.

This motif is also found in Jewish folk tales, but with different form and character. Instead of the "fool" we have the "hidden *tzaddik*," the *nister.* Usually he is actually one of the thirty-six righteous men whose merit sustains the world. Superficially the *nister* resembles the simpleton or fool of the tales, especially in his outward appearance. He is not dressed like other Jews, but wears a caftan of coarse, uncolored cloth, and sometimes even wears bast shoes. He customarily supports himself by hard ignoble labor (as a carter or porter) and appears to be ill-mannered, dull, and totally uneducated. Not only doesn't he know how to learn, he doesn't even know how to pray.

And then, when the time is ripe – generally when Jews must be saved peril – he is suddenly revealed and turns out to be wiser than all the greatest *tzaddikim,* with total mastery not only of the entire Torah but also of the arcane lores that only angels achieve.

This motif recurs in dozens and perhaps even hundreds of tales and legends. Sometimes the story amounts merely to the *nister*, dressed in his caftan and bast shoes, tattered and filthy, coming to ask for the hand of a rich bride or noble girl. Everyone ridicules him, but to their great astonishment the bride herself immediately states her consent to marry him, because she was told in a dream (sometimes by means of a magic mirror given to her by a wonder-working *tzaddik*) that she must marry precisely this man.

Here we offer, by way of example, several stories typical of this genre.

A certain rabbi, who was a great master of Torah, had an only daughter, for whom he had not managed to find a suitable husband. Then the rabbi's late father appeared to the rabbi, his wife, and their daughter in their dreams and told them she must marry a young man who worked in the nearby flour mill; otherwise she would die.

The rabbi went to the mill to inquire about the worker. A lad dressed in torn rags, with a stupid face, came out to meet him. The rabbi began talking with him, but the fellow's answers were not relevant. The rabbi asked him if he had ever studied anything. He answered that he didn't understand how to pray or even know how to read and write.

But the rabbi, following his father's injunction, took the young man home with him. He offered him decent clothing, but the lad refused to part with his rags. When the bride saw this kind of groom she fainted dead away. The relatives and neighbors broke out in tears, but there was nothing could be done about it.

They began preparing for the wedding. Suddenly a shepherd carrying a long staff came to the house. "Where is the groom?" he asked. "We're friends who worked for the same master."

When he saw the groom he fell on him and embraced him. The distress of the bride and her relatives merely increased. They begged the shepherd to persuade the groom to at least take off his mill clothes and wear clean garments.

"Bring me the silk garments," ordered the shepherd. They brought him the expensive clothes. The groom took off his clothes and put on the new ones. Suddenly his face shown and he began to show vast erudition in both Talmud and Kabbala. All were struck with astonishment by his greatness.

The corpse of a Christian boy was thrown into the cellar of a certain Jew, who was then accused of ritual murder. When the *tzaddik*[48] Gur Aryeh learned of this, he began fasting and praying to God, asking him to save the innocent Jew.

Then he had a dream in which he was told to go to a certain city, find a poor hosiery-maker, and order him to come save the Jew. The *tzaddik* went to that town, and after much searching found the hosiery-maker. Before him stood a crude and uneducated man who could not put two words together or even begin to understand what people were saying to him. When Gur Aryeh shouted at him, though, he promised to do what was needed.

The hosiery-maker set out on foot to the city where they were going to try the innocent Jew. The king and the pope were going to attend the trial. The pope, who was traveling in a carriage drawn by four horses, overtook the hosiery-maker on the way. When he saw a poor person plodding along he invited him into his carriage, "because the popes always act with humility and compassion."[49] The hosiery-maker asked the pope why he was traveling to that city. When the pope told them that he was going to judge a Jew who had murdered a Christian child, the young man asked him not to start to trial unless he were present. The pope promised him.

The next day they erected a scaffols in the marketplace. The king, queen, and courtiers arrived, but the pope was waiting for the hosiery-maker to arrive. When he did, the trial began. Some of the judges said the Jew was guilty, but others argued that the Jew was innocent. The pope turned to the hosiery-maker. "What do you think?"

The hosiery-maker stood up and said, "follow me!" Everyone went after him. He led them to the cemetery, where he ordered them to open the dead child's grave. When they uncovered the coffin he opened it with his own hands and addressed the dead child.

"Do you see who is standing before you here? Sit up!"

The child sat up.

"Why are you silent? Tell us who murdered you."

The child opened its mouth and said: "I was lying sick in bed. Then the bishop came to my father and tried to persuade him with smooth words to kill me and throw me like a foundling on the Jew's doorstep. In return he promised him forgiveness for all his sins. For a long time may father vacillated. But in the end he agreed and sharpened the knife. Then, totally ignoring my pleas and cries, he killed me. I don't remember any more."

"That's enough. Now lie down again in the coffin!" the hosiery-maker told him. The child lay back down motionless in his coffin.

Of course the Jew was set free and the father and bishop were hanged. The hosiery-maker was made viceroy.

But most typical is the following story:

Once upon a time there was once an elderly couple who had no children. For a long time they prayed to God. Finally a pious old man appeared to them

and announced that a son would be born to them. The old man's prophecy was fulfilled and an infant was born to them. They began to educate and raise him, but he was dull-witted and disobedient, a perpetual vexation to his parents. Then they handed him over for a period of three years to a group of wandering beggars to educate him. He ran away from them and hid in the House of Study behind the stove. Everyone in the town considered him to be a simpleton, but because he took good care of the House of Study they made him the sexton.

In that same town there lived two important Jews: a rabbi and a rich man. Both had sons who sat in House of Study together and learned Torah. One day the two began to brag about their brides. Each proudly asserted that his was more beautiful.

Suddenly the sexton shouted from behind the stove. "Don't waste your valuable time on foolish things. Keep learning Torah!"

The two broke out laughing and began to mock him.

He replied, "if you wish, I can show you your betrotheds. But you must not touch them and never tell anyone."

They promised. He drew a circle around him. Suddenly a tempest blew up and two beds appeared as in a vision, with a young woman sleeping in each. The bride of the rabbi's son lay with her coverlets in disarray. The young man went over to her and straightened her blankets. But the moment he touched her he fainted and the vision melted away. The rich man's son panicked and ran home. The sexton returned to his corner behind the stove. In the morning they found the rabbi's son stretched out unconscious on the floor. They called in the doctors, but no one could help. He remained mute and unable to walk.

One day the rabbi was sitting in the synagogue and crying. The sexton came over to him. "What will you give me if I heal your son?" he asked.

The rabbi offered him money, but he refused. "I don't want money," he said. "Give me your daughter for my wife."

The rabbi hesitated for a long time, but in the end he gave his consent and even gave him a written promise. The sexton told the rabbi what to do and his son soon recovered.

But the rabbi didn't tell anyone who had cured his son. The sexton, too, kept quiet. A long time passed. The rabbi forgot his promise and betrothed his daughter to the son of a great scholar. The wedding day came. The sexton went to the judge's attendant, gave him two gold coins, and told him to go tell the rabbi that "Leibel, the synagogue sexton, wishes to bring to your attention that he wants the wedding to take place." The rabbi chased the messenger away.

Then Leibel gave the messenger ten gold pieces and the promise that the rabbi had signed and told him to show it to the rabbi and say that "Leibel asks that you hold the wedding four weeks from now."

When the rabbi saw the document he became very alarmed. He took his cane, intending to beat the servant, but stood rooted to the spot, as if turned to stone. When he sent a messenger to tell Leibel that he would keep his promise, he immediately stopped being paralyzed he could move as before. The rabbi told his

prospective in-laws that he was bound by a vow and could not give his daughter to their son. They went back where they came from.

The rabbi began the preparations for the wedding. He asked the sexton to at least quit his job and move into his house, but the latter would not agree and continued to live behind the stove.

Around that time an old man came to Leibel's parents and handed them a letter from their son, inviting them to his wedding. When they came, the rabbi, Leibel's father, and the leading men of the town went to the synagogue to bring the groom. But hardly had the parents of the groom and bride entered the synagogue when the doors slammed shut behind them and no one else could enter.

The old folks went behind the stove, where they beheld the entrance to a cave. They entered the cave and were dazzled by the brightness of the light. The walls of the cave were covered with gold, silver, and precious stones. Around a table of gold, on ten golden chairs, sat ten old men, with large books in their hands. At the head of the table sat the groom. His face shone like a flame and he was learning Torah. When the parents entered, the old men rose from their places, said, "mazel tov!" and blessed the groom. The parents and the groom left the cave and went to the rabbi's house. The groom began delivering wise expositions on the Torah. What he said was "so profound that even the greatest scholars understood nothing of them. But all felt as if they were melting from their great joy."

8

Another motif, also found in the folklore of European peoples, is the story of the appearance of a rich house or magnificent castle in the very heart of the woods or steppes. The hero, a knight or simply the main character of the story, is lost in the woods. Suddenly, a tent, palace, or castle appears in front of him. Sitting there is another warrior, waiting to duel the wayfarer, or perhaps a sorcerer, or a cyclops, or simply a band of thieves who are holding a beautiful princess captive. In another cycle of stories the hero builds a castle in the course of a single night, generally at the order of the king of the sea.

We find the same motifs in Jewish folktales, but reworked in Jewish ways. Instead of warriors, knights, beautiful princesses, sorcerers, and witches, here we encounter the Patriarchs, the ever-present Elijah the prophet, angels, and *tzaddikim*.

Here is one of the most lyrical stories of this sort:

Two rabbis, one of them mild-mannered and the other choleric, were traveling by foot from one city to another. As they walked they got into a dispute about a certain topic in the Gemara and did not notice that they had strayed from the path. They wandered for three full days without noticing it.

After three days they came to a dense and frightening forest. Suddenly a magnificent castle appeared before their eyes, surrounded by a fortified wall; on the great gates they saw the following inscription: "This is the gate of the Lord, the righteous will enter through it."

The choleric rabbi turned to his comrade. "Are we not *tzaddikim*?!" he said, and began to bang on the gate. But the gate remained closed. Then he uttered the Ineffable Name and the gate sprang open.

The rabbis entered the castle. There was no one in the first room. But they saw a closed door, with a golden key in the lock. The choleric rabbi turned the key hard and the door opened. They went through. They saw a table whose beauty cannot be described in words. On it was a large book with golden clasps, and inscribed, "This is the book of Adam."[50] They tried to open the book, but the clasps were locked and the book would not open.

The choleric rabbi yelled at the mild-mannered one: "Why are you silent? Don't we have the right to look in the book?!" The mild-mannered rabbi kept silent and didn't know what he should do. The choleric rabbi uttered a special name of God, added another name – but all in vain.

Suddenly they spied another door, which also had a golden key in its lock. They entered the third room, which was beautifully painted and inset with precious stones. At the head of the table sat an old woman who held two sieves. From one of them she took leaves, tore them between her fingers, and threw them into the second sieve.

"Good morning!" the choleric rabbi greeted her, and asked what she was doing.

She replied: "I have children in the world who fast from one Sabbath to the next. When I grind leaves, they give off a fragrance that spreads through the world and invigorates those who are fasting."

"What's your name?" asked the choleric rabbi.

She replied: "My name is Sarah and my husband's name is Abraham. He has gone to Paradise just now to bring fresh leaves."

"Why, mother Sarah, can't we open the book of Adam?" asked the choleric rabbi.

Sarah replied, "You still are not worthy of this. You are indeed *tzaddikim*, but you must undergo a special purification of your bodies. Go out through the gate, where you will see Miriam's well. You must immerse yourselves in this well and purify yourselves."

The rabbis went out through the gate and found the well. But snakes and scorpions were crawling on it, with their venomous tongues protruding and quivering.

"Why are you hesitating?" the choleric one said to the mild-mannered one. "We have to know what is written in the book of Adam!" He took off his clothes and stepped on the snakes. The mild-mannered rabbi followed him. The snakes and scorpions retreated to their holes.

The *tzaddikim* immersed themselves and went back to the castle, but it had disappeared. The choleric one cried out: "Mother Sarah! Why did you deceive us? We were ready and willing to die merely to get a peak into the book of Adam – but now we have lost both you and the book!"

Then a heavenly voice was heard: "Stop crying, my children! Be content that you had the merit to immerse yourselves in Miriam's well."

"We will not obey a heavenly voice!" retorted the choleric one.

The voice spoke again: "My children, if you do not stop shouting I shall destroy the world and return it to primordial chaos. Let it be enough for you that while alive you had the merit of visiting Bird's-Nest Castle *(kan tsippor)*."

At that very moment someone appeared and showed the rabbis the way to the high road.

As for the second motif – how a castle is erected overnight – we find this in the old versified story (mentioned above), sanctified in the Sabbath hymns, about how Elijah the prophet, sold into slavery by the poor man to whom he delivered himself, erects a magnificent castle overnight at his master's orders. Here we will offer another legend of this genre.

The *tzaddik* Gur Aryeh, who was mentioned above, was one of the king's leading counselors. There was another minister who was extremely jealous of him. Once he turned to the king and said, "why do all of your ministers and counselors give feasts in your honor, and only Gur Aryeh has never done so? You should command him to hold a feast in your honor and invite you and us to it!" (The minister knew very well that Gur Aryeh was a poor man and lived in a ramshackle hut and did not have the means to give a feast.)

When Gur Aryeh appeared before the king, he ordered him to hold a royal feast. "Very well," replied Gur Aryeh, but give me a month's time so I can prepare a lavish feast such as no one has ever offered you before." The king agreed and gave him the requested time.

Each day the evil minister would send spies to check whether Gur Aryeh was really getting ready for the feast. His spies reported that Gur Aryeh was sitting day and night in his shack or in the house of study, learning Torah with his disciples, and was giving no thought whatsoever to the royal feast.

The appointed day arrived. Gur Aryeh came to the king and invited him, along with his counselors and ministers, to accompany him back to the feast. Gur Aryeh led them to the river; on its bank they saw a lavish palace. Entering, they saw the tables set with vessels of gold, silver, and precious stones, filled with the very best foods and wines. A vast number of attendants and waiters stood ready to serve the guests. The king and his ministers stood there struck with astonishment. "Eat and drink whatever you want," Gur Aryeh told them, "but don't take the dishes with you."

After the feast the crowd began to disperse, but the evil minister could not move. Everyone was surprised, but Gur Aryeh said: "He won't leave until he returns the salt cellar made of a single diamond, which he took from the table and put in his pocket."

The minister was forced to admit that he had stolen the salt cellar. He put it back in its place. The king took a fancy to the salt cellear and asked to borrow it so he could have one made just like it.

Sometime later the rumor spread that in a certain country the king had held a lavish royal feast and invited various kings. When the invited kings arrived, a

storm suddenly blew up and carried the castle away in a whirlwind, with all it contained. The next day the castle returned from wherever it had been. The king was humiliated that this happened in the presence of his guests, but was even angrier that a diamond salt cellar – one without peer in the world – had vanished from the castle.

The king who had borrowed the salt cellar returned it. He banished the evil minister and appointed Gur Aryeh as his viceroy.

Among the other motifs of European folklore that can be found in Jewish folklore we will mention "rapid motion." In European folktales this involves material objects – seven-league boots, a magic carpet, or a flying horse on which the hero travels. In Jewish folktales, however, things are different: the swift journey is accomplished by means of a word uttered by the *tzaddik,* or merely by his thought. It is not the hero who is conveyed swiftly; instead, the ground moves beneath him in the opposite direction. In rare cases the rapid motion takes place in a cloud, or, even more infrequently, on the wings of an eagle.

A legend about the Besht relates that, when he was still hidden and disguised and living somewhere in a valley, he once went up to the top of the mountain, where he walked back in forth in thought. A group of bandits had gathered on the summit of the next hill. When they saw the Besht approaching the edge of the abyss they expected him to fall off. But just then the top of the next hill moved over to join the top of the first one, the Besht walked peacefully from one hill to the other, and the hills again separated as they had been before. When the Besht again approached the abyss, the hilltops repeated the same maneuver. And so on again many times.

Also interesting is the following story:

Two rabbis were wandering in the forest. Suddenly they saw a golden castle before them. They entered and saw a golden table, around which an old man surrounded by a group of students were sitting on golden chairs. They were learning the arcane secret of the words "vanity of vanities." The old man (Elijah the Prophet) was explaining to the students that the name of God was concealed in these words. If they spoke it they could jump instantly from one end of the world to the other; the number of skips and jumps corresponded to the number of steps in the comprehension of the words (seven altogether). At the first level of comprehension it was possible to skip from one end of the world to the other in a single bound; at the second level – in two bounds; and so on.

The motif of invisibility works similarly. In Jewish literature it is achieved not through some material object (such as a cap of invisibility) but through fasting, ritual immersions, and the utterance of divine names.

The wonder-workers of Jewish legends, too, put their ears to the ground. What they hear, though, is not the hoofbeats of galloping horses that are pursuing them, but what is taking place in heaven and in the underworld. In Jewish tales, the emperor of the sea, who assembles the fish and commands them to find the lost royal signet, becomes the leviathan. The "apples of youth" are picked from the Tree of Life in Paradise. The water of life comes from Paradise; the waters of death, from Hell. And so on.

Thus in general we find that Jewish folktales include almost all the basic elements of the folklore of other peoples. But these elements have been transformed from a material to a spiritual ground, imbued with the spirit of the Bible and Talmud, and painted in the strong hues of a religious sensibility.[51]

Notes

Translator's note: Rendering this article into English posed an interesting problem, because of the multiple linguistic levels involved. An-Ski wrote it in Russian, which meant that he had to translate many sayings, tales, and songs from their original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Yiddish. Comparison of his versions with the originals (in the Talmud and the pioneering collection of Yiddish folksongs on which he relied [see n. 7]) reveals various liberties and occasional misunderstandings. When Zalmen Rejzen translated the essay into Yiddish, he naturally used the original Yiddish texts and ignored An-Ski's reworkings. Although it seems likely that in a few places An-Ski's changes were intended to make the texts more palatable to Russian readers, the fact is that, despite his use of quotation marks, he was not pretending to offer anything other than a paraphrase of the originals (he did not print the Yiddish folksongs as display text, for instance; but does so treating those in Russian and Ukrainian). In a few interesting cases I have noted deviations between An-Ski's Russian version and the Yiddish originals; generally, however, in these cases I have simply abandoned the Russian for the Yiddish, as presented by Rejzen, or the original talmudic passages.

Because my own Russian is weak, I executed a first draft of this translation on the basis of a free rendering by Shalom Lurie of Rejzen's Yiddish into Hebrew. In my verification and correction of this draft against the original Russian I benefited from the generous assistance of my friend and colleague Avraham Kaufman, who helped eliminate a train of inaccuracies that had crept in at one stage or another of the threefold translation process. Thanks to him, it can be said that An-Ski's own words are here presented in a more accurate version than ever before.

Notes that were provided by An-Ski himself appear without brackets (An-Ski's notes that merely provided a Russian translation for terms in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Yiddish, have been omitted). The bracketed notes have three sources: those added by Zalmen Rejzen, who translated the essay into Yiddish (it appeared in the collected edition of An-Ski's work in Yiddish, *Gesamelte Shriften* 15 [1928], pp. 29–95), are preceded by the letters "ZR"; those added by Shalom Lurie, in his Hebrew translation of Rejzen's Yiddish, are marked "SL." Bracketed notes without any attribution – as well as bracketed explanations in the body of the text – have been added by the present translator, who had all three of the previous texts in front of him.

[1] [This is the only line in the entire article printed in Hebrew characters – and with no translation provided for those not fluent in Aramaic. It is found also in BT Berakhot 45a and about half-a-dozen other places in the Talmud, in contexts where the later Sages could not decide among conflicting opinions as to the normative *halakhah*. "Go out and see what the people do!" – and *that* is the rule to be followed.

[2] [SL: Vladimir Ivanovitch Dall (1801–1872), Russian physician, author, and ethnographer. He was the personal physician of Pushkin and was at his bedside from the time he was wounded in his duel against Dantes until his death. He was a member of the Academy of Sciences by virtue of his collections of flora and fauna from the Orenburg district. Dall gained his chief fame for his immense anthology of 30,000 parables, sayings, and folktales. He edited and published a four-volume Russian lexicon, published in 1863–1866 (republished frequently, the last time in Moscow in 1955). For this lexicon, Dall received the Lomonosov Prize and

an honorary degree from the Russian Academy of Sciences. The ten-volume edition of his complete works was published posthumously, in St. Petersburg, in 1897–98.]

[3] [SL: Pavel Vasilievitch Schein (1826–1900), Russian and Belarussian folklorist. He was very active in the collection of folk materials in both languages. In 1870 he published a volume of Russian folksongs; in 1874, a volume of Belarussian folk-songs. To this he added various publications in the field until his last years.]

[4] [SL: The ethnographer Lev Yakovlevitch Sternberg (1881–1927) was active both before and after the 1917 revolution. He was a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He specialized mainly in the ethnography of the peoples of Siberia and in materials drawn from the ancient religious traditions. He contributed to Western dictionaries and encyclopedias with articles in the field of demonology.]

[5] [SL: Vladimir Ghermanovitch Bogoraz, known by the nom-de-plume N. A. Tan (1865–1936), Russian author, folklorist, ethnographer, and philologist. He collected folklore materials among the Chukchi and published studies on the folklore and ethnography of peoples of northeast Asia. He also wrote dictionaries and grammars of the Chukchi language. His collected writings were published in ten volumes in St. Petersburg in 1910-11. Many of his works were published posthumously. He edited a volume entitled *Evreiskoe Mestechko v Revoliutsii* (The shtetl in the Revolution) and contributed the first article in it, with the same title, on pp. 7–26. The book was published in Moscow and Leningrad in 1926.]

[6] [SL: Ilya Orshansky (1846–1875), well-known Russian-Jewish attorney and journalist. Even though he died of tuberculosis at age 29, he gained fame as a journalist in his struggle for Jewish emancipation in Russia. His literary estate included studies of the Jews in Russia, marked by great erudition and a deep understanding of the economic and legal needs of the Jewish masses.]

[7] S. M. Ginzburg and P. S. Marek, *Yidishe Folkslider in Rusland* (Jewish folksongs in Russia) (St. Petersburg, 1901; [photo-offset reprint, ed. Dov Noy, Ramat-Gan, 1981]); Ignaz Bernstein, *Jüdische Sprichwörter und Redensarten* (second expanded and revised edition, Warsaw, 1908).

[8] In Dall's collection, *Proverbs of the Russian People*, which is far from complete, there are 30,000 proverbs.

[9] [Here and elsewhere, wherever An-Ski incorporated transliterated Hebrew terms into his Russian task I have carried over the transliteration.]

[10] It may be that this tendency is even found in Pharaoh's dream of the thin cows swallowing the fat ones [(Gen. 41:4)].

[11] [SL: BT Hagiga 12a: "As R. Eliezer said, Adam [stretched] from the earth to the sky, as it is said, "ever since God created man on earth, from one end of heaven to the other" (Deut. 4:32); but one he sinned, the Holy One Blessed Be He placed His hand on him and made him smaller, as it is said: "You hedge me before and behind; You lay Your hand upon me." (Ps. 139:5).]

[12] [SL: "R. Levi says: They used to beget their children and increase and multiply like some kind of large vermin, six at each and every birth. And at once they would stand on their feet and speak in the Holy Tongue and dance before them, as it says: 'They let their infants run loose like sheep, and their children skip about' (Job 21:11)."]

[13] [BT Berakhot 54b].

[14] [SL: "Then Joseph sent to Pharaoh, saying: 'Send me 70 of your warriors, because I have discovered thieves and want to put them in chains.' He sent them to him and Joseph's brothers were looking to see what he wanted to do. Joseph said to the warriors: 'Put this one in prison,' When they approached he bellowed at them. When they heard his voice they fell on their faces and their teeth shattered, as it is said: 'The lion may roar, the cub may howl, But the teeth of the king of beasts are broken' (Job 4:10)" (Genesis Rabbah 91:6).]
The realization of vast strength in a voice, which is also known from the folklore of other peoples (for example, the whistle of Solovei the Bandit in Russian folktales), is especially frequent in Jewish folktales.

[15] If I am not mistaken, the only talmudic legend incorporating a certain idealization of martial valor and strength is the story about the Bar-Kokhba rebellion: "Ben Koziba had 200,000 men with a finger cut off. The Sages sent to him: 'How long will you maim Israelites?' He replied, 'How else can I test them?' They replied, 'Anyone who riding a horse cannot uproot a cedar will not be written on your muster roll' " [JT Ta'anit 4:3; An-ski's mistakenly gave as the source the reference for n. 17 below].

[16] [BT Tamid 32.]

[17] [After BT Baba Metzia 84a; An-ski's reference is impossibly corrupt.]

[18] [According to a note added by Lurie, the actual source is Ginzburg and Marek, Nos. 6–7, pp. 8–11.]

[19] [The final line, which An-Ski's printed in transliterated Hebrew, is based on verses in Psalms (96:1, 98:1, 149:1) and a passage in the Passover haggadah. SL *added*: The songs in a Jewish dialect of Russian [with Polish additions – LSJ], are in Ginzburg and Marek, Nos. 15, 16, 17, pp. 15-18.]

[20] [The original text is in Ukrainian.]

[21] [Derived from the first line of a liturgical poem from the Additional Service for the Day of Atonement, after the retelling of the Temple ritual for that day: "In truth, how resplendent was the appearance of the High Priest, when he came out of the Holy of Holies unharmed."]

[22] [Evidently because *dal* is Hebrew for "poor, indigent."]

[23] [In the traditional handwritten text of the scroll of Esther, the letter *yod* in this name, the last in the list of Haman's sons (Esther 9:7–9), is written smaller than the surrounding text, and the *vav* that precedes it is written larger – thereby creating the visual image of a man hanging from a gallows: ויזתא].

[24] [See above, note 7.]

[25] An allusion to the folk song cited above, in which God tries to find a mate for his daughter, the Torah.

[26] In the folk language, the names Jacob, Esau, and Ishmael frequently were used to designate the Jews, Russians, and Turks, respectively. The Russo-Turkish war was referred to by saying that Esau had gone to war against Ishmael. [Esau or Edom was used to refer to Rome already in talmudic times, and was naturally transferred to the Christian world.]

[27] [An-Ski seems to have misunderstood this Yiddish saying. The popular adage, as attested by Rejzen's Yiddish, was actually, "it wouldn't help even if Mar son of Rabbi Ashi were to come in person." *Mar* 'lord' was indeed the courtesy title of the exilarchs, but the sage in question (d. c. 468) did not belong to the royal line of David. The source of the expression may be the story recounted in BT Baba Bathra 12b, according to which Mar, after overhearing a simple-

ton proclaim that the next head of the talmudic academy in Mata Mehasya would sign his name "Tavyomi" (evidently the sage's given name), hastened to that town. Arriving in the nick of time, he managed to receive the coveted appointment instead of his colleague Aha, whom the other sages had been about to select for the position.]

[28] It should be noted that the *tzaddik*'s expertise is not limited to the domain of the Torah. In addition to the entire Torah (both exoteric and esoteric), he also knew all the seven sciences, all seventy human languages, the speech of the animals and birds, the secret of invisibility, physiognomy, and medicine. There is an entire group of legends about *tzaddikim* who were expert physicians. Most of these legends are attached to the name of the "greatest physician who ever was," Maimonides, who learned from Aristotle himself, knew how to create a homunculus, and so on.

[29] [SL: Transcribed in reverse order, as quoted by An-Ski.]

[30] [Here An-Ski renders the Yiddish *rabbi* by the Russian *uchitel'*. Rabbi also means "master, teacher," but in the context of spending Sabbath on maneuvers rather than in the synagogue, the irony of drill-sergeant instead of rabbi is no doubt paramount.]

[31] [Thus the Yiddish; An-Ski's Russian, however, is "than to call a soldier 'teacher.' " (1) He softens the derogatory Yiddish *yoven* 'Russian soldier' to soldat. (2) The Yiddish feter 'uncle' corresponds to Russian *dyadya*; An-Ski has instead *dyad'ka*, from the same root, but normally meaning tutor, instructor, or drillmaster. This may be a slip; or perhaps An-Ski, with the previous song in mind, "corrected" the Yiddish.]

[32] Commentaries on the Talmud.

[33] It is characteristic that the only song in which we find broken words about battlefield encounters is in the section of children's songs: "A white dove is leading me to England. England is closed and locked and the keys are broken. One, two, three. Poland is gone; Russia is running with its cannons, Poland is left without its soldiers" (ibid., No. 90, p. 118).

[34] [Familiar form of Stepan, a distinctly non-Jewish name commonly used in Yiddish to indicate a crude peasant.]

[35] [Khariton, too, is a distinctly gentile name.]

[36] [Translation of the version in Aaron Jellinek, *Beit Midrash*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem 1967), p. 48, incorporated by SL in place of An-Ski's retelling of the legend.]

[37] [Translation of the original text in BT Baba Metzia 59b, incorported by SL in place of An-Ski's retelling of the legend.]

[38] [SL: i.e., the Torah precept of "deferring to the majority" expounded from Ex. 23:2.]

[39] [Translation of original text in BT Ta'anit 25a].

[40] [ZR: Here An-Ski presents the content of the hasidic story that he himself later put into verse for children and published under the title, "A Din-Toira mit Gott" (A suit against God), in his *Collected Works* 1, pp. 147-158.]

[41] [According to *halakhah*, rabbinical courts may not start to hear a case after dark.]

[42] [The concluding service of the Day of Atonement, recited from late afternoon until after dark, during which, according to Jewish tradition, the gates of heaven are thrown wide open to receive prayers and repentance.]

[43] [The Jewish idiom appropriate here, and supplied by Rejzen, corresponds to a personification of accusation or indictment. An-Ski resorted to a circumlocution, "forces hostile to the Jews."]

[44] [See previous note; here An-Ski accordingly wrote "made the hostile forces vanish" instead of "nullify."]

[45] [SL: Ginzburg and Marek, No. 83]

[46] [I.e., Rabbi Judah Loew (c. 1525–1609), the Maharal of Prague, he is the hero of the legend of the golem.]

[47] The foundation for a large part of these legends was evidently provided by the story of the greatness of R. Samuel Halevi ben Yosef Hanagid (993–1056) [also kown as Ibn Nagrela], who rose from small shopkeeper to be the vizier and [military commander] of the king of Granada. According to the historian Heinrich Graetz:

"In Malaga, Abulkasim Ibn-Alarif, the vizir of Habus, the second king of Granada, had a palace next to Samuel's little shop. This brought good fortune to the poor scholar and raised him above want, and ultimately exalted him to a height worthy of his greatness.

"A slave of the vizir who frequently furnished information to her master regularly had her letters written by the poor Jew. These letters displayed so much linguistic and caligraphic skill that the vizir Ibn-Alarif became anxious to know the writer. He had Ibn-Nagrela called into his presence and took him into his service as his private secretary (1025). The vizir soon discovered that Samuel possessed great political insight and consulted him on all important affairs of state, and as his advice was always sound, the vizir at length undertook nothing without Samuel's approval.

"When Ibn-Alarif fell ill, King Habus was in despair as to what to do about his complicated relations with neighboring states. The dying vizir referred him to his Jewish secretary, confessed that his successful undertakings had been mainly due to Samuel's wise suggestions, and advised Habus to employ him as a counselor. The Berber king of Granada, who had fewer prejudices against the Jews than the Arab Mussulmans, raised Samuel Ibn-Nagrela to the dignity of minister (katib) and put him in charge of the diplomatic and military affairs (1027)."

(Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews* (Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1894), vol. 3, ch. 8, p. 256).

[48] [Russian *pravednik* 'righteous man', which is how An-Ski generally renders the corresponding Hebrew/Yiddish *tzaddik*. By the nineteenth century, however, *tzaddik* in Yiddish had acquired the specific sense of a hasidic rebbe, and that is how An-Ski *usually* employs it in this article. I have tried to express the dichotomy of meaning by rendering the word sometimes by "righteous man" and sometimes by "*tzaddik*," as appropriate. Here An-Ski applies *pravednik* to Rabbi Loew in the style appropriate for a hasidic wonder-worker, even though the rabbi lived several centuries before the hasidic movement appeared.]

[49] It is typical that Jewish stories and tales display an attitude of reverence and respect for the pope. He is always presented as a humble, compassionate, generous, and just person. This may be explained by the fact that frequently, during anti-Jewish persecutions and pogroms, the popes frequently protected the victims. It may also be that this expresses the Jews' respect for the supreme representative of the spiritual side of the Christian nations.

[50] [The reference in the original is clearly to Adam, known in Yiddish as *Adam harishon* – literally, "the first man"; An-Ski for some reason rendered it literally in Russian as *pervego cheloveka*!]

[51] [ZR: An-Ski published an excerpt from this article in Yiddish in the magazine put out by his friend and colleague, Dr. Haim Zhitlowsky, *Dos Neye Leben* (New York, 1910) – "Di Grund-

motiven fun Yidishen Folks-shafen." We have published this section, without modifying the introduction, even though it is slightly out of date.]

CHAPTER III

Y. L. CAHAN – A SCHOLAR OF JEWISH FOLK SONGS

In any discussion of Jewish folkloristics, Y. L. Cahan occupies an honored place as one of the most important students of Eastern European Jewish folklore and particularly of Yiddish folk songs. In his article about Cahan's instructions on the collecting of folklore, Richard Bauman complains that most American folklorists are unaware both of Cahan's collections and of his scholarly work, even though much of his work was carried out in New York, because both are in Yiddish. This is also why the work of this immigrant folklorist remained known to only a restricted circle (Bauman 1962, 284–289).

In Israel, too, Cahan's collections and scholarship are not accessible to most of those who deal with Jewish folklore, because of their lack of command of Yiddish. This injustice was remedied to some extent in the very first issue of *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore,* in which Galit Hasan-Rokem, one of its editors, included her Hebrew translation of Cahan's "Folkslid un folkshtimlekh lid" (Cahan 1952a, 194–204; Cahan 1981, 146–152).

Cahan's biography reflects the ups and downs that were the lot of Eastern European Jews since the 1880s on. His scholarly work is associated with the methods of international folklore studies of his own time, on the one hand, and the trends in the study of Yiddish folklore that prevailed in Poland between the two world wars, especially in Warsaw and Vilna, on the other.

Cahan was born in Vilna in 1881. When he was eight his family moved to Warsaw. There he began collecting folk songs, under the inspiration of I. L. Peretz, the undoubted pioneer in the collection of Yiddish folk songs.[1] In 1901 Cahan emigrated to London, where he lived for

[1] In addition to the original publications in Urquell, the Peretz section at YIVO contains a notebook of 60 pages in Peretz's handwriting: "Yomtov bletlekh, folkslider. Gezamelt durkh I. L. Peretz. Tsenzurirt Varshe 23 July 1996" (see Pippe 1937, 1–3). In addition, Peretz was one of the first to respond to the collection of Yiddish folk songs collected in Russia and published by Saul Ginzburg and Pesach Marek (Ginzburg and Marek 1901). This anthology was published in St. Petersburg in 1901, with the date of the censor's approval – 15 September–4 December 1900 – noted on it, by the Russian Jewish Voskhod publishing house. (A photo-offset reprint of this rare volume, edited by Dov Noy, was published by Bar-Ilan University Press in 1991.) As early as January 24, 1901, a week after the book was issued, the weekly *Der Yud* (7-8) published a series of articles signed "Ben-Tamar" (Peretz's nom de plume), under the title, "Dos Yidishe leb'n loyt di yidishe folkslider." It was reprinted, with some modifications, in the Cracow periodical *Di Yudishe bibliothek* (1904, nos. 2-3). It can also be found in the collected works of Peretz, in the volume *Literatur un Lebn* (Peretz 1926, 26–48; see also Rejzen 1937, 291–292; Peretz 1937, 292–299). In addition, it is interesting to note that in 1934 the weekly *Literarishe bleter* (14) published an excerpt from a manuscript by Peretz that had been sent to YIVO in Vilna by Nachman Maisel of Warsaw, under the title, "I. L. Peretz un dos yidishe folks-shafung: tsu zayn 22-sten yortsayt" (I. L. Peretz and Jewish folk art: for the 22nd anniversary of his death). Maisel believed, incorrectly, that the manuscript had been written around 1901. But as Shmuel Zanvil Pippe cor-

three years. In 1904 he moved to New York, making his home there until his death in 1937. By profession he was a watchmaker and always supported himself in this craft. But he devoted the bulk of his energies to collecting and studying Eastern European Jewish folklore. This duality was typical of folklore scholars at the time, since they could not support themselves from their research and had to engage in some more remunerative profession.[2]

His training in folklore studies, too, was typical of Eastern European folklorists. Like them, Cahan was an autodidact who had taught himself everything he knew about folkloristics. But he differed from most of them in one essential respect. This was reflected in his long association relationship with the YIVO ethnographic committee – a complex relationship that was not devoid of friction.[3]

The difference between Cahan's approach to the collection of Jewish folklore and that of the YIVO committee illuminates his central ideas about the definition of Jewish folklore and the appropriate method for collecting it. The ethnographic committee was part of the philological section of YIVO. YIVO, the most important academic institution devoted to the study of Yiddish culture, was founded in 1925 in order to tackle major ideological and scholarly problems in interwar Poland. The first meeting of the ethnographic committee, in October of that year in Vilna, declared that the committee's main goal was to collect Jewish folklore and establish a world center for the study of Jewish folklore "wherever the Yiddish language is alive," in the words of Chaim Chayes, the committee's first secretary (Chayes, 1926, 47).

Because the members of the ethnographic committee were aware of the changes taking place in Eastern European Jewish society, they wanted to document the Jewish folklore of past generations, which was rapidly vanishing, as well as the emerging folklore of their own period. To carry out this vast enterprise they set up a network of collectors all over Poland. Volunteers and with no training in folklore, they received guidance from the committee. The committee members realized that without this network it would prove impossible to accomplish the mission they had set themselves. As a result, the committee did not apply any selection criteria to the materials collected and legitimized the divorce between the collector, who collected material and sent it to YIVO, and the scholar, who would study the material in the future.

Even though Cahan, as noted, was self-taught, he embodied the integration of collector and scholar. Most of the songs in his anthology, *Yudishe Folkslieder,* published in New York in 1912 – the essay translated here served as its introduction – were collected by him in Warsaw in 1896–1901. After he left Poland he continued to collect Jewish folklore from Eastern European Jewish immigrants in London and the United States.[4] In parallel to his collection efforts, Cahan devoted much time and energy to studying the theory of folklore. He was thoroughly versed in the comparative school, the mainstream of folklore studies in those years. He applied

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rectly noted (Pippe 1937, 286–290), this is a large extract from a review that Peretz wrote about I. L. Cahan's *Yudishe folkslieder* – the volume to which the essay translated here served as the introduction.

[2] The well-known Warsaw folklorist, Noyekh Prilutski, was an attorney. Many other Jewish folklorists were journalists or jacks-of-all-trades.

[3] Roni Biran pointed this out in the context of the episode of the YIVO collector Berl Werblonski (Biran 1988/9, 239–270). See also Gottesman 2003, 164.

[4] Richard Bauman relates that Cahan transcribed folklore from his grandmother, Mrs. G. Kerman, in New York (Bauman 1962, 289). The anthology also includes songs that Cahan collected in London and New York.

the theory he learned to Yiddish folklore, examining key issues such as the sources of Jewish folklore, the relations between Jewish folklore and international folklore, the relations between oral and written composition, the authenticity of folklore items, and, of course, the scholarly method of folklore collecting.

We can learn about his approach to the collection of folklore from his treatment of the issue, scattered throughout his various articles, but chiefly from the two monographs he wrote to provide guidance to YIVO's collectors in association with his lectures to them in 1930 (Cahan 1952b, 1952c). His method can be divided into two parts: (1) the relations between collector and informant; (2) the relations between collector and material.

In the first area, Cahan spoke of the need to cultivate a close bond with the informant before the transcription process and stressed the caution required and the need to avoid skepticism or condescension toward informants. The actual transcription should not be begun until a relationship of trust had been established; then one could encourage the informant toward bygone days and old songs and stories (the focus on the past is tied up with Cahan's definition of folklore – see below). Cahan warned collectors to refrain from being too demanding and assertive during the transcription process. He also insisted on the appropriate interaction in the transcription situation. The transcriber should listen to the performance first, setting down only notes and not a full transcription. Only the second performance should be recorded. The repetition allows informants to refresh their memories and may provide the collector with information for the questions that should be addressed to the informant. Cahan insisted on a precise, word-for-word transcription and the fullest possible documentation of the informant's personal details. He also stressed the need to give informants full credit for every detail spoken by them.

In the second area – the relationship between collector and material – Cahan believed that collectors must specialize in a particular genre that suits them. He recommended starting out by transcribing less complicated genres, such as sayings or proverbs, and only later continuing on to complex forms like folk songs or folktales. Cahan was cognizant of the importance of the cultural context and held that collectors must study the nature of the tradition they intended to record and become familiar with earlier collections where these existed. In addition, they must know who are the bearers of the tradition of the particular genre they are studying, including sex, age, and social status. Adult informants were the best choice.

Cahan's position about the ideal collector-scholar is highlighted in his demand that collectors develop the ability to discriminate between what he called "authentic" and "inauthentic" folklore – an issue that concerned him greatly. This ability, he believed, could be acquired with time and experience in collecting and studying material. Cahan recommended that collectors develop their own repertoire (Cahan himself learned to sing folk songs and sang them for his informants to "prime the pump"). He believed that this was the only way to acquire their trust and extract items of folklore that a society would rather not reveal to an outsider, lest it provoke antagonism or ridicule.

From all the aforesaid we may understand that Cahan identified with the goals of the ethnographic committee of YIVO when it came to critical importance of collecting Jewish folklore; but his methodology, unlike the committee's, was more selective and critical. The complex relations between Cahan and the ethnographic committee were manifested in the fact that, on the one hand, its members accepted him as an authority in the discipline, maintained ongoing contacts with him, and sent him the materials collected, asking for his opinion. Cahan

was also invited to be the first lecturer at a course for collectors that YIVO conducted in Vilna on October 31 and November 1, 1930. On the other hand, despite Cahan's criticism of the collection methods and materials collected, the YIVO workers considered all of it to be worthy of archiving and did not reject it or the collectors in the field. When Cahan proposed, on November 2, 1930, that the committee change its name from "ethnographic" to "folklore," to bring it into line with the folklore societies in the West, the members agreed. Despite the name change, however, YIVO publications continued to refer to it as the "ethnographic committee." (Gottesman 2003, 121) The committee members held Cahan in great esteem and accepted his opinion on many matters. But when there was a divergence between it conception that every item of folklore should be collected and Cahan's more selective approach, they did not defer to his opinion, although they tried to avoid any direct confrontation.

The essay "Jewish Folk Songs," published here in English for the first time, is Cahan's most comprehensive treatment of the subject, although the various topics raised in it were further developed in his later work. The essay was first published as the introduction to the first volume of his *Yudishe Folkslieder,* published in New York in 1912 (with the date of composition given as "New York, 1910"). Part of it had been published earlier in the New York periodical *Literatur* on Nov. 2, 1910 (pp. 122–141). Later it appeared as the first essay in his posthumous *Shtudies vegn yidisher folks-shafung,* edited by Max Weinreich, and published by YIVO in 1952 (pp. 9–42).

In this essay Cahan deals with key issues that occupied him in the study of folk songs. First and foremost is the definition of the genre. Age, he says, is the prime criterion for determining whether a song is a folk song. A folk song is one that "circulated among the people for many years," "alternately shedding and reassuming different forms and content." Consequently, folk songs will always exist in multiple versions. Cahan was one of the first students of Yiddish folk songs to recognize the importance of the melody.[5] In addition, a folk song necessarily has an associated melody; only the words and melody together express the people's soul. Folk songs originate with anonymous bards or folk singers endowed with poetic talent. The moment their songs are accepted by the people – that is, when they began to be handed on from one person to another – they metamorphose into folk songs. During the transmission process they undergo modifications. Part of the song may be forgotten, part of it is altered. The events that inspired the creation of Jewish folk songs were, he believes, extraordinary incidents that took place in cities and towns. From this perspective, the songs reflect the context in which they were created and sung. But significant changes take place as songs move from place to place. By way of example, Cahan cites a song that in its earlier version, as sung in Russia, reflects the custom of marrying off children in order to save the boy from military conscription. In a later version, collected in Poland, this element has vanished and the song has lost its historical value. In addition to its expression of its social context, a song also expresses the life and aspirations of the individual who sings it.

One of the key issues tackled by Cahan in his folk-song studies is that of authenticity, and he touches on that in the present essay, too. The terms "authentic" and "inauthentic" are frequent in his writings. Cahan consistently refrained from including songs linked to con-

[5] The folk songs in *Yudish folkslider* are published with the accompaniment of 175 melodies transcribed by the New York cantor H. Roasoto.

temporary events or associated with written materials under the rubric of folk songs. As Ruth Rubin noted, he held that only what is old, simple, and pure merits being accounted a folk song (Rubin 1955, 40). Cahan treats the authenticity of folk songs while distinguishing them from what he calls songs in style of folk songs and "songs of Badhanim (jesters)."

Cahan developed the issue of folk song versus songs in style of folk song in a later essay (Cahan 1952a, Cahan 1981). Here he quotes Sholem Aleichem, who alleged that in Yiddish, "the label 'folk song' is attached to all the songs that are written in popular Yiddish and published for the folk." (Sholem Aleichem, 1904). Cahan considers these to be popular songs rather than authentic folk songs. It is perfectly true that songs of this sort may become folk songs – but only after the passage of time. Only if the people adopt the song – and the odds for this increase if it is accompanied by a catchy tune – and sing it for a long time can it be considered to have crossed the line and turned into a folk song.

Cahan also draws a distinction between folk songs and the songs of wedding jesters. He acknowledges that the jesters' work may have some folkloric value, but their ditties belong to an inferior species; whereas Cahan, following Herder, considers folk song to be a sublime art that expresses the folk temperament and has the capacity to inspire emotions that jesters' rhymes will never arouse.

With regard to the universality of folk songs, Cahan accepts the philological approach common in folklore studies of his day; namely, that similar songs in different languages and cultures have a lost common source and origin. Thus, for example, he shows that *Had gadya* songs (of "the house that Jack built" pattern) exist in many cultures. He rejects the theory that Yiddish riddle songs should be traced to fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Germany. Cahan agrees that there are reciprocal influences among peoples, the songs are part of a universal phenomenon and are not specific to a particular culture, even though it endows a song with its own special nature.

Another topic covered is that of love songs, to which Cahan later devoted a separate essay (Cahan 1952). Cahan challenges the view of Yiddish literary critics, including Leo Wiener, in his *History of Yiddish Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Wiener 1898), that the word *libe* 'love' was not part of the Yiddish lexicon until the middle of the nineteenth century. He demonstrates that the Jewish masses, and especially the lower classes, were singing love songs in Yiddish as early as the sixteenth century. Love songs fill the first section of his anthology. He points out that they are more common among women and express the pain of love, loneliness, and helplessness. Women's love songs are sung by and among women. Love is a theme of men's songs, too, but it is much less common and they do not bear so strong an impress of emotion as do women's songs.

Cahan also touches on the methodology for collecting the songs, including his decision to transcribe them in "standard" Yiddish and not in the particular dialect in which they were sung. This decision was influenced in part by the fact that as a Yiddishist he rejected the idea of transliterating Yiddish folk songs in the Latin alphabet. "Yiddish does not have to part company with its traditional alphabet, and certainly not when we are dealing with folk songs." Still, "the Yiddish alphabet . . . does not have enough letters for all the various sounds of our language."

The songs in the anthology introduced by the present essay were divided into 11 thematic sections, as follows: love songs, bride-and-groom and wedding songs, family songs, cradle

songs, children's songs, riddle songs, soldiers' songs, workers' songs, Purim songs, religious songs, and miscellaneous songs that did not fit into the other categories.

When modern folklorists appraise Cahan's work we cannot ignore his emotional and critical approach to folklore materials, expressed in his assessment of both collectors and informants; his stubborn rejection of folklore materials with a contemporary relevance; and his failure to pay attention to the performance and context. Nevertheless, his work inspires our awe because of the massive scale of his collecting and the breadth and depth of Cahan the scholar.

Jewish Folk Songs

Y. L. Cahan

1

The songs collected in the two volumes of the anthology *Yidishe Folkslider* (New York) are folk songs in the full sense of the word. They were published after they had circulated among the people for many years in a sort of anonymity, as a species of tacit mystery concealed from the outside world. They survived to the present by diffusing from person to person, from mother to child; in this way they were preserved and graven in the folk memory. By means of many years of toil I succeeded in collecting a small part of the rich treasury of Yiddish songs that are still hidden among the people.

The primary source for the buried treasure of Jewish folk songs in Yiddish is to be found in Russia. At various times and in changing circumstances the people there created songs, or revived old ones, which are always young and fresh, as they undergo perpetual metamorphosis, alternately shedding and reassuming different forms and content. Today, however, the increasing number of songs being composed for artistic performance or the theater, as well as revolutionary and nationalist songs, have almost totally chased from the field the ballads of such well known bards as Berl Broder,[1] Velvel Zbarazher,[2] Mikhel Gordon,[3] S. Bernstein,[4] Abraham Goldfaden,[5] Eliakum Zunser,[6] and others.

Even today, despite the immense changes that have taken place in the lives of the Jews in Russia, it is possible to find hidden corners and remote villages in the Pale of Settlement where original folk songs still flourish. In places where the old conditions of life have not yet been altered and modern culture has yet to penetrate; in places where the modern spirit has not yet filtered down to the lowest strata of the people: there one can frequently hear the hushed, sweet, and plaintive melody of the Jewish folk song. In such places, the authentic folk song still prevails, in its full glory and splendor.

It is true that in the big cities, where life is more pressured and frantic, and the Jewish rank and file have attained a higher cultural level – in these cities authentic folk song is slowly dying out. It is gradually being erased from the national memory and sinking into oblivion. We hear its silent and sad melody at increasingly infrequent intervals. I fear that the day is not far distant when our authentic folk songs will have become a relic of the past.

People who are inadequately conversant with this matter may think that the previous sentence is somewhat overwrought. They would say that new folk songs are being created every day in our theaters and by sundry musicians. These songs are taken up by the audience, who learn their words and melodies and sing them all the time. What is more, the old folk songs have been published in hundreds of editions of sheet music and anthologies and are still being

sung in various places and circumstances. This being the case, how can it be true that our folk songs have indeed reached their last hour?

The truth is that none of those songs just mentioned, including those that are explicitly labeled "Jewish folk songs," are folk songs in the full sense of the term.

"Among us" – contended our famous Sholem Aleichem against the music critic Joel Engel – "the label 'folk song' is attached to all the songs that are written in popular language, in simple Yiddish – what is called *jargon* – and published for the folk. But here a typographical error of long standing intervenes: 'songs for the folk' is replaced by 'folk songs.' "

Engel's definition is better. In his opinion, "folk songs are songs that have been taken over by the people from anonymous composers who lived in a distant and forgotten time, or songs that are transcribed from people in our own day, in front of our eyes, but are widespread among the people because of their folk character."[7]

We must not forget that the people themselves do not distinguish between a folk song and a song that is not a folk song. They sing anything that is catchy and any words that can be set to music. It would be a mistake to call all of these "folk songs," both the old ones and the new ones that spring up and are sung by the people. It is an even more serious error to assert that songs have wide circulation among the people exclusively because they are written in the "simple language of the common folk" or because of their popular nature. If we take, for example, the songs of Edelstad[8] or Vinchevsky,[9] we find that they are quite devoid of all such characteristics. Nevertheless they are well known and sung everywhere. The songs of Abraham Rejzen,[10] by contrast, are indeed written in the simple language of the people and have a folk nature; but they do not circulate widely and almost no one sings them.

What can account for this phenomenon?

I believe that the melody is the chief factor that makes songs circulate widely among the people.

For the common folk a melody frequently sinks deeper roots than the song itself. Many people pick up the melody of a song and repeat it and hum it quietly, or at least something close to it – the "metamorphosis of a melody," as I. L. Peretz famously expressed it. Consequently a song that is created along with a melody – even an art song – has a good chance of becoming popular and widely distributed, even among those strata of the people who do not understand some or all of the words.

An authentic folk song is not just a simple song that is understood by everyone; it is a song that is created by the people themselves – and this is the essential point – and that expresses their character in a natural rather than a contrived fashion and reflects the deepest recesses of their soul. An authentic folk song is not meant to be read, quoted, or declaimed; an authentic folk song is meant to be sung, because it grew along with the melody that is attached to it, like body and soul, which are quite incapable of existing separately.

I accept the principle that folk songs without a melody are only half folk songs.

We must not imagine that songs suddenly sprouted and sprang up from the people or even that they were composed in collaboration by many people. Their origin is in the works of individual anonymous bards or folk singers, who did not bother to publicize their own names by means of their songs. No one knows them and no one asks who they are. They sing for themselves and for others and in practice belong to everyone. The anonymous folk singer does not stand out from the masses. He does not read books and does not know how to express his ideas

in writing. The ideas and worldviews of the elite strata are thoroughly alien to him; his perspective on the world is the same as that of his own folk milieu. He draws his thoughts directly from the life around him, from the mouths of the people and the depths of his own soul.

He is one of the multitude but with an innate lyric talent. He is not a professional poet and he is not to be sought in the company of the professional entertainers and performers at weddings and circumcisions. Their songs consist for the most part of trite puns, tasteless jokes, and rhymes that melt away with the assembled guests at the wedding and in practice leave no trace of their existence among the people.

But the authentic folk poet creates something that is natural and not contrived, that is innocent but full of feeling. His songs pass from one person to another and live in the people's memory. Obviously songs like this are liable also to be forgotten over the course of time. Nevertheless, a few stanzas are still sung, or sometimes only isolated lines or the melodies of songs whose sounds have long since faded away. More than once they serve as the building blocks for new musical works.

The authentic folk song springs from the most sensitive folk temperament at various seasons, in times of happiness or catastrophe, in times of joy or mourning, in times of pain and anger, love and hope and so on.

The songs appear at various opportunities: here a new waltz emerges, or a quadrille or *sher* or polka. Where do they come from? From a tune that was played at some wedding, or even from a hurdy gurdy in the street. In a short time the melody spreads among the people and is played or sung or hummed everywhere, until a song is born. But this is no ordinary song, no off-the-cuff rhyme of the kind performed by wedding jesters, but a true folk song with content, sung with heartfelt emotion. For example:

> Play me the new *sher*
> That has just appeared;
> I have fallen in love with a pretty girl –
> But cannot approach her.
>
> I would go up to her,
> But she sits so far away;
> I would kiss her,
> But I am bashful in public.
>
> Not so much in public
> As before God.
> I would like to spend time with her –
> But no one must see.[11]

Some of the songs were the result of unusual circumstances, of the events that sometimes take place in a small town. These may include the sudden discovery of the secret passion of a young couple, or – woe and alas! – a groom who drowns in the river on his wedding day, or similar incidents that agitate the surface of the quiet and monotonous life of the common folk. In circumstances like these the folk singer may create a ballad that describes the episode in

great detail. Then quite suddenly, though no one knows what or who or whence it came, the people are singing a song to a new tune, or perhaps to an old familiar one. It may begin, for example, like this:

I'll sing you an air, people,
About something that happened not far from here:
A young fellow who was engaged drowned –
And what a really big fellow he was, to boot!
(Cahan 1912, 1: 226)

The song caught on at once and was sung by men, women, and children, young folks and old alike. Thanks to the melody the song spread and became popular, until, within a very short while, everyone had become a collaborator in arranging it. They all sang it according to their individual taste and version, their individual understanding and heart's desire. Thus, almost unnoticed, intentionally or unintentionally, new words and expressions not originally there infiltrated into its lines, new stanzas were incorporated – some of them borrowed from familiar old songs. Phrases were exchanged, lines switched, rhymes modified – and even the tune itself was altered.

Slowly the nature and content of the song changed; the individual touch of the original composer was lost and it was absorbed into the collective folk character. In this way the song became the creation and possession of all the people – an authentic folk song.

A song does not remain within the confines of the place where it was created forever. It roams through the surrounding towns, penetrating the small ones and then the larger ones. It travels with carters and hired maidservants, with army recruits and with laborers. A song that was born, for example, in Lithuania, may find its way to Poland or southern Russia and from there proceed to Galicia or Romania. A folk song may march along many and varied paths, as in every district it adapts itself to local circumstances and reflects the particular lifestyle and specific character of the new milieu.

As the song continues its journey among the people, and is performed with greater frequency, more and different versions of it are created. Sometimes the versions diverge into separate songs, all spawned by a single parent. Each of these has its own content and character. Not only do these versions allow us a glimpse of the most hidden recesses of the people's soul; they also permit us to discern regional variations in how people live.

Consider, for example, this old children's song that is still sung in various parts of Lithuania and Poland.

Boys and girls
Took one other;
The wedding on Tisha be'Av –
No one came.

This song evidently originated in the "panic time," when Jewish parents would secretly marry off their underage children to keep them from being drafted into the army (Ginzburg and Marek 1901: introduction, p. 18, song 225).

In Poland, by contrast, the song lost its historical value and mutated into a version with a day-to-day character, involved in weekday life.

Yeast buns and eggdrop cakes
Took one another;
The wedding on Tisha be'Av –
No one came.

There is an old song that was evidently directed against girls who did not attach adequate importance to family status as a factor in a potential mate and were willing to marry a simple artisan. In Lithuania, they sang this morality tale as follows:

I have told you and told you and told you:
You must not choose a tailor.
A tailor is a boorish fellow –
The devil take him!
(Cahan 1912, 2: 100)

In Poland there was a different version:

I have told you and told you and told you,
And I'll tell you once again:
If you agree to take a tailor as your husband
You will have only crying and weeping.

What kind of business is tailoring?
A needle and a thimble;
And when you come out from under the huppah it may be that
The wife bawls: I'm hungry!
(Cahan 1912, 2: 18)

As can be seen, in Poland the lower classes were nearly as concerned that the groom might be an ignoramus or lout rather than a scholar. The important question was whether he could earn a living, whether there would be yeast buns and eggdrop cakes in his kitchen.

But we cannot always confidently determine the time and place where a song was born or first sung. The itinerant folk song knows no borders. It rambles from one country to another, from one people to another, from mouth to mouth; not only can it reflect the life of the people in one particular milieu, it can also represent the life and aspirations of the individual, of the singer himself, with all the joys and pains that surround him. This becomes clear in songs that are sung by different characters. For example:

When I'm with my man,
My mama is there too;

When I want to get engaged,
My mama won't let me.

I won't pay attention to my mama;
I'll make an end of the matter:
I will marry my man
And go away with him.

I'll go way with him
All around the world;
Even if death should come,
He must be my husband!

This is the cry of pain and even the last desperate step by a lovelorn Jewish girl, who may have never left her own town or set foot past the nearest road junction. In her stubborn decision to marry her man in hand and go away with him one can sense her helplessness, her fear of the strange wide world, in which she may lose her life.

Quite a different version of the song is sung by a man, a vigorous and independent person who can get along and stand on his own wherever he goes.

I am with my beloved,
My mama is with us;
I want my beloved,
My mother won't let me.
I'll pay no attention to my mama's advice,
I will take my beloved just as she is.

I will take her
And make an end of the matter;
I will take her
And go away with her;
I will go away with her,
Straight to Odessa
And get married
Before a day has passed.

This is how the people create their songs, which reflect their inner lives in all times and circumstances. From a single song, which wanders among the people for long years, many new songs emerge, and they too are always undergoing change. The songs are sung in different versions, until their common origin is forgotten for one reason or another. But this principle does not always hold sway. There are stable songs that maintain their grip on memory and survive for centuries; they do, it is true, change – the stanza structure may be modified, the melody altered, some of the stanzas or rhymes may be lost – but they themselves are not forgotten.

Maturity – this is one of the distinguishing traits of the folk song.

2

Some of the old songs are still being sung by the people and are as fresh as ever, as if they had been created only yesterday. In fact, they are many centuries old. Many of the game songs and counting songs that our children sing, as well as riddles songs and wish songs, were known in Germany as early as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the songs derive from Germanic parentage. It seems more likely that they are "universal folk songs." This name is apt because they circulated among almost every nation in Europe. Every people, of course, thinks they are its own and sings them in its own versions (Cahan 1912, 2: 100).

By way of example, here is one such universal folk songs, the ancient *Had gadya* that our children still sing today in numerous versions:

God sent down
A little tree down, a little tree down.
Let the little tree grow little pears,
Let the little tree grow little pears.
The little tree will not grow little pears,
The little pears refuse to fall off.[12]
(Ibid., 1: 20, 69 ff.)

Zunz conjectures that the Passover song *Had gadya* is in fact an imitation of a German folk song and dates from the fifteenth century.[13] Other Jewish scholars agree. However, Dr. K. Kahler has proven in his closely reasoned article that this theory is quite wrong.[14] He cites the opinion expressed by Sanders (*Volksleben der Neugriechen*) that similar modern Greek folk songs actually derive from Jewish folk songs. The Greek song is something like this.

Once there was an old man,
Who had a rooster.
Every morning it would crow and wake up
The poor man, the old man.

The fox came around
And gobbled up the rooster
Which every morning crowed and woke up
The poor man, the old man.

The dog came around
And gobbled up the little fox
That gobbled up the rooster,
etc.

Among English folk songs, too, one can find different versions of our *Had gadya*, such as the well known "This is the house that Jack built," as well as other songs that, according to

Halliwell,[15] are derived from the Jewish folk song. Similar songs can be found among the Poles, Russians, French, Italians, and other nations of Europe. Parallels to our song have been found as far afield as Siam and Iran. Every nation, of course, sings its own version. Thus, for example, in Alsace they sing about the piglet that refuses to walk, whereas in Switzerland it is a calf that refuses to drink, and so on. Dr. Kahler is extremely skeptical and cannot imagine that the Persians, the modern Greeks, and all the other peoples of Europe got this song from the Jews in order to sing it in hundreds of variants. He also points to a parallel in the Indian *Panchotantra* and concludes that the song is extremely old and has its ultimate source in the Far East.

What is in any case quite certain is that if *Had gadya* is not originally Jewish it is in any case not an imitation of a German song. The contrary is more likely to be true, as can be inferred from the Hebrew words that found their way into the last stanza of the German song "Ein Zicklein":

> Da kam unser lieber Herr Gott
> Und schlacht den *Malach Hammoves*
> Der da hat geschlacht den *Schochet,*
> Der da hat geschlacht den Ochsen.
> (Arnim and Brentano, 803)[16]

There is no doubt that at some time in the past there were mutual borrowings between the folk song in Yiddish and the folk song in German. We may conjecture that Yiddish songs were also assimilated into the treasury of German songs.

As long ago as the early Middle Ages there were continual exchanges of songs not only between nations that lived in close proximity to one other, such as the Germans and Dutch and Danes, the Spanish and the Portuguese, the Serbs and the Bulgarians, the Latvians and the Lithuanian, and so on, but also between peoples whose ethnic origins were quite remote and who had only faint contact. Thus, for example, German and Polish folk songs found their way to Lithuania and were incorporated into the local treasury of folk songs. German folk songs also penetrated into Latvia. In Upper Silesia, Polish folk songs absorbed a number of German folk songs almost word for word. Other lively exchanges took place between Slovenian and German folk songs; a large number of Czech legends, ballads, and love songs were absorbed by German folk songs. Nor is there any doubt that the Germans took a few songs from the French and that German songs were translated into and sung in French. Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries Russian songs penetrated Finland; the Finnish folk song tradition is saturated with Russian influences. Scandinavian folk songs exerted an even longer influence on their Finnish counterparts.[17]

The itinerant folk song did not exempt Jewish folk songs. Polish, Ukrainian, and German folk songs made their way into the treasury of Yiddish folk songs at quite an early date. They were absorbed, discarding their old forms and taking on new ones, over a period of many years and became thoroughly Jewish. Many Yiddish songs were created on German models. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that Slavic folk songs left only weak traces in our folk melodies.

The roots of almost all of the wandering folk songs go back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. As I noted above, they do not seem to have developed from a German or Slavic stock. Variants of most of them can be found among the folk songs of many European nations. It can be said that, like *Had gadya*, they belong to the genre of the universal folk song.

It is a commonplace that every nation uses riddles as a way to test intellect. This is an old custom that European peoples brought with them from the east. In almost every language there are folk ballads that present a series of questions and answers as a way for a lad to test the intelligence of his future mate. In many English and Scottish ballads the match depends on the outcome of this or a similar quiz:

> 'O what is longer than the way,
> Or what is deeper than the sea?
> 'Or what is louder than the horn,
> Or what is sharper than a thorn?
> 'Or what is greener than the grass,
> Or what is worse then a woman was?"

The answers evidently satisfy the lad:

> 'O love is longer than the way,
> And hell is deeper than the sea.
> 'And thunder is louder than the horn
> And hunger is sharper than the thorn.
> 'And poison is greener than the grass,
> And the Devil is worse than woman was."
> (Child, p. 2)[18]

In a Serbian song, a girl sits on the seashore and asks:

> Is there anything wider than the sea?
> Is there anything longer than a field?
> Is there anything swifter than a horse?
> And what can be sweeter than honey?
> And who is dearer than a brother?

A fish pokes its head out of the water and answers her:

> Isn't the sky wider than the sea?
> Isn't the sea longer than a field?
> Isn't the eye swifter than horse?
> Isn't sugar sweeter than honey?
> And one's beloved – isn't he more dear than a brother?
> (Talvj 1840: 136)[19]

Songs like these are sung among us in many versions and to many melodies; but the wedding motif and the various explanatory strophes, so common in English and German songs, are absent. Ours are simple riddle songs, as they make plain at the outset:

Fine maiden, pretty maiden,
I am going to ask you a little riddle:
Where is there water without sand?
Where is there a king without a land?

Silly lad, silly rustic,
Why don't you have any sense in your head?
The water of the eye has no sand,
The king in a deck of cards has no land.

There is a similar song in German. I will quote only one stanza, which is very similar to the Yiddish version, by way of example:

Was für ein König ist ohne Land?
Was für ein Wasser ist ohne Sand?
Der König auf dem Schilde ist ohne Land.
Das Wasser in den Augen ist ohne Sand.
(Arnim and Brentano, 803)

Although these four lines are almost identical with the Yiddish song, we must not infer that the Yiddish song developed from or imitated the German song. In other particulars it is very similar to the English song. If we go further and compare it to songs in other languages, we will discover a resemblance and sort of internal correspondence among them. From this we may conclude that in fact all of these songs go back to single archetype that has been lost over the centuries.

It sometimes happens that several stanzas are preserved from songs that have long since fallen silent. Stanzas or lines make their way from one country to another, from one nation to another, and when they reach a safe haven settle down in the folk songs sung there. This is why we find identical or similar stanzas and identical ideas in songs on different themes sung by nations that are quite remote from one another in language and culture.

Here I shall quote, by way of example, one stanza that comes at the end of many German love songs:

Wenn gleich der Himmel Papieren war'
Und jedes Sternlein ein Schreiberl' war'
Und schriebe an jedes mit sieben Händ'
So schrieben sie meinter Liebe kein End.

We find these same lines in the folk songs of other nations.

In Serbian:
Were all the heavens paper,
Were all the forest pens,
Were all the sea ink,

And were I to write for three full years
I could not express my pains in writing.

In modern Greek:

If the entire world sea were ink
And the sky were paper
And I sought to describe my pains in writing –
None of them would suffice.

We find these same exaggerations in many Yiddish love songs as well:

If all the little trees were pens,
If all the little streams were ink,
Ink and pens would not suffice
To write down all my present sorrows.[20]

Among the 700 Yiddish folk songs collected so far I have not found, after an exhaustive search, more than a few dozen repeated formulas like this. We may conclude that the origins of these songs are hidden somewhere in the early Middle Ages and that our erotic love songs, too, blossomed in that long ago age.

3

"Love – that is a new word," opined a Yiddish writer in the 1870s. The editors of the first anthology of Jewish folk songs in Russia agreed with this opinion.[21] Prof. Leo Wiener, the author of *The History of Yiddish Literature in the Nineteenth Century,* also believes that the word *libe* 'love' is not to be found in the Yiddish lexicon. He endeavors to prove that "the Jews were not acquainted with this sentiment until the middle of the nineteenth century – and if they had to give it a name, they used the German word *Liebe*".[22]

But there are abundant facts to demonstrate not only that the word *love* has been around since the dawn of the Yiddish language, but also that romances and love songs are not a rare phenomenon in our folk art.

As early as the sixteenth century the Jewish masses in western Europe were evincing an interest in heroic romances and sagas translated and reworked from German into Yiddish, such as *Dietrich von Bern, King Arthur, Die Liebschaft von Floris und Blanchefleur, Till Eugenspiegel,* and others.

These books were so well loved and popular among readers of Yiddish in that age that on more than one occasion rabbis used the prefaces to their ethical tracts to complain about them. They were particularly perturbed by the fact that these belles lettristic volumes had a faithful readership that was perhaps even larger than the circle of devotees of ethical tracts. This is also evident from the preface contributed by the Christian Cornelio Edelkind to the Yiddish version of the Psalms by Elijah Levita (Bachur), in which he recounts that he persuaded the author

to translate the Psalms for the benefit of pious women and for men who did not have the opportunity to learn Hebrew in their youth, but nevertheless preferred to spend the Sabbath and festivals reading "divine literature" rather than *Dietrich von Bern* or *The Beautiful Glika*.

Steinschneider quotes prefatory remarks in this vein from the *Maase Bukh:*

> Accordingly, dear ladies and gentlemen, if you frequently read a book and learn from it, don't read the cow books [the reference is evidently to the *Kuhbuch,* an anthology of stories published in 1555], and don't make the effort to read books about Dietrich von Bern and Hildebrand, which are merely filth and will provide you with neither warmth nor heat. They are not divine writings, but you stand in need of forgiveness from God. The books written among us – it is a sin to read them at home if there is no Sabbath sanctity outside. And if you want to spend your time reading, I will write for you a fine book of tales *[maase bukh].*
>
> (Steinschneider, p. 102)[23]

But such moralizing did not always have an impact on the masses, who found their own ways to spend their time.

The desire for life – notes the scholar A. Berliner – is not lost even in times of extreme distress, as is evident from the games and recreations in which the masses found their pleasure and delight.

In the public ballroom maintained by every guild and community for social gatherings and family celebrations, the fair sex, too, joined in the dancing, for this was a place where they could show off their magnificence to the maximum. Here Jewish girls could appear without a veil marked with two blue stripes, and the men could shed the badge on their coat and their cornute hat. On the contrary, here there were men and women wearing expensive belts without which they could not dance; and anyone who lacked this item of apparel had to rent one, paying two dinars for the privilege. What is more, sometimes a lady would ask a gentleman decked out in a rented belt to lend it to her so that she could join in the dancing. As a consideration the gentleman would ask a relatively high price, that is, no less than permission to announce in the presence of all the assembled dancers, while presenting the belt to the lady, that she would be his mate. It was not at all important whether the lady related to such an announcement seriously or as a joke. It was enough that she agreed: and then the rabbis were confronted with the difficult task of determining the extent to which such a manner of contracting a match was legal and proper. One fond grandfather could find no better legacy for his granddaughter than 20 Viennese pounds, so that she could buy her own handsome belt decorated with gemstones.[24]

During that same era, when those popular books were beloved and successful among the Jewish masses, an anthology of Yiddish German folk songs was assembled; the manuscript is now in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. F. Rosenberg wrote a rather lengthy study of this rare document, in which he conjectures that it was written in 1595–1605 and that the anthologizer was a certain Isaac Wallich of Worms. The manuscript contains one play and 54 songs, 12 of them composed by Jews; all the others – four fifths of the anthology – are German folk songs and party songs, most of them dating from the late sixteenth century.[25]

The songs excerpted by Rosenberg in his study include dance songs and love songs, like the following:

Young miss, don't you want
To dance with me?
I beg you not to disappoint me,
I must be merry, I must be merry,
As long as I have strength and can.

Your delicate young body
Has struck me with love
And your clear eyes, too,
As well as your red mouth;
Link your arm,
Dear one, with mine,
Then my heart will be strong.

It matters not at all whether this song was originally Yiddish or German. What is important is the fact that such ardent love songs were being sung by the Jewish masses as early as the sixteenth century. In the course of time they were gradually forgotten, but their traces can still be found in our folk songs today. Take, for example, the following lines from Wallich's anthology:

I came to my sweet love's door.
The door was locked
The bolt was shot.

Dear love, let me in!
I have been standing here too long
I'll soon be quite frozen.

I will let you in
Only if you pledge your troth
That you want be my own.

I will not pledge my troth to you.
I want your love –
But I do not want to marry you.

These stanzas survived in some of our own love songs, too. The first three run like this:

Open the gate for me
I will not open!

It's raining, the wind is blowing;
I'll spoil my silk jacket.
I will not open!

The last stanza recurs in many songs; for example:

I love you, you can truly believe me.
I cannot live without you for even a minute.
You are dearer to me than my life –
But marry you, my soul, I cannot.

Because of our limited sources it is not possible to offer additional passages and proofs to make it clear that Yiddish love songs go back many hundreds of years and are not a new phenomenon in the life of our people, one that appeared only in the second half of the nineteenth century, as some scholars believe.

Yet it is a fact that in bygone years *love* was almost a dirty word and loving was considered to be forbidden, a moral transgression to be condemned by Jewish society. Romances – love affairs in real life and not only in books – were infrequent. All this applies to the solid householders and well to-do classes, but not to the Jewish masses in general. In the lower classes, among the tailors' and shoemakers' apprentices, among the bakers' and carters' assistants, and among the seamstresses and domestic servants and their ilk, love affairs were no rare phenomenon or random accident, but a daily fact. Thanks to the influence of preachers and official public opinion, the masses, too, thought that to fall in love was a sin, a moral transgression; but human instinct and the erotic sentiment were far stronger than official public opinion.

Centuries ago, as well as 50 years ago, the Jewish masses sinned and loved.

None of the obstacles and persecution helped. The scorn and threats were of no avail, nor even the stern morality preached in poems like the following:

The girl who wants to be important to her father and mother
Is dear to everyone else, too;
But the girl, alas, who plays at love
Should be burned in the fire.
(Cahan 1912, 1: 118)

While devout Jews and Jewesses went back to the synagogue every Sabbath afternoon, after eating their cholent, to listen to the preacher's sermon, the young people, boys and girls, would assemble in a cellar or attic to dance and sing songs, especially love songs.

People loved in secret and took long walks on byways and hidden lanes, just as the songs described:

You are beautiful, Rachel my life;
Fix yourself up,
Put on your fine cloak
And we'll go for a walk.

Let us stroll, Rachel,
Among the thick set trees;
The two of us will walk
In a place where no one goes.

Let us go strolling together
Among the thick leaves,
And should you meet a girlfriend
Tell her you're going to your uncle's.

Let us go strolling together
Between the iron railings;
But do not fear, my darling soul,
Nothing will harm you here.
(Cahan 1912, 1: 40)

"A place where no one goes," "among the trees," in the forest or by the "iron railings" of the prison located somewhere on the outskirts of town – even in such places there was no safe haven from the pious ones, with their eyes on the lookout for sin, who stood in ambush on every path and lane. In the end the secret love becomes public knowledge and there is always someone in town who turns it into a song:

Somewhere two couples are walking, [some sing: "two young people"]
Somewhere two couples are walking.
They are very much in love, in love –
None are quite like them.

Just to talk with me is enough,
Just to chat with me is enough.
As soon as I get back home
My father will lock the door.

I will take you back home, my love,
And you will ring the bell.
I will write a poem about the two of us
And the whole world will sing about us.
(Cahan 1912, 1: 38)

And indeed the girl does hear the "whole world" singing this song the next morning, but she hopes for God's help and that all her enemies may burst. With philosophical bitterness she concludes:

Where the rain comes down harder
The little stones get wetter;

So too our love has come to the surface
Like oil on the water.

The secret love floats to the surface like oil on the water, and some unknown person comes and reveals it to all. But songs about love remain anonymous. They are woven among the young in the darkest secrecy and echo through the whole world from a dark basement flat or tavern somewhere. Hence people who did not come into close contact with the lower classes were led to the conclusion that there was no love among the Jews and accordingly no love songs.

4

Yiddish love songs were and remain hidden in the people's mouth. They have never emerged into public view or been sung at family celebrations and official social events. Nor were they heard in the presence of a middle class audience. The latter were entertained by the ballads of wedding jesters and other songs. Love songs were born among the lower classes and remained within the same circles that created them. Their distinctly lyrical content, their innocence and warmth, were in polar antithesis to the dry bantering humor that came to prevail among the middle class. What an impression it would have made – and how ridiculous it would have been – had a girl stood up in front of an audience of Jewish men and women and sung a song like this:

Oh, I got what I wanted
In my life!
I wanted a handsome lad,
And God gave him to me.

I thought that he was really mine,
That I had really got him;
But a prettier girl came
And took him away.

Of course this could never have happened, because for a girl of the people a love song is a deep dark secret, kept sacred in the heart. She would sing her privy thoughts only to herself or her closest girlfriends, on condition that no stranger, and most certainly no strange man, could hear. Only to her most intimate friends would a lovelorn girl ever sing this lament:

How can I be happy
When all my paths are spoiled?
When I remember his handsome face
How can I live?
I eat and drink and sleep at night –
But my heart is lost in thought.

In general the lovesick girl whose heart is lost in thought sits at home:

I sit in my little room
And think only of you.
A pit gapes in my heart
When I hear a knock at the door.
Because to you alone my heart is drawn
And no one knows my heart.

Another girl rehearses this plaint:

The whole day I sit alone
But my dear one does not come;
He must have found another girl
And cast me out of his thoughts.

Such are the restrained, heartfelt motifs and thoughts of love and jealousy that the innocent girl of the people keeps hidden inside, concealed from curious eyes.

This is not how men relate to the same songs. They do not keep them shut up inside. One can say that generally they sing less about love. Only in rare cases, generally when the beloved begins to speak about "the goal of love" – about marriage – does a man launch into an emotional song and declare, with the utmost seriousness:

I love you, you can truly believe me.
I cannot live without you for even a minute.
You are dearer to me than my life –
But marry you, my soul, I cannot.
(Cahan 1912, 1: 144)

But the man is not always the guilty party when love cannot achieve its "goal." Frequently it is the parents who interfere and erect barriers, or he is conscripted into the army. Occasionally he is forced to decamp for some other reason. At the moment of departure he promises that he will return, that he will yet be united with her, with his dear one, and they will be married. Sometimes he gets all worked up, remembering her tears and grief:

There on the hill stands a little tree,
A little tree that is bowed and bent.
My betrothed stands there
With her tear filled eyes.
(Ibid., 1: 100)

He comforts her, his "crown," his "soul," and begs her to stop crying, not to listen to what people say. . . . She has captured his heart; and even though his parents tell him to forget her, nevertheless he promises that

No brook will flow dry.
No one will extinguish our love.

And before another stream has flowed dry, he has forgotten all his promises and his love dies away just as rapidly as it was kindled.

The simple and innocent girl of the people, by contrast, is much more resolute and unwavering in her love; if she falls in love, it is with all her heart and soul, with a fire that burns in her pure heart. All her life – until she is old and gray and on the dark verge of the grave – she never stops loving him and hoping, dreaming, and singing about her enchanting love:

His eyes are beautiful
And dear to me;
With your dear sweet charm
You have kindled a fire in my heart.
And my heart is drawn to you
Like a magnet to iron, to steel
And love burns in me
And grows greater than ever.
If only I had wings
I would fly to you.
(Ibid., 1: 66)

When the fire of a love burns in her heart and she is drawn to her beloved like a magnet to iron or steel – in such a case a girl does not stop with a wish to grow wings:

I will sail on the seas,
I will swim through the streams.
I will leave my dear parents,
And I will come only to you, my dear love!

These lines are enough to prove how natural and fierce is first love, the youthful love of a Jewish girl.

The girl's love receives even stronger expression in songs of farewell and separation. Here, at the moment of parting, love flames up more fiercely than ever. Feelings of sadness and longing, love and jealousy mix and intensify the impression and mood from which she sings her song:

My heart, my heart weeps within me
Because I must part from you now;
My thoughts scatter hither and thither –
It is so difficult for me to part from you.

It is indeed difficult to part, to part in such pain; but it is even more painful for her when she does not know where her beloved has gone and where she should look for him. Nevertheless she takes hold of herself and asks him:

From the first town, from the first village
Write me the first letter;
I beg of you, my sweet love,
Do not forget me.

When you reach a stream,
Do not drown in it;
When you meet another girl,
Remember me!
(Cahan 1912, 1: 82)

Still another girl is unable to stifle her feelings of self pity at the moment of separation and, losing all self control, mourns her loneliness and helplessness:

If you are going away, my dear sweet love,
Why do you leave me here?
Why do you leave me here?
Alas, how faint I am!

Alas, alas, I am dying!
Your words lay me low!
(Ibid., 1: 92)

But it would be too one-sided were I to fail to hear the voice of the swain. He too suffers because he must part from his beloved. Even though he sings about love less often, his song is no less moving. In it, too, we can sense the pangs of love, the aching cry caused by the necessity to go away from his beloved. All the same, his feelings do not find such strong or overt expression as do those of the woman.

Out of some hidden pain he sings:

Come here, my life,
Come here to me!
I will give you a kiss, my beloved,
So you will have a keepsake of me!

Alas, you are going away from me,
You are going to wander and roam;
Until now you have loved me,
But later – a different fellow.

But he does not faint and he does not die and does not even allow his jealousy to overcome him. There is one thing he wants to ask his beloved, the "crown of his head": does she really intend to spend her life with him?

To which she replies:

My parents insist
That I forget you;
But I carry your picture on my heart,
As the two of us sat together.

We sat on a bench,
You sang lovely songs to me;
With God's help
We shall meet again.

As we shall see, he does not meet her again so soon. He wanders the streets of the city to escape his thoughts, but her picture returns and dances before his eyes:

I roam the streets
But cannot embrace my beloved;
Oh, her blond hair
And her lovely face!

As noted above, men do not sing about their love nearly as much as women do. This is the common theme of females young and old, who have had so many experiences of this sort.

"Love rises from a smile, and from a smile to a kiss. It chases away the intelligence of the wisest man, and dissolves the common sense of the most prudent lass." So philosophizes the author of one song. According to another, "love begins like sweetest nectar, but its end is bitter and ugly."

It is impossible to describe the grief of a girl whose love is shattered by deceit; her heart nurtures a bitter desire for vengeance, not only against the one who led her astray, but also against all the false young men. After giving her friends a full account of her sad and disappointed love she issues a stern warning to them:

Listen to me, girls,
It is not good to know love;
Someone should gather all the false lads
And burn them in fire!

Someone should burn them in fire,
Until they're reduced to tiny coals;
I loved for five years,
And gained nothing from it!
(Ibid. 1: 232)

Her bitter experiences lead another girl to a different conclusion:

My troubles surrounded me
Like the hoops on a barrel;

You can believe today's fellows
Like a dog in the street!
(Ibid., 1: 114)

The songs about betrayed love are full of bitterness and gall, but still do not lack the pathos and heartfelt tone and the refined sensitivity for beauty that is so richly and variously expressed in almost all of our love songs.

I have lingered on these songs in order to draw the attention of interested readers to the hidden treasures of Yiddish folk song. In particular I wanted to focus on the folk lyrics of those of our poets and writers who unfortunately have not yet attracted attention. I have presented a few typical songs by way of example. Even though each song merits study in its own right, I have made do with a few comments here. Anyone who wishes to plumb the depths of these songs and gain a clearer understanding of their beauty and lyrical power must have closer contact with them and hear how they are sung by the people. As Herder put it: "One must hear a song and not only see it; and listen to it with the ears of the soul, which does not measure and does not weigh and does not count the syllables, but is open to heed the faraway sound and even floats away with it ."[26]

5

From the unknown lyrical poetry of the people, from the quiet and melancholy love songs, I pass to the merrier sort of bride and-groom and wedding songs, full of joie de vivre. Here it is important to note, above all, that these songs – even though they do not belong to the forbidden or concealed genres, and, as can be deduced from their content, were sung publicly in various circumstances, before or after the wedding – border on the domain of the wedding jesters but have no direct affinity with their work. The jesters' material may have some folkloristic value, but it belongs to a lower genre than folk song, in both form and content.

To demonstrate the correctness of this thesis, consider a few lines taken from a book of jesters' songs.[27]

This wedding song begins as follows:

A little bit on purpose is better than a lot that is not on purpose.
Here comes the jester bringing the groom a sweet gift from the bride.
The gift is inset with fine gold –
Just the gift the groom wanted to receive from the bride.
Here comes the jester. He stands with the gift on the threshold by the doorpost,
And he asks: "Master of the World, may I not be ridiculed and humiliated.
My masters and teachers, if you would ask
Why a jester has to stand on the threshold, by the doorpost,
It is because the letters of the mezuzah say: 'Who is this and what is he.'
I will tell you something; listen to me closely
And I will take the trouble for you.[28]

King David of blessed memory also spoke a verse in Psalms:
'Come, my sons, listen to me [Ps. 34:12].'
And now let us complete his words.
The gift that I have brought will be the bride herself, rising beautiful,
And for the groom – to life.
I cannot say that the letters of the mezuzah say:
'Who is this and what is he.'
But I must say that the letters of the mezuzah do say:
'This jester will have his say today.' "

This is a fine example of the nature of jesters' songs. There is a good reason why the title page of this little book bears the inscription, "how nice it is to read the songs that the jester used to sing." Indeed, the jester sang these songs, but not the people; and for this reason they had no influence on our authentic folk songs.

Neither the Polish *marshalik*[29] nor the Lithuanian *badhan*, who could simultaneously inspire laughter and tears in the largest wedding party, nor the poets of the old Jewish community had the capacity to compose innocent and heartfelt songs of the sort that were created and sung among the people – songs that lead us to the deepest recesses of the life of the people and expose to our eyes an unknown world of joy and grief. A few lines of these songs have the power to describe not merely some event or moment, but even entire periods of folk history, as is clearly demonstrated by the following song:

In-laws pass
In the streets and ask
Whether perhaps Reb Leizer
Is ready to marry off his daughter.
"Yes!" says the father.
"No!" says the mother,
"My daughter Hasya'leh
Is still too young for the wedding canopy."

This could have happened from time to time in the past, when it was the parents' opinion that determined the nature and timing of a match, while the young bride to-be, Hasya'leh, had to sit quietly and ultimately do the will of her pious parents. It did indeed happen, however, that a modest and devout Jewish daughter could no longer repress the natural emotion of love. Then she would open her mouth to complain about something vague – and the good and loyal mother would have apply her intuition and tact to guess what was bothering her daughter. We hear this in one song:

Yomme, Yomme, sing me a little song,
About what the girl wants.
"The girl wants a pair of shoes –
Someone has to go tell the shoemaker!"
"No, Mama, no!

You don't understand at all,
That's not what I mean."

The mother hazards other guesses: perhaps a dress, perhaps a hat, or a pair of earrings, until at last:

Yomme, Yomme, sing me a little song,
About what the girl wants.
"The girl wants a groom –
Someone has to go call the matchmaker!"
"Yes, Mama, yes!
Now you understand!
Now you know what I mean!"
(Cahan 1912, 2: 9)

Times have changed, and the songs along with them. The modesty and bashfulness of the past have vanished. A modern girl no longer waits for her mother to guess what she wants. She says openly what is bothering her and demands rather than asks:

Mama, make me a wedding!
"My daughter, it's not time yet."
Mama, make me a wedding,
Stop laughing!

Mama, make me a wedding!
"My daughter, we don't have the money."
Mama, I don't care,
I too want to be happy!
(Ibid., 2: 15).

As can be seen, all of these songs, as well as each song individually, deserve study. If I wanted to say something about every group of songs, this introduction would grow into a book by itself.[30] To avoid this complication I will not talk about the songs that describe family life, cradle songs, soldiers' songs, workers' song, religious songs, and others with various and sundry contents. I will comment only about children's songs, which are no less important for us, even those that seem to be little more than rhymes with meaningless words and childish prattle. Their depths, too, frequently conceal some meaning or event.

I heard a heder boy sing such a children's song to the tune of a military fanfare. When I asked him what the song meant and why he sang it to that melody, he replied with a typical heder boy story:

My teacher, Reb Yossel Ber, once sent a boy from our heder to buy bagels with cheese for six kopecks. Instead the boy ran to the soldiers' parade ground, where they were drilling, and

spent the whole day there. In the late afternoon he came back to the heder with the coin in his hand and sang his excuse to the melody of the military march, as follows:

Rebbe, there are no bagels
Rebbe, there's no cheese cheese cheese!
Here is the coin.
Don't be mad at me-me-me!

We can sense at once that children's songs, especially those composed by heder boys, are full of wit and sharp humor. I will provide only one example: a song of Warsaw heder boys, which they sang in Polish to the cantillation for the haftarah:

Stand up Reb Judah![31]
I won't go.
Why won't you go?
Because I don't know how.
Why don't you know how?
Because my father didn't teach me.
Why didn't he teach you?
Because he doesn't know how either.

In this schoolboy song one hears the irony about "Poles of the Mosaic faith."

It is clear that many lines in our children's songs are relics of old and long forgotten songs that adults used to sing. Some of these are many centuries old, making it hard to trace their origins. Others are younger, but even with them it is difficult to determine their provenance and period with any certainty. Consider, for example, this song that children sing while racing or playing "catchers," in which one child chases the others and tries to catch them.

Oh, our Poles
Are against the Jews!
Oh, our fields
Are covered with blood.
They turn back and pursue us,
They turn back and torment us.
Forward to the horses,
Forward to arms!
One, two, three –
Let's run away.

I would conjecture that from the examples and explanations presented above readers can extract some idea of the essence of those songs, which they may even have heard sung here and there without paying them any attention.

6

Readers who may be more interested in this topic will certainly be curious about when, where, and how I collected these songs. What procedure did I follow in transcribing the text, melodies, and variants? Here I will offer a brief explanation of everything of interest to professionals.

I collected the vast majority of the songs in Warsaw between 1896 and 1901. I collected the material without any assistants and not from books or manuscripts, but directly from the people.[32] While transcribing the first songs I remarked that it was impossible to separate the text from the melody and there is no point to reading or reciting a folk song. Because, however, I was not able to transcribe the melodies I was forced to transmit them to memory.

This proved a great boon for me. The fact that I knew a fairly large number of folk songs by heart gave me an advantage over other collectors. I went among the people not as an interloper, a researcher, come from the outside to collect folklore material, but as one of them, a local bard, to whom all gates and lanes were wide open.

Here is one small incident typical of my method of collection:

In a certain place I got to know a laborer, a young family man, in whose house his and his wife's friends, young men and women, and acquaintances from work used to gather every Sabbath, summer and winter. The young people would dance, sing, play pranks, and have a good time. It was a sort of drinking bash, albeit a respectable one.

One Friday evening I came to visit my young acquaintance. The assembled company already knew that I was mad about songs. When I arrived I told them that I knew some new songs.

"New songs!" enthused the company.

"And they are lovely," I said, trying to pique their interest.

"Please, sing them. Let's hear what you have new," came voices from every side. I, of course, did not wait for them to ask again and began to sing.

> Next to my mother's little house
> I stood innocently,
> The one who is dear to my heart
> Passed here in the street.

That was enough; nothing more was necessary. Everyone broke out in thunderous laughter, while I stood perplexed and confused and embarrassed, wishing I could disappear. But I quickly recovered and asked, with astonishment, "why did you laugh? What's so funny?"

"I used to sing that song when I was a girl," jested an older fellow.

"My grandma used to sing that song," blushed a girl.

"You shouldn't sing such childish songs," noted my friend the host, his face assuming a serious cast. "You ought rather to sing us the song about the worried householder or the song of the clock and the mirror, or even the song about the aristocrat."

"Yes, yes, the song about the aristocrat," chorused the young women.

Again I did not wait to be asked again and sang "The Aristocrat," and also "The Worried Householder," and other songs by Zunser and Goldfaden, which restored my standing in this

group of young people. I sang the songs with precision, overemphasizing the rhymes, and they began to look at me with fond respect, as if I were a real singer.

I took advantage of the changed atmosphere to go back to the subject that interested me.

"You see that there was no reason to laugh at me before. I've shown you that I also know other songs. You can say whatever you want, but I feel that those songs don't hold a candle to the first song I sang. You say it's a childish song that your grandma used to sing. That may be. I think so too. But do you know when your grandmother sang a song like that? It was a long time ago, when she was a little girl, when she was in love – and she herself may have written the song back then!"

"Whose grandmother?" asked a curious girl.

"It doesn't matter whose grandmother it was. That was only an example. Believe me, I myself didn't hear that song from my grandmother, but from a girl; in fact, a pretty girl sang that song to me yesterday. I liked it and simply learned it off by heart. I'll sing it to you again.

"Next to my mother's little house
I stood innocently,
The one who is dear to my heart
Passed here in the street.

"With the blue eyes, eyes,
With the blond hair,
I thought that whenever he says
Is the absolute truth.

"What do you say? Isn't the song wonderful?"

"But that's not the whole song!" the girl insisted with irritation. "Anna knows the whole song."

"Then I will ask Anna to sing me the whole song."

But Anna refused. She stubbornly repeated that she didn't know the song, that she had long since forgotten it.

I had an idea. "Do you know what, Anna? If you sing me the song, I'll sing you the "Legend Song."

"If Anna won't, I'll sing it for you!" broke in another girl, less bashful. "I'll sing the verses you left out. Listen how the song continues:

"Alas, Mama, Mama,
Mama, I swoon.
Since I fell in love
I am full of melancholy.

"To fall in love, to fall
Is no wonder at all.

It takes the marrow out of the bones,
And every other part of the body!"
(Cahan 1912, 2: 150)

Obviously I was very much taken with this song and praised the singer profusely. I kept my promise and sang the "Legend Song," which the company received with great enthusiasm, until at the end they all joined in the refrain:

Let my enemies live this way
If they give me a little kid!

Once I had managed to create this lively atmosphere for singing, everything proceeded without obstacle. Everyone sang a song without being pressed. People wanted to show off their knowledge and a sort of competition developed. I, of course, took advantage of the opportunity and wrote down everything I needed to and sang with them in order to learn the melodies by heart.

I repeated this procedure until I felt that I had exhausted the treasury of songs in this group. Then I went out in search of a new group of acquaintances, among whom I was able to find my way to the most deeply hidden treasures of Jewish folk song.

As I have already noted, I collected most of this material in Warsaw; but many of the songs originated in the provincial towns and villages of Poland. I have labeled these songs "Warsaw" because the singers promised they were natives of the city.

In England and America, which I reached later in my travels, I was able to collect a many songs from Lithuania and Podolia, and some from Galicia and Romania.

From the perspective of Yiddish philological research it would certainly have been quite important to transcribe the songs in the characteristic dialect and voices of each place. For various reasons, however, I decided to transcribe them in the standard literary language. First of all, the anthology is intended for a broad readership, which for the moment is not yet interested in the details of Yiddish philological research. Second, even had I attempted to transcribe the texts phonetically, according to the various dialects, I absolutely could not have managed this with the Yiddish alphabet, which does not have enough letters for all the various sounds of our language.

A song from Warsaw, for example, would be transcribed in the local dialect in a way a reader from Lithuania would have difficulty understanding this and I would have to gloss every word.

It is impossible to represent all of the vowels and consonants in the various dialects of Yiddish using the letters of the Yiddish alphabet. Some argue that to do this you have to use the Latin alphabet.[33] I do not agree. Yiddish does not have to part company with its traditional alphabet, and certainly not when we are dealing with folk songs.

Leaving aside the dialect, for all the songs I wrote down precisely the melody to which the people sang them. I added nothing and subtracted nothing, even in those places where I felt there was some excess or deficiency. When I collected one song from several people, I tended to use the most complete version. If, however, I noticed any differences between them, in content or form, I recorded them as different versions and in practice as separate songs.

I did not omit very short songs, with only one stanza, or songs of which only fragments have survived – fragments of longer songs that have almost faded away into oblivion, although their melodies still wander among the people.

In 1901, when the massive folk song collection of Ginzburg and Marek was published, I went through the material I had accumulated and set aside the songs they had published. I kept only about 60 versions.

I also followed a different procedure in editing the songs by genres. I did not begin with historical songs, religious songs, cradle songs, children's songs, and the like. I intentionally deviated from this formula and began with love songs, in order to attract readers' attention at once to the most beautiful and most important element in our folk songs – the authentic folk lyrics. In the anthology *Yidishe Folkslider* (1912) this section runs to 130 songs.

The second volume is divided into categories, as follows:

1. Bride and-groom and wedding songs
2. Family songs
3. Cradle songs
4. Children's songs
5. Riddle songs
6. Soldiers' songs
7. Workers' songs
8. Purim songs
9. Religious song
10. Miscellaneous songs that do not fit into any of the above categories

The two volumes contained 331 songs and 175 melodies.

The melodies were notated by the well known New York cantor, H. Rusota, whom I would like to thank for his arduous and conscientious labor. To the best of my knowledge, Mr. Rusota wrote down the melodies with great accuracy, as I sang them to him, including all my mistakes and imperfections, as I learned them from the people.

Although I am not a musician, I understood that folk tunes, like the lyrics of the songs, must appear in their original form and tempo. After that musicians and composers can draw on this primary resource and use the raw material according to their own taste and preferences.

Finally, I would like to express my warm thanks to all my friends and acquaintances and to all those who provided or sang these songs to me.

As long as I live I will not forget the Sabbaths, the evenings, all the precious and sweet hours when "we sang on a bench and you sang me lovely songs," songs that disclosed your innermost and holiest secrets, your desires and yearning for love, your joys and your torments. Never, never will I forget.

Everything you sang to me and everything you entrusted to me, over the 15 long years of my labors of collection, I now convey to the public, so that the world may become familiar with a significant and important part of our folk songs and so that Jewish poets and musicians can draw with enthusiasm a bounteous share from the pure wellspring of the people – and so that Yiddish folk songs may once again be sung, fresh and free.

Notes

Most of the notes below have been added by the editor. Those that were part of the original text or were added by the translator into Hebrew have been marked accordingly. The present translator is responsible for the bracketed notes.

[1] Berl Broder (1815–1868), the pen name of Ber Margolis, the founder of the group of poets and singers called the "Broder Singers." He wrote many songs, words, and melodies that won great popularity. Some crown him as one of the leading Jewish popular poets of the nineteenth century. See Dov Sadan, "Musicians of Brody and their Legacy," *Avnei Miftan* 1 (1961): 9–17.

[2] Velvel Zbarazher (1826–1883), the pseudonym of Benjamin Wolf Ehrenkranz. At a young age he was influenced by the Haskalah and began to write poems in Hebrew. He began writing Yiddish poems to please his young wife. He also set these poems to music. He moved to Romania where he sang in teahouses, taverns, and inns. The audiences received his poems with great enthusiasm. He was invited to appear in wealthy homes as a singer and entertainer. From 1878 he lived in Vienna, where he performed in restaurants and coffeehouses. Many came to hear him sing.

[3] Mikhel Gordon (1823–1890), Yiddish poet and maskil. He was married to the sister of J. L. Gordon. Many of his songs have been lost; many others circulate anonymously. For details, see Isaac Karlas, "Gordon, Mikhel," *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur* 2 (New York, 1958), 129–134; Avraham Greenbaum, "Mikhel Gordon and his Book on the History of Russia," *Chulyot* 5 (1999): 51–54 (Hebrew).

[4] Samuel Bernstein (dates unknown, but he was no longer alive in the early 1880s) wrote poems and even a play, first published in *Kol Mevasser* (Odessa, 1872). He was very popular with the readers of that periodical.

[5] Abraham Goldfaden (1840–1908). In his youth he wrote poetry in Hebrew and was a disciple of the bilingual poet Abraham Ber Gottlober. He published his Yiddish poems in *Kol Mevasser* and his Hebrew ones in *Hamelitz*. Both papers were published in Odessa under the editorship of Alexander Zederbaum. He began his activity as a playwright while studying in yeshiva. He also set his Yiddish poems to music. Goldfaden traveled from place to place until he reached Iasi in Romania, where he began to organize groups of singers and actors. He laid the foundation for the Yiddish theater. His most famous plays include *Shulamis, The Two Kune Lemels, The Witch*, and *Bar Kokhba*. For more information, see Abraham Goldfaden, *Poems and Plays*, edited, introduced, and annotated by Reuven Goldberg (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 7–57.

[6] Eliakum Zunser (1835–1913) wrote dozens of poems that he set to his own music. He arranged the melodies according to the taste of his audiences. The poet Itzik Manger (1901–1969) called him "the great jester, the crowning glory of all weddings, a moralist and rhymester for your people Israel." Three generations of Jews sang his songs with delight.

[7] Author's note: see *Der Yud* (Cracow) (1901), Nos. 24 and 40; see also Y.L. Cahan, 1952, "Folkslid un Folkstimlekhlid" in his *Shtudies vegen Yiddisher folksshafung*, N.Y.: YIVO, 194–197.

[8] David Edelstadt (1866–1892) grew up in a Russian milieu and wrote his earliest poems in Russian. He was strongly influenced by Russian writers and revolutionaries. After the po-

groms of the early 1880s he emigrated to the United States and joined the anarchist movement, which was popular among Jewish workers. He published his first Yiddish poem in the anarchist paper Di Warhayt (1899). From then on he wrote in Yiddish. See Ori Kritz, *The Poetics of Anarchy: David Edelstat's Revolutionary Poetry* (Frankfurt am Main, 1992).

[9] Morris Vinchevsky (1856–1932), poet, editor, and translator from Russian and German into Hebrew and Yiddish. In his youth he was influenced by socialist ideas. He contributed to the first socialist periodical in Hebrew, Aaron Lieberman's *Ha-emet*. In Hebrew he used the pseudonyms "Ben Netz" and "Yogli the Wind Man." He wrote in both Hebrew and Yiddish. For 15 years he lived in London, where he was known as "the grandfather of Yiddish socialist literature." In 1894 he settled in New York, where he was very active in the Jewish socialist labor movement. He wrote many revolutionary poems in Yiddish. In 1918 he was strongly affected by the Balfour Declaration but did not go back writing the Hebrew. Recognized as the poet of the revolutionary labor movement, he left behind many works. For information see Isaac Karlas, "Vinchevsky, Morris," *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur* 3 (1960): 432–443.

[10] Abraham Rejzen (1876–1953), poet, storyteller, and editor. A brother of the scholar and editor Zalman Rejzen (1887–1940). He wrote many poems and stories in Yiddish and was part of the circle of I.L. Peretz in Warsaw. He was an enthusiastic champion of the Yiddish language in all forms. Abraham Rejzen edited literary anthologies and published stories in almost every available forum. His poems were warmly received by the people. Many were set to music and translated into other languages (Hebrew, Russian, German). His first collection of stories was published in Warsaw in 1903, followed by collections of poetry and other writings written or edited by him. Abraham Rejzen was a very prolific writer and was especially active to enrich and glorify Yiddish literature. In 1911 he moved to New York, where he continued his creative activity until his death.

[11] Authors note: I heard the melody for this song in New York at a wedding. See Cahan 1912, 1: 19.

[12] Yiddish is rich in diminutives that developed in folk speech and were absorbed into folk songs. These diminutive have a great deal of charm, but nuances of this sort are difficult if not impossible to translate into other languages [note added by the translator into Hebrew. In English one could talk about "treelings" and "pearlings" here – but the effect would not be at all the same.]

[13] Leopold Zunz, *Gottesdienstliche Vorträge*, p. 133.

[14] K. Kahler, 1889, "Sage und Sang in Spiegel des jüdischen Lebens," *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, p. 234.

[15] J. O. Halliwell, 1842, *The Nursery Rhymes of England*. London.

[16] Arnim von Achim and Clemens Brentano, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn, Alte deutsche Lieder.* Reclams Universal Bibliothek.

[17] Otto Boeckel, 1906, *Psychologie der Volksdichtung.* Leipzig, p. 182.

[18] Francis J. Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. Cambridge ed., p. 2.

[19] Talvj, 1840, *Characteristik der Volkslieder germanischer Nationen*. Leipzig, p. 136.

[20] [It is astonishing that Cahan fails to note that in Jewish tradition this metaphor can be traced back many centuries. It is found at the start of the liturgical hymn *Aqdamut*, an Aramaic poem by R. Meir b. Isaac Nehorai (d. before 1096), recited (according to the Ashkenazi rite) in the synagogue before the Torah reading on the first day of Shavuot.]

[21] S. Ginzburg and P. Marek, 1901, *Yidishe Folkslider in Rusland*. St. Petersburg, p. 17.

[22] Leo Wiener, 1899, *The History of Yiddish Literature in the Nineteenth Century*. New York, p. 57.

[23] In Mitteilungen zur Jüdischen Volkskunde 17, p. 102.

[24] Berliner, 1900, *Aus dem Leben der deutschen Juden in Mittelalter*. Berlin, p. 18.

[25] Rosenberg, F. 1888. *Über einer Sammlung deutscher Volks un Geselschaftslieder in hebräischen Lettern*. Braunschweig.

[26] Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), German philosopher, thinker, theologian, and literary critic and one of the leaders of the *Sturm und Drang* movement. He made many studies of ancient folk poetry and wrote a book on the spirit of Hebrew poetry.

[27] Author's note: *Der Krumer marshaelik mit a blind evig* (Lemberg: Yakov Ehrenpreis, 1875), p. 9.

[28] [Evidently the jester is punning on *mi* = who, which he said was written on the mezuzah, and *mi* = effort, toil.]

[29] *Marshalik* means a wedding jester or clown, frequently the master of ceremonies at a wedding. For the etymology of this term, see Ariella Krasny, 1988, *The Jester*, Ramat Gan (Hebrew), pp. 76–77; Jacob Lipshitz, 1930, "Badhanim un letzim bai Yidn," *Arkhiv far der geshikhte fun yidishen teater un drame*. Vilna and New York, pp. 38–74.

[30] Author's note: this kind of work would be possible after a meticulous collection of a very large number of folk songs from Lithuania, Podolia, and other regions.

[31] [This line, in Hebrew in the original, represents the beadle calling Reb Judah up to the reading of the Torah.]

[32] The editor of the volume appended to Cahan's article a section from an article published in the newspaper *Der Yud* (Cracow), March 14, 1901, under the title, "Yiddish Writers' Purim Party": "... The greatest impression was made by an original and successful skit: A blind Jewish beggar, wearing a broad-brimmed hat that protects his ailing eyes from the bright light, his face gaunt and lined, a young girl leading him by the hand. The blind man and the girl walk back and forth and from time to time stop alongside a different group of people and sing Jewish folk songs to an original folk melody. The blind man sings about Jewish troubles and about Jewish compassion in a truly heart-rending version, while the girl who holds his hand helps him with her thin and feeble, but pleasant, voice. This sight must be familiar to anyone who lives alongside Jews, especially in provincial towns. What pious Jewish heart is not moved by the song of the blind bigger, by his sad songs with their gloomy words and mournful melodies? The blind man and girl received applause and cries of 'bravo!' everywhere they stopped and sang. It should be noted that Mr. C. [Y. L. Cahan], who acted the blind man, is himself a well-known amateur and collector of Jewish folk songs and melodies. No one could have performed this role better."

[33] Judah A. Jaffe, 1909, "Di Klangen fun Yidish un der Yiddisher Alef Bet," *Dos Naye Leben* 9, 12.

Dr. X. 1909. "Vegn yidisher gramatik un reform in der yidisher shprakh," *Leben un Visenshaft* 1.

CHAPTER IV

ALTER (ASHER ABRAHAM ABBA) DRUYANOW AND THE STUDY OF JEWISH FOLKLORE

Alter Druyanow was born in Druya, Lithuania, in 1870. His father was the local rabbi but also a well-to-do man who made a living from the iron trade. Druyanow was educated at the Volozhin yeshiva, known as an institution for brilliant young men.[1] The winds of the Haskalah did not pass Druyanow by; he moved to Breslau in Germany, where he met Micha Yoseph Berdyczewski (Bin-Gorion), who became an author, scholar and anthropologist of Jewish folk literature, and even shared a room with him. Druyanow was not only a folklorist, but also an author, publicist, and historian, who was first and foremost a Zionist in spirit and action.

Druyanow achieved its first literary milestone in 1890, at the age of 20, when he published an article in *Ha'Melitz*. He went on to publish in *Talpiyyot,* whose editor was Leivick. While supporting himself in the iron trade he wrote for Reuben Brainin's *Mi'mizrah Umima'arav* (1894), which advocated a fusion of Hebrew and European culture; he signed his articles with the pseudonym Avigdor Ha'Edrai (from the name of his hometown, Druya). In these articles he expressed his strong affinity for Tolstoy; later he began translating the master's writings into Hebrew. This enterprise came to naught, unfortunately, when the manuscripts were destroyed in the great fire that swept Druya on Shavuot 1899.

Druyanow attracted the attention of Ahad Ha'am, who recognized his literary talent and opened the pages of the monthly *Ha'shiloah* to him (1897). Here Druyanow published, among other items, a series of articles under the rubric "Letters from Russia" and an essay on "Adam Ha'Cohen as Poet." Later Druyanow published other pieces on key figures in Jewish cultural and intellectual life, including "The Governance of the Soul" about Ahad Ha'am (*Ha'Olam*, 1914), "Shalom Yaacob Abramowitsch" about Mendele (*Massu'ot*, 1919), and "What Bialik's Poetry Gave Him" (*Bustenai*, 1935), as well as a monograph on Pinsker, "Pinsker and his Time."

Druyanow joined the Hibbat Zion movement when he was 16. Between 1900 and 1905 he served as secretary of the Odessa-based Committee for the Settlement of Eretz Israel, and came to know and admire Lilienblum, Ahad Ha'am, and their work. His job brought him to Eretz Israel for the first time in 1903, in company with Menahem Mendel Ussishkin; in Zikhron Yaakov he took part in the establishment of the organization The Jewish Center, whose goal was to organize the Jewish community in Eretz Israel. During this same period he was the moving force behind the establishment of the Teachers' Association. In 1905 his Zionist activity took him to Vilna, where he was one of the founders of the Russian Zionist Center and became its secretary. In 1906 he made aliya, settling in Haifa and working as a bookkeeper for the Atid

[1] Bialik, too, studied there.

Company. Under the pseudonym A. Carmeli he published epistolary pieces on Eretz Israel in the newspaper *Hazman*. In 1909 he was invited by Ahad Ha'am to edit *Ha'Olam,* the official weekly of the Zionist Organization, and returned to Vilna to take up the post. Later he continued to edit the newspaper from Odessa.

When the First World War broke out *Ha'Olam* suspended publication. Druyanow became an active member of the Committee to Help Jewish War Refugees, visiting many of the devastated Jewish communities and seeing the destruction with his own eyes. The Jews' suffering did not end after the war, as dozens of pogroms swept the Ukraine. In 1917 Druyanow was appointed manager of the Petrograd office of an oil company, but he continued his Zionist activity as a member of the Russian Zionist Center. Druyanow described the atrocities that struck the Jews of Russia during and after war, and translated the impressions of other observers for publication in the third volume of *Reshumot,* the periodical on Jewish ethnography and folklore he founded in association with Bialik and Rawnitzki.

The title page of the first volume of *Reshumot* proclaimed that it was edited by A. Druyanow, in association with Y. H. Rawnitzki and H. N. Bialik. In their introduction the editors announced that their new periodical would be devoted to (1) research into and exposition of the life and folklore of the Jewish people and (2) the collection and compilation of these materials. Thus the journal would have both a scholarly side and a more popular aspect directed at the broader public, from whom the material would not require "excessive specialization or special literary talent, but only some understanding of the matter, some fondness for it, and some good will." They appealed to all those who hold the Jewish people and its culture dear to "come to the habitations of Israel and carefully search its treasuries and storehouses. Whatever ancient relics of writing and art you find there, or other precious items suited to the goal of bringing together Hebrew folklore in accordance with the program detailed below – record and copy them for yourselves and send the fruit of your labors to the editors of *Reshumot*." That program listed six departments, intended to cover every relevant matter: lifestyles, belief and religion, language and literature, art and poetry, historical documents, and miscellaneous (including bibliographies and abstracts of books in foreign languages). Each part was further subdivided. For example, "lifestyles" included remote communities, famous persons, unique Jewish occupations and crafts, and Jewish cuisine and dress; "belief and religion" included Jewish religious sects, unusual customs and superstitions, and so on. The introduction to the first volume describes the many travails on the road to publication and the editors' strong commitment to continuing the enterprise. Their appeal to readers is marked by an emotional tone that recurs throughout the piece, through its conclusion: "We must work diligently to save whatever can be from the ravages of time."

In 1921 Druyanow moved definitively to Eretz Israel, as part of a group of Hebrew authors, and settled in Jerusalem. For the first year he served as manager of the office of the Dvir publishing house, and then as manager of Jaffa–Tel Aviv Savings and Loan Bank. Bored by the job, he resigned to devote himself to writing and to literary and public endeavors.

In August 1928 Druyanow was recruited to work on the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* in German and Hebrew, a project launched by the Berlin-based Eshkol publishing house, under the overall editorial direction of Jacob Klatzkin. Druyanow refused to move to Berlin to work on the encyclopedia and insisted on remaining in Eretz Israel. When this concession was granted he agreed to edit four sections of the encyclopedia: modern Hebrew literature, the geography

and natural history of Eretz Israel, the Hibbat Zion movement, and folklore. The project was never completed; only the first two volumes of the encyclopedia were published in Hebrew.

In 1931 the Jewish National Fund dispatched Druyanow on a mission to Poland. He collected and published his impressions of this trip in *Zionism in Poland.* In the mid-1930s he also edited the magazine *Mi'yamim Rishonim,* two issues of which were devoted to the history of the national rebirth of the Jewish people.

In 1934, to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of Tel Aviv, the first Hebrew city, Druyanow took over a celebratory project that had originally been entrusted to S. Ben-Zion. He spent two years working on the *Book of Tel Aviv,* writing large sections and editing the rest. Getzel Kressel wrote that it is "without doubt one of the classic books of the history of the entire Yishuv and not only of Tel Aviv" (Kressel 1981, 67).

Druyanow was also responsible for two major projects that involved systematic and comprehensive collection and compilation: in the field of Zionist history, *Ketavim le'toledot Hibbat Zion ve'yishuv Eretz Yisrael* (Documents on the history of Hibbat Zion and the settlement of Eretz Israel; 3 vols. 1919–1932); and, in the field of Jewish folklore, *Sefer ha'Bedihah ve'ha'hiddud* (Book of Jokes and Witticisms; first published by Omanut in Frankfurt, 1922).

In the three volumes of the former, Druyanow collected invaluable documents and important archival materials about the emergence and history of Hibbat Zion. Druyanow was assigned this task in 1914–1915 by the Odessa Committee, which defined it in an extremely restricted manner – publishing the archives of Pinsker and Lilienblum. But Druyanow went far beyond his original brief and greatly expanded his sources and discussion. "He clearly perceived that the new movement for the settlement of Eretz Israel had sprouted independently in different centers and with weak links among many individuals" (Kolatt 1984, 303). Getzel Kressel described Druyanow's unique method of collecting and organizing materials as follows: "He had an intuitive sense of history, which enabled him to amass not only extremely rich documentation but also to penetrate behind the documents" (Kressel 1983, 62).

The collection of Jewish jokes, *Sefer ha'Bedihah ve'ha'hiddud* (the Book of Jokes and Witticisms), was the fruit of almost three decades of effort. In the preface to the first volume he writes that when he was lying ill in a sanatorium near Dresden he picked up a humor anthology, *Der yidisher humorist.* This gave him such pleasure that he decided to start writing down every joke or witticism he heard from Jews: "Folk jokes can provide a key to some of the spiritual recesses of the people, over which other keys have no control." He explains that he decided to write the book in Hebrew in a style close to that of talmudic aggadot, but also with something of the dialectic manner of halakha. He notes his recognition of the great advantages of brevity, unimpaired by a single unnecessary stroke. Druyanow explains that for editorial reasons he had had to leave much out (abundant material was found in his files after his death), but nevertheless appeals to readers to send him additional relevant items.

The introduction to *Sefer ha'Bedihah ve'ha'hiddud*, which was written in Odessa in 1919 and is published here in translation, is an important contribution to the study of this genre.[2] Druyanow begins by noting that all of the injunctions and admonitions that the Jews should avoid laughter and jesting were in vain. The introduction comprises three main sections, each

[2] For later discussions of the Jewish jokes see: Landmann 1962, Noy 1962, Reik 1962, Oring 1984; 1992, Ziv 1986, Ben-Amos 1992, Chase 2000, Halkin 2006.

dealing with a different aspect of jokes and humor. The first is a comparison of European humor and Jewish humor. Druyanow identifies the former chiefly with puns and wordplay, whereas Jewish humor is based on "intellectual midrash," which embodies an entire image. The second section (not translated here) deals with the ridiculous and the jock, here Druyanow moves toward the psychological pole and emphasizes the functional nature of the joke as a device to cast off restraints, to rebel, and to express one's own superiority. In the last section of the introduction, "From the Treasury of Jewish Humor," Druyanow provides examples to ground his argument that jokes are used to throw off restraints and to show how humor rebels against everything and challenges the social order and institutions.

Sefer ha'Bedihah ve'ha'hiddud is not just the zenith of Druyanow's work of compilation. It is a monumental work in which he invested meticulous stylistic efforts in order to provide a distinctively Hebrew setting to gems of folklore from diverse sources, supplemented by notes about sources and variants. The collected material required the laborious editing and arrangement of more than 3,000 Jewish jokes. Ultimately, in the third edition, they were organized into 35 topical chapters, including "Storekeepers and Peddlers," "Rich and Poor," "Hasidim and Mitnaggedim," "Gluttons and Topers," "Physicians and Patients," "Naifs and Rogues," "Matchmakers and Matches," "Husbands and Wives," "Parents and Children," "Relations between Human Beings and God," "Relations between Human Beings," "Israel and the Nations," "Famous People," "Zionism and Eretz Israel," "From the Mouths of Babes," etc. In the preface Druyanow notes that some jokes would be equally at home in more than one chapter. The book was extremely popular, went through several editions, and enjoyed great public esteem.

Druyanow died of cancer on 9 Iyar 5698 (May 10, 1938). In his will he wrote, "it is well known that I leave behind neither wealth nor property, but only these composition, with which I have bound up my soul and they are my reward for all my toil." This was a reference to his opinion pieces and commentaries, many of which were collected in the two-volume *Selected Writings*.

These essays repeatedly demonstrate Druyanow's strong link to folklore, the landscapes of his youth, his hometown of Druya, and the people and Jewish way of life he had left behind there. An essay with a strong folkloristic vein is "From the Roof of the Great Synagogue," first published in *Bustenai* (1934). This tells the story of the synagogue in Druyanow's hometown of Druya, which was the pride of the town and its people. It begins by reiterating his attachment to Druya: "I knew each and every corner, every tree and stone there." From his perch on the roof of the synagogue the young Druyanow once looked out over the town and stored this bird's-eye view in his memory. He describes how the synagogue was central to the life of the town and its role in the lives of individuals, both in their daily lives and their rites of passage – from circumcision in infancy, through marriage, and concluding on their day of death. The synagogue is the heart of the town and pulse of its routine. The origins of the building are associated with a legend whose hero is the local rabbi, Rabbi Mikhali, which Druyanow heard in his youth from "the old and the aged." According to this account, the synagogue was built by Duke Sapieha to express his gratitude to Rabbi Mikhali for blessing the infant in his wife's womb, thanks to which the child lived, after the Duke had lost four other children who died soon after birth. What is more, after Rabbi Mikhali's passing the Duchess donated, on every anniversary of his death, "one gold dinar for each charity box" in the synagogue. The legend juxtaposes Rabbi Mikhali's successful blessing with the Pope's failure to save the fourth infant

from death. What is more, the Jews of Druya received a permanent exemption from taxes and rates because of the Duke's immense gratefulness to the Rabbi.

There are other legends associated with synagogue; for example, that about Isaac the sexton, who, when he left the synagogue every night, notified the dead with three knocks of a brass ring that the synagogue was now available for them to pray.[3] Every morning, when he opened the synagogue, he would again knock three times to let them know that their shift for prayer was over. Thanks to his special relationship with the world of the dead, voices from beyond informed Isaac Sexton of his impending death. Whereupon he went home, recited the entire book of Psalms, gathered a minyan to recite the confession of the dying with him, lay down in a clean robe, and only then breathed his last.

None of the fires that swept the town ever damaged the synagogue, because the building and its magnificent Holy Ark were destined to be transferred to Jerusalem: "When the Messiah comes, all the townsfolk will gather in the synagogue and recite 'Shema Yisrael.' At once the building will fly up from the spot and come down permanently in Eretz Israel."[4]

Under the synagogue, according to legend, there is a tunnel that reaches all the way to Jerusalem. Druyanow recounts how its secret, which had been passed down among the rabbis of the town, was lost. For generations the rabbis always lived permanently in Druya and learned the secret of the tunnel from their predecessor, until Rabbi Jacob Mendel moved to another town, where he studied Torah day and night, and was brought back to Druya only after Rabbi Meir's death. Thus the secret of the tunnel passed away with Rabbi Meir. Druyanow tells that as children in the town they would look at Rabbi Mendel, by then a very old man, and, whispering behind his back, condemn him because his insistence on isolating himself in another town had caused the secret of the tunnel to be lost.[5]

In the second volume Druyanow included stories from India and China, stories of Juha, and several Jewish tales as well. Some of them he merely translated; others he reworked, on the grounds that "because there are different versions, I think I am permitted to add yet another one" (p. 933.)

Druyanow and his great folklore project are evidence of the major contribution that committed Zionists made to the study of Jewish folklore. Unlike the Yiddishists, who set out to collect folklore materials in Yiddish, Druyanow opted for Hebrew in his scholarly writings, the journal *Reshumot,* and the jokes anthology. Unlike Bialik and Rawnitzki, though, who focused on talmudic legends in their masterly *Sefer Ha'Aggada*, the legacy that Druyanow studied and published was that of modern times and, for the most part, of the Jews of Eastern Europe (although he sought to include the folklore of other diasporas in *Reshumot*.)

[3] Cf. the legends from the YIVO collection: Cahan 1938, 153–154, inv. C. 22100, 10935, 50044, 22103.
[4] Cf. Bar-Itzhak 2001, 42–45.
[5] Cf. Bar-Itzhak 2001, 133–154.

Jewish Folk Humor[1]

Alter Druyanow

"There is no generation without its jokers." (JT Berakhot, chapter 1)

Our literature is replete with injunctions and admonitions that aim to keep people away from laughter and jesting. "Rabbi [Judah the Prince] gave his son four charges: Don't live in Shekhantziv, because they are jokers. . . ."[2] "Rabbi Akiva says: laughter and frivolity accustom people to lewdness."[3] "Four groups do not greet the Divine Presence: scoffers. . . ."[4] "It is forbidden for human beings to fill their mouths with laughter in this world."[5] "What is the meaning of the verse, 'At scoffers He scoffs' (Prov. 3:34)? That the door is opened wide for a person who wants to behave impurely."[6] "All raillery is forbidden. . . ."[7] "Anyone who makes fun wreaks destruction on the world. . . . Pains assail him. . . . He falls into Hell."[8]

So taught the talmudic sages, and more. Their disciples, and their disciples' disciples, reinforced their words: "Beware of jesting, which is next to sin, banishes reverence, and accustoms a person to transgressing" *(Sefer Hayirah).* "Anyone who jests is casting off the yoke of the kingdom of heaven" *(Menorat Ha'maor).* "But the second is extremely grave–namely, laughter and jesting, because sinking in them is like sinking in the ocean" *(Mesillat Yesharim).* "In sum, a person who jests, even in the slightest degree, causes all the evils in the world" *(Reshit Hokhmah).*[9] All these injunctions and admonitions, and similar ones, have been for naught: no one is more drenched in humor than the Jew. If you are looking for an acerbic joke, you will find it in our treasury. One expert has actually decided that "Jewish humor is the alpha and omega of all humor."[10]

We still remember the pious and devout Jews who really did steer clear of jesting; if they were involuntarily overcome with laughter, they repressed it with all their might. But in that period too, they were already the exception. Your ordinary Jews may be considered to be a resident of Shekhantziv; no one is more at home with jokes than they are. And, it must be added, not just with polite jokes. This subject has engaged me for many years now. Whenever I come across a Jewish joke–whether in a book or in conversation–I write it down in my notebook. To the extent possible I have tried to compare our jokes with those of other peoples. My conclusion is that if in some points our jokes are superior to theirs, when it comes to decorum ours sometimes fall below theirs. Sometimes even an ear used to that is blistered by our jokes.[11]

Nothing is off-limits for Jewish humor. A Jew will make fun of anything–this is the dominant trait not only of Motke Habad, Caleb Letz, Hershele Ostropoler, and their ilk, but even of many of the ancient sages who were so lavish in their castigation of jesting and laughter.

"For their mother has played the harlot" (Hos. 2:7). And was our mother Sarah a harlot?! He said to him, 'like daughter, like mother; like mother, like daughter; as is the generation, so is the prince; as is the altar, so are the priests.' Kahana said: As is the garden, so is the gardener" (JT Sanhedrin 2:6 [end]).

What is the source of the saying: "Sixty pains assail the teeth of a person who hears the noise made by his fellow who is eating when he himself is not eating.' I hold that it comes from this verse: "Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and took Rebekah as his wife and loved her. . . ." Right afterwards it says, "Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah" (Gen. 24:67, 25:1) (BT Baba Qama 92b).

Rashi explains that Abraham "was jealous of Isaac."

"I saw among the simple . . ."–these are the tribes. ". .. I noticed among the youths a lad devoid of sense" (Prov. 7:7)–this is Joseph (Genesis Rabbah 87:1).

"I am the God of your father" (Ex. 3:6–the Lord addressing Moses from the burning bush)–this is what is meant by the verse: "a simpleton will believe anything" (Prov. 14:15) (Exodus Rabbah 3:1).

What is meant by the verse: "and [Jacob] lay with her that night" (Gen. 30:16)? It teaches that the Holy One Blessed Be He assisted in the deed (BT Niddah 31a).[12]

If the sages of antiquity were like this, how much the more so do the latter-day jesters show no respect for anything or anybody, not even for the most majestic of majesties and mightiest of the mighty, and do not refrain from any device that strikes them as appropriate for joking and wisecracks.

For example, I am not acquainted with any body of jokes that makes such extensive use as ours do of the text of biblical verses, religious law, legends, prayers, and rabbinical sayings in order to distort them, parody them, and mistranslate them for the sake of a witticism or joke, and even for a witticism or joke that goes beyond the bounds of good taste. You must not claim that, because Jews are accustomed to seasoning their conversation with fragments of biblical verses and scraps of religious law and legend, they can no longer distinguish the sacred from the profane: when a joke uses texts of this sort for its own ends we are dealing with a unique technique of humor–one that starts by elevating the verse, homily, or prayer, taken in isolation, to its original status, that is, its sanctity, and then tramples it under its own intention–the witticism it attaches to it. Were this not the case, the joke would lose its punch. Jewish humor has absolutely no fear of profaning in the holy. It turns entire biblical stories into a surface for intimate matters (ask anyone who has studied in a yeshiva and he'll tell you!)[13] and uses the clarifications of religious law by Abaye and Rav[14] for vain and scurrilous casuistries that are not only absurd, but also quite rude.[15]

Take the prayer "May the cry of Your worshippers,"[16] which is recited with such profound devotion on the day when the Jews purge their sins before their father in heaven and confess "the sin that we have transgressed before you by jesting": Jewish humor expounds this supplication in the sense of a short and well-known text from the Song of Songs.[17] Consider the liturgical poem "And say to God":[18] it gives it the sense of "talk to the wall." All these exegeses and "translations," with their element of utter blasphemy and profanity toward God, can be heard

even from the mouth of a Jew who has never once in his life drunk a glass of water without first making the benediction. . . .

There must be unique causes and factors, then, that addict the Jew to jesting. What are they?

Before we can identify them, however, we must first consider the essential nature of the Jewish joke and see whether and how it is distinguished from its cousin, the European joke. I say "the European joke" intentionally, because I am inadequately informed about Oriental humor.

European Humor and Jewish Humor

I

The technique of European humor is fundamentally linguistic: an exposition based on letters, symbols, and words.

I am referring here to the species of humor known as *kalauer* in German and *calembour* in French–the pun. This genre has a long and illustrious history in Europe. It is a special favorite of the French, whose language is rich in words with a similar pronunciation but different spelling and meaning. For example, in the Year VII, on the eve of Napoleon's return from Egypt, a cartoon published in Paris depicted the members of the Directory in the guise of a lancet, a head of lettuce, and a rat–in French, "lancette," "laitue," and "rat." But anyone who recognized these three objects read them, not as written, but phonetically: "L'an sept les tuera" = The Year Seven will kill them.

Another example: After the Prussian victory at Sedan, the French made fun of Napoleon III, joking that "il a perdu Sedan (ses dents)." In other words, not only had he lost Sedan, but also "his teeth."[19]

It only takes a moment for us to catch the gist of these two puns. Each of them involves two coexisting senses, one inside the other. The first, on the surface, conveys an explicit message that requires no camouflage or concealment. The second, by contrast, is meant to tell us something that contains a secret allusion and consequently cannot be said out loud. These two senses involve quite different and unconnected referents. Along comes the genius of language–that is, the homophony of familiar syllables–and binds the two together, so that we fortuitously learn the covert from the overt. No one has given away the secret, no one has violated its confidentially; it simply came to light "on its own."

Later we shall return to this idea and see that here we have already touched upon the essence of the joke. For the moment, however, we must return to our investigation of its technique.

The pun is the lowest form of humor. Children, too, use aggregations of syllables that sound alike and sometimes even create true puns. In fact, the pun is the basis for those juvenile entertainments in which the covert is unveiled retrospectively: riddles, rebuses, and the like. Many puns have no rhyme or reason or bite. This is understandable. Aggregations of sounds and syllables are merely the external qualities of speech and not a means by which it

can ascend to a higher level. Language can reach a higher level only through the aggregation of meanings, which are the inner property of speech. Accordingly, humor that relies on developing the meanings of words attains a much higher level than do jokes that play with letters and syllables.

Here are a few examples.

When Napoleon III became emperor his first action was to confiscate the assets of the previous royal house of Orleans. French humor paid him back: "C'est le premier vol de l'aigle"–it's the eagle's first flight: except that the French word *vol* also means "theft"; and the eagle is, of course, a predatory bird.

A bearded student came to Professor Kastner in Göttingen and introduced himself as "Karl Krieg." The witty professor looked at him and said, "Ei, so habe ich die Ehre den dreissigjahrigen Krieg zu sehen." Here again we have two simultaneous meanings: "I have the honor of seeing the Thirty Years' War" and "I have the honor of seeing the 30-year-old Krieg" (since *Krieg* is German for "war").

The leaders of the community came to Rabbi Eleazar Rokach of Amsterdam to ask whether the trustee of the congregation, who had already served in the post for a year, should retain it for another year. Because the rabbi was ill, his wife entered his room to pose their question to him. After a few minutes she came back with an answer: "Rabbi Eleazar said: 'There is a refutation: the one who taught this did not teach that' "–a common phrase in the Talmud–but also relevant to the context, since *shanah* 'taught' also means 'year': thus, "the one for this year [is] not the one for that year.

Finally, an example in Yiddish: A balding and white-haired Jew is sitting in a restaurant, stuffing himself with food. One of the other diners looks at him and says to his friend: "You know what that old Jew looks like to me? Like a fine winter's night: oysgeshterent, oysgeshneyt, un frest–az di tseyn knaken." (starry [but also with a prominent forehead], snow-covered, and chilly [but also gluttonous]–when the teeth chatter [or snap together].

In these four examples, too, we find what we already noted in the first two puns: one meaning inside another, one of them overt, the other concealed–but we clearly intuit the hidden meaning from the overt one. The French monarchist does not say that Louis Napoleon is a thief; the professor does not say that the man standing before him is too old to benefit from university studies; the rabbi's wife of Amsterdam does not say of the trustee that he is not suited for his job; and the man in the restaurant does not shame of his fellow diner by calling him an old glutton. Nevertheless all this is indeed said and perfectly clear. How can everything be said and understood, when in fact it was not said and not made explicit? The answer lies in the genius of language, namely, the homophony of familiar words.

The hallmark of all jokes based on the linguistic technique is that they are necessarily attached to the particular language in which they were created. Nothing remains if you try to translate them into another language.

Here are four more examples. I ask the reader's pardon in advance for the proliferation–here and below–of examples. I am not telling jokes for the fun of it, but in order to clarify the essence of the matter under discussion. And there is no better way to illuminate and explain than example.

Caleb Letz is eating in a Jewish restaurant. They serve him fish. Caleb hesitates briefly, leans his head toward the plate, and begins to whisper over the fish. He whispers and pauses, whispers and pauses. The other diners are astonished. The host goes over to Caleb and asks him, "what are you whispering?"

"Heaven forbid," replies Caleb, "I'm not whispering or casting a spell, I'm just conversing with the fish. I greeted them. They returned my greeting. 'Is everything all right in your world?' I asked them. 'Everything's fine in our world,' they replied. 'We're swimming in butter.' I said, 'where do you come from?' 'From the Dvina River,' they answered. 'So,' I asked, 'what's new in your place, in your Dvina?' 'We don't know anything new,' they replied. 'We can only tell you old stories: we left there two weeks ago.' "

One evening, Chaim-Leib and his wife Ester-Basya, who married off their youngest daughter a few days earlier, are talking to each other about the future. Says Chaim-Leib to his wife: "Do you know, Ester-Basya, what I want to do? Old people like us should start thinking about their mortality. . . . If one of us dies, heaven forbid, I think I'll set out for Eretz Israel at once."

After Abraham-Ber receives the dowry in cash he settles in a village and opens a shop. A few months pass. Abraham-Ber's father writes and asks what kind of living he's making. Abraham-Ber replies briefly: "Thank God! In our village they're already talking about building a church." A few months later, his father again asks what kind of living he's making. This time his reply is equally brief: "May God have mercy! Now they're talking about building a house of study."

An excerpt from a letter written by one Jew to his brother: ". . . You asked what will become of my son, who is studying at the Academy of Arts. I don't know. All I know is that before he can draw a bird he manages to eat an ox."

These four examples resemble the previous ones, in that they conceal one meaning inside intention, a revelation inside a disguise. It would be wrong to say that Caleb Letz is exposing the duplicity of the restaurant owner, who serves his customers spoiled fish; that Chaim-Leib is admitting to his wife that he secretly hopes she will die first; that Abraham-Ber the shopkeeper is saying that he is glad about every gentile and unhappy about every Jew added to the population of his village; or that the Jew is telling his brother that art it quite useless. At the same time, we are well aware that all of these things are being said–even though they are not said. This time, however, when we ask how the hidden meaning is exposed, even though it is never stated, we cannot reply that language is responsible. Translating these four jokes into some other language does not affect their meaning or blunt their sting. The fact is that the first two, which, like the latter two, are Jewish jokes, have already been naturalized in other languages; what is more, I myself have rendered all four into Hebrew from other languages (Yiddish and German). Here, then, we are dealing with a special kind of duality of meaning, a duality that goes beyond the linguistic technique. If we called the previous type of ambiguity a play on letters, syllables, and words, that is, playing with language, we can call the latter sort of ambiguity, which is independent of language, an ambiguity of thought. Below we may be able to identify the foundations of this technique, too. For the moment, though, we shall simply use "linguistic ambiguity" and "conceptual ambiguity" to distinguish these two types of humor.

In fact, this constitutes the fundamental difference between European humor and Jewish humor: the typical European joke requires the cloak of linguistic technique, while the typical Jewish joke does not. In other words, European humor is typically a matter of linguistic ambiguity; Jewish humor, of conceptual ambiguity.[20]

II

Here I feel a need to append several comments to this hypothesis.

I deliberately emphasized that I am referring only to the "typical" joke. All of us know that there is no absolute and perfect type in the world. There is no rule without its exception. On the other hand, we also know that everything in the world has its own peculiar lineaments and signs, more or less distinctive, which tend toward a particular nature and from which–if we examine them correctly–we grasp their essence. It is only in this sense that I said that European humor requires the cloak of linguistic technique, whereas its Jewish cousin does not. I could have offered many European jokes that involve no rhetorical tricks and can be translated into any language in the world; and, on the other hand, many Jewish jokes that are language-dependent and accordingly bound fast to the language (Yiddish or Hebrew) in which they were created and quite untranslatable into another language. But the former do not define the nature of the European joke, nor the latter that of the Jewish joke. The essence of European humor is defined exclusively by jokes involving linguistic ambiguity; that of Jewish humor, by jokes based on conceptual ambiguity. Note that even Lichtenberg,[21] of whom Immanuel Kant said that each and every one of his jokes incorporated a complete problem, made extensive use of plays on syllables, letters, and words;[22] what is more, Kant himself was wont to do the same.[23]

I find particular reinforcement for my assumption in a book by Sigmund Freud, *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious* (1905). There is no doubt that this author got to the root of the joke and uncovered many things that had eluded earlier writers on the subject. When he focuses on the linguistic technique (in the second chapter of his book) he does not offer a single Jewish joke to illustrate any of the 11 technical forms he identified. When he starts investigating forms that do not depend on language, however, he immediately begins to present examples of Jewish jokes. That Freud himself failed to mention of this fundamental difference we have identified between the European humor and Jewish humor does not prove that he was unaware of it, but only that it was irrelevant to his purpose: his topic was the joke in general, as the psychological manifestation of a human being, and not the humor of a particular people as the revelation of its unique mentality.

Finally, a note about European humor: I have said that there are also many European jokes that do not rely on linguistic techniques. There is no need to demonstrate this. We should note, however, that we do not know how many jokes were born in Jewish brains, only to be taken captive by gentiles, along with their creators, and naturalized among them. Indeed the essence of Jewish humor, which does not require the cloak of language, allows it to be naturalized in any language. You could say that the naturalization of Jewish humor in gentile languages is very similar to the naturalization of the Jews themselves among the gentile nations. Experts

on this subject will tell you that they frequently encounter European jokes–German, French, and so on–and their sharp eyes immediately recognize that "there is Jewish blood flowing in their veins." Sometimes, it is true, a European joke will be retold as a Jewish joke; but these are isolated cases, because "there are more on our side than on theirs."[24]

Now I turn to the second half of my hypothesis: the typical Jewish joke does not need the cloak of language. I know that this runs counter to the conclusions of those individuals who have studied Jewish humor. (I think that Dr. I. Koralnik is the only one who sensed that Jewish humor "is not wordplay, but a particular rung on the scale of the spirit."[25]) Nevertheless, the longer I examine our folk humor, that is, the jokes created in our homes and streets every day, the more I realize that those who think it language-based are mistaken. For example, Dr. Heinrich Levi, in his fine article, "Was sich das Judische Folk erzahlt,"[26] presents four illustrations to demonstrate that our humor tends to be based on words. If we examine these examples, though, we will see that one of them is mere foolishness and no joke at all. The second joke is quite German and has nothing Jewish about it. It is perfectly logical that German humor relies on wordplay: it suits the genius of that language. The third joke can be translated into any language with no loss of form or content and clearly cannot be assigned to the linguistic category. Only the fourth involves an unsuccessful pun–and even that is half-Jewish and half-German. Even if all four of Dr. Levi's examples were Jewish wordplay, however, they would not be grounds for proving that Jewish humor in general relies on this technique. Our treasury of jokes is so vast that even four times four would prove nothing. I myself do not rely on the handful of examples presented above, but on the hundreds of Jewish jokes I have recorded in my notebooks over a long period of time (as noted above). I transcribe–and continue to transcribe–them verbatim. Later, when I came to translate them into Hebrew, I discovered that only ten or fifteen percent were untranslatable. Is this not clear proof that our typical popular humor does not rely on wordplay and does not need the cloak of linguistic technique?

What, then, caused the few authors who have written about Jewish humor to misunderstand it and believe they had identified a fundamental tendency to wordplay? I think the source of this error is not hard to find.

As is known, the Bible is full of linguistic midrashim (expositions of the text)–wordplay.[27] Both the legal (halakhic) and legendary (aggadic) strands of the Talmud are replete with wordplay. In a certain sense we can even say that the entire Talmud is merely aggregations and meta-aggregations of midrashic expositions of letters and words. This method is the foundation of kabbalistic (and hasidic) literature. The post-talmudic rabbinic writings also make wide use of the technique, not only in matters of law and legend, but also simply in pursuit of rhetorical embellishment (see the introductions and approbations in so many rabbinical texts). Our scholarly literature also employs it; so do our ethical writings. It goes without saying that our liturgical and poetic literature, both ancient and modern (as in J. L. Gordon,[28] Abramowitsch,[29] and others), is overflowing with wordplay that sometimes rises to the level of an actual joke. In brief, all the genres of Hebrew literature, from its earliest days to the present, are replete with wordplay. It is no wonder, then, that authors who studied Jewish humor followed the line of logical induction: if every genre of our literary art over the generations has a strong proclivity toward word play, so too must our humor. When they observed that there are indeed Jewish jokes that rely on wordplay,[30] they deemed this adequate proof of their hypothesis.

Something else, too, seems to have misled those who made this induction. It is well known that Jews, when they employ gentile languages, habitually incorporate into their speech and writing words and locutions that are peculiar to themselves–especially from Hebrew. Every such admixture of a word or expression, which is totally alien to the spirit of the language into which it infiltrates, contains an element of the knowing wink, of the wry-faced allusion that is a close relative of the joke. This is why special lingos, the argots of thieves, musicians, and the like, strike us as humorous. Our folk songs provide another example of this. Those that deal with serious matters such as love are written in a Yiddish that is almost purely Germanic. Even religious poems almost never incorporate Hebrew words and idioms. But the comic songs of those generations already tended to conscript such words and locutions into their Yiddish.[31] Hence it is possible that authors who inadequately studied what was in front of them mistakenly considered this, too, to be a matter of punning, and then compounded their error by adducing it as support for their theory of Jewish humor.

Whatever the case, anyone who says that our humor is fundamentally linguistic is quite mistaken. The contrary is true. Most of our humor stands outside the bounds of the linguistic technique. If so, however, we may indeed be astonished: why are our jokes different from our other literary productions, all of which run after puns? Before we can answer this question we must consider another important sign that accompanies our humor.

I have already intimated that I am referring only to the jokes that are created on a daily basis in Jewish homes and the Jewish street–in other words, the popular or folk humor of the Jews. My contention is that this folksiness is the second distinguishing characteristic of our jokes. (If and to what extent this trait distinguishes Jewish jokes from their European cousins, I cannot say.) The vast majority of our jokes are foundlings. They pass from mouth to mouth, from place to place, and no one knows their parentage or whose genius imbues them. They are like folk sayings, folk tales, folk beliefs, and the like, which also have no forebears. It is true that we also have had well-known and famous jesters who are deemed to have sired many of our jokes. For example, in Lithuania, there are Motke Habad, Shaike Feffer, and Caleb Letz; in southern Russia–Hershele Ostropoler, Shmerl Shnitkever, and Lebenu Gotsvunder; in Germany, Jeschia Bachur and Shimshon Bemel; in Hungary, the preacher from Raytze; and many others. Great rabbis, too, have been assigned the paternity of some jokes: Rabbi-Rabbi Heshel (of Cracow), Rabbi Baruch Mordechai Lipshitz (of Sedlitz), Rabbi Eisel Harif (of Slonim), and others. But precisely this putative parentage attests to the folk nature of the Jewish joke. Is it really the case that Motke Habad is the father of one particular joke, while another was sired by Caleb Letz? Not in the slightest. In Lithuania, most jokes that involve wordplay are attributed to Shaike Feffer, and most of those that are foul-mouthed to Abel'e Greenwald; while in southern Russia the very same jokes are attributed to Lebenu Gotsvunder and Shmerl Shnitkever, respectively. I have in front of me a collection of Jewish jokes, most of them related in the name of "the preacher from Raytze";[32] but in Lithuania you hear the very same jokes told in the name of Motke Habad, the Blind Preacher, and others. The paternity credited to most of our famous jesters means only that they serve as the archetypal clowns to which our folk humor is assigned. Many jokes created by their contemporaries have been attached to them; and what is more, many jokes that did not exist when they were alive have also been attributed to them. It stands to reason that the jokes being created today will also find popular figures to latch onto.

But note the wonder! This folk archetype of the Jewish jester–usually a beggar-clown–who grows in our own soil and is intimately bound to our soil, appears in the writing of other nations more often than in our own language and literature: thus, for example, Bogrov's Chaikl Paikl,[33] Franzos's Sender Glatayu,[34] and Zangwill's Da Costa and Itsikl Yenkeles.[35] Bogrov wrote in Russian, Franzos in German, and Zangwill in English; nevertheless, each of them proved capable of creating a character that is the spitting image of the Jewish clown–his facial contortions, his manner of speaking, and his jokes. Is this not further explicit support for our hypothesis that Jewish humor is not the thrall of any linguistic technique? At the very same moment, though, we return to our question: what caused our humor to be distinguished in this respect not only from its European cousins, but also from all of our other literary productions?

The second trait we identified in our jokes–their folk nature–can lead us to an answer to this question.

From the perspective of the psychology, wordplay is usually only one of the external manifestations of a love for language. Human beings have been endowed with various tools for getting to know themselves and, through themselves, what lies outside them. Most of these tools are available not only to human beings, but also to animals; nevertheless, animals never go beyond self-perception to attain self-awareness. Human beings stood up and made themselves a unique tool to elevate themselves from the mute abyss of mere perception and make the voice of consciousness resound in their ears. This tool is language. It makes no difference whether this tool succeeds in its task–whether language truly bespeaks human beings to themselves or in fact erects yet another barrier; ultimately human beings have no tool that is more important and precious than language, because they believe that it does give voice to their selves. This is the reason for their special fondness for and assiduous attention to it. Or, more precisely, it is the special fondness for language that leads to the assiduous attention to it. Human beings have a need to explore and rummage through their language: in it and from it they seek to raise fragments of perception to consciousness. This, then, is the psychological significance of wordplay, which accompanies human beings at all levels of civilization and rises with them from one level to the next. At the lowest level are the feeble effects created by picking through letters and syllables, in the manner of infants, who are delighted when their mouths find syllables that sound alike. From this level wordplay ascends until it achieves a skillful acuity that dazzles with its beauty and sometimes with its power. These works are produced by people who cull and refine their language. Once produced, they are hurled into the crucible of the language, where they are refined and purified before returning to the people.

From this we learn that it would be quite superficial to infer anything about our creations in other languages (including Jewish languages) from those in Hebrew. Until a generation or two ago only Hebrew served Jews as a tool, albeit imperfect, for self-expression. "Who knows?" writes Bialik. "Perhaps in truth primordial speech emerged not between two people, between one person and his comrade, as a social implement, speech intended for other purposes, but from the mouth of a person who lived alone, speaking to himself out of a psychological need, speech merely for its own sake, on the lines of 'I commune with myself; my spirit inquires' (Ps. 77:7)."[36] Throughout the generations such speech, speech for its own sake, where the speakers feel an emotional need to give voice to themselves to their own ears, existed for Jews only in Hebrew. This is why all the categories of our Hebrew literature, down through the generations,

are replete with word play. From Leah's "she named him Reuben; for she declared, 'It means: "The Lord has seen [Heb. *ra'ah,* related to the first syllable of Reuben] my affliction" ' " (Gen. 29:32), through J. L. Gordon's "Spain (*sep*h*ar*a*d*)–we turned it into a garden (*pardes*); but it was turned into a nettle (*sirpad*) for us" [where the three nouns ring the changes on the order of the same four Hebrew consonants]; from the talmudic passage that expounds the verse in Exodus, "he shall give money to its owner, and the dead" (Ex. 21:35)[37] through Abramowitsch's parody of the liturgy,[38] "please by the might of the greatness of your right hand loosen the bundle"–"and give me some socks"; from the *gematria*[39] and *notarikon*[40] of the talmudic sages through those of the medieval codifier and commentator Rabbi Jacob Ba'al Haturim and on to Mendel Ba'al-Gematria; and so on–we find a single thread of disporting with letters and words, of linguistic skill and acuity, that runs from generation to generation, because a single thread of this special fondness for this particular language, in which the Jews express themselves to themselves, continues from generation to generation. This is not the case with any other speech–that is, language–and not even with our own Jewish vernaculars. For us, they were never speech for its own sake; from the outset they lack that element of "I commune with myself; my spirit inquires" and were accordingly never given over to wordplay.

Readers should not fall into the mistake of thinking that when I say this I am taking sides in our language war.[41] That quarrel is totally irrelevant here. We are dealing not with the conflict among our various languages, but with the people's attitude toward its languages; none of us can ignore the fact that the Jews were always attached only to Hebrew, because it alone served as the language of their soul and heart and only in it did they listen intently to the yearnings of their self. Some say that the Yiddish language, in which prayers and supplications were written for our mothers, is also imbued with the tears and soul-quivering of half the people. There is certainly some truth in this. But it may well be that our mothers wept their most agitated tears in the Hebrew discourse that informs the Yiddish supplications. Others say that the writings of the first hasidim were in Yiddish, and from this it rose to the degree of the speech of the heart and soul. There is a small measure of truth in this too, of course. First of all, though, if we measure hasidism by the standard of the long course of Jewish history, its influence is that of a johny-come-lately; and this is precisely the point we are making–namely, that until recently Hebrew was the only language in which Jews expressed themselves for themselves. Second, hasidic literature itself is evidence of the Jews' attitude toward their languages. The first hasidim, who generally were neither great sages nor great orators, obviously could not find adequate means of expressing their new thoughts and ideas in Hebrew; in their hour of need they were forced to rely on Yiddish. But even then they were careful to make sure that the overall form of their language remained Hebrew, as it had always been: their common sense told them that otherwise the soul would depart from their speech, which would no longer be speech for its own sake.

Jewish humor itself provides a faithful illustration of the people's attitude toward the Jewish vernaculars. Isaac Meir Dick[42] was, as is known, one of the very first to write in Yiddish. His maskilic[43] friends once asked why he did not consider writing a grammar of that language? "I'll tell you a story," replied Dick. "A few days ago, late on Friday afternoon I was walking down Jews' Lane and heard a woman quarreling with her daughter about a Sabbath *kugel*. 'Chaike,' the woman was yelling, 'may your bones rot. I left you a fine kugel on the stove and went out to

the market–*un du host mir dem kugel tsupatsket un tsudatsket, tsufratsket un tsulatsket*' [and you have fooled with and . . . my kugel: *patchken* is a standard Yiddish word–to daub, smear, or make a mess; but the others seem to be for-the-nonce coinages]. Know then, my masters: a language in which it is possible to *patchke* and *hatchke* and *katchke* and *fratchke* doesn't need a grammar book."[44] I don't know whether Dick really said this, or if others merely attributed it to him. Still, if such a remark could be placed in the mouth of one of the first builders of the language, we know what their attitude toward it was. And if its writers and speakers relate to a language in this way, what place can wordplay and rhetorical artistry have in it?[45]

This, it seems to me, is why our folk humor was not dominated by the linguistic technique until the last generation. I intentionally say "until the last generation." When the attitude toward the Yiddish language, our vernacular, changed, and it too became the object of special fondness, our folk humor began to take the form of puns and wordplay. This is obvious if you look at the new jokes published in the Yiddish newspapers and almanacs in recent years.

Finally, one short note that is relevant to our investigation. In recent years we have also begun to use gentile languages and feel an attachment to them. There are already large sectors who know only the language of the country in which they were born. But the jokes created among these groups, too, are increasingly dominated by wordplay. This too, I will add as an aside, has misled authors who wrote about Jewish humor to think that wordplay is its foundation.

III

No, the distinguishing sign of Jewish humor is the "intellectual midrash." But what does that mean?

Many authors have written about humor (not the Jewish variety, but humor in general). Each of them looks for a particular "formula" to classify the various types of humor on the basis of its internal technique. If we examine these formulas we find that none truly incorporates every type. There are limbs and even entire bodies that cannot fit within the compass of any of them. It goes without saying that I do not pretend that I will manage to find what eluded my betters. I, however, I do venture to offer a definition that strikes me as fundamental, I must preface this by saying, first, that this definition is not my own, but the product of the essences of various definitions that I have heard from friends; and second, that even this definition should not be called comprehensive, although it does strike me as more satisfactory than the others.

> Caleb Letz is drinking coffee in a Jewish coffeehouse. When he finishes and goes over to the counter to pay, the owner says to him: "Reb Caleb, what do you think of my coffee?"
>
> "Your coffee," replies Caleb, "has one great advantage, but also one great deficiency. The advantage is that it does not contain any chicory. But its deficiency is that it doesn't contain any coffee, either."

In this fine jest we again find what we have already discovered in other jokes: a duality of covert inside overt. Caleb does not expose the secret of the coffee's mediocrity; quite the con-

trary, he seems to be covering over and concealing it. Precisely because of this, however, the secret leaps forth and is revealed, "by accident." Let us try to analyze this joke into its parts, in the hope that this will teach us something we have not perceived thus far. The normal situation is that Jewish coffee contains both chicory and coffee; the two are combined in our minds to produce the normal idea of coffee. Nevertheless, "coffee" that is all chicory and contains no coffee is also called coffee; a fortiori, so too is pure coffee without any chicory. Thus the absence of chicory, by itself, does not negate our normal idea of coffee; nor does the absence of coffee do so. But Caleb comes and suggests a greater feat: he says that we should make room in our minds for an image that is in fact inconceivable–"coffee" that contains neither chicory nor coffee. This is similar to Lichtenberg's famous witticism, which has become a commonplace: "What does it resemble? A knife without a blade that is missing its handle." Our normal image of "knife" is composed of blade and handle. Nevertheless, we can sustain the concept of a knife whose blade has been removed, just as we can accept that of a knife whose handle has been removed. Lichtenberg comes and tells us to make room in our conceptual space for a knife from which both blade and handle have been removed.

The inner technique of these jokes, then, is the combination of ideas that are ostensibly tied together by the thread of a particular necessity–logical, psychological, or descriptive. When we reach the end of the thread, however, we discover that it was never there at all–only its image–and the combination it tied together has evaporated. In other words, the jester assigns substance to a seeming possibility of meaning, even though he knows that this substance is quite absurd and the seeming possibility a chimera.

I repeat: I do not believe it possible to include all the many varieties of the joke within this definition. But it does cover most of the jokes I come across. For want of an alternative we are compelled to make do with a small sample–a mere approximation. Below I present several examples from our storehouse of jokes in order to see how close this approximation comes.

(1) *Irony* (a species of humor that is uncommon with us): "This, it seems, is our eternal fate. Even our God was taken over by the nations, who then abuse us every day: 'Where is your God? (after Ps. 115:2)' "[46] The speaker pretends that there is some substance to the premise ("they took over our God"), so that the abuse ("where is your God?") becomes an expression of ingratitude. At the same time, however, both we and the speaker know that there is nothing to this, that the dispossession is no dispossession and their "god" is not our God. Clearly everything is insubstantial and only a joke.

(2) *Sarcasm* (a more common form of humor among us): "Motke Habad is relating his troubles to his friend. 'My wife Chaya-Leah is sick. She is seriously ill. I'm afraid she has been poisoned.' 'What do you mean, poisoned?' asks the other in astonishment. 'She had an accident a few days ago,' Motke replies. 'She bit her tongue.' " Here we immediately perceive the bogus possibility to which Motke would ascribe a metaphorical reality: we really do seem to be able to imagine a "serpent-woman" or "mad-dog-woman" whose tongue is full of venom.

(3) *Mockery:* "When Israel-Jacob realized after his wedding that he had been tricked, he said to his wife: 'Chaya'leh my dear, if you said before our wedding that you have 2000 rubles, when you really only have 1000–I forgive you. Should you have to steal from others to bring it to me? And if you said that you're 25, but it turns out that you're already past 30–I forgive that too: no person is born exactly when she wants to be. But I do have one request to make of you: from now on don't get any older.' " It is plausible, to some extent, for a person to say to his

friend, "live–but don't get any older"; or "don't live, so you won't get older." But Israel-Jacob's request combines something of both senses.

(4) *Foolishness:* "Benny the simpleton was sent to buy a hen. Instead he brought back a pitcher of water. 'Benny,' they asked him, 'why did you bring us water instead of a hen?' He replied, 'I went to the market to buy a hen. The woman praised her hens and said they were all fat. It follows, I told myself, that if fat is better than a hen I ought to buy fat instead. I went to the butcher shop to buy fat. The butcher praised his fat and said that it was as limpid as oil. It follows, I told myself, that oil is better than fat, so I should buy oil instead. I went to the store to buy oil. The storekeeper praised his oil and said that it was as clear as water. It follows, I told myself, that water is better than oil–so here's a pitcher of water." No explanation seems to be required to understand the inanity of Benny's conclusions.

Here are three more examples that also require no explanation of their inanity.

(5) *Unworldliness* "Rabbi Joseph Loksh used to eat egg custard for the second Sabbath meal. Once his wife was stingy and didn't make it. 'Wife,' he asked her, 'why are you deviating from my custom?' 'When the summer ended' she replied, 'and winter came, the hens stopped laying. At first I could buy an egg for a penny; now it costs threepence." Reb Joseph's face glowed. "Blessed be He who gives intelligence to a hen: for a wage of one penny she won't lay an egg, but for a wage of threepence she lays an egg."

(6) *Naivet'*: "A woman covered with soot came to the rabbi of Vilna, Abele Fusviler. 'Rabbi,' she asked, 'I have a question: what should I cook today?' 'Go home,' he replied, 'and make pancakes.' After she left the rabbi said to his disciples, 'this innocent is certainly a servant. When she asked her mistress what she should cook today, she yelled at her and said, "go ask the town rabbi!" So she came to me.' "

(7) *Ignorance:* "Jacob Yag cited a biblical verse to support the ban on leaving the dead unburied: 'His breath departs; he returns to the dust on that day' (Ps. 146:4)."[47]

Here we feel the difference between the other types of jokes and those based on foolishness, unworldliness, naivet', and ignorance. All jokes involve an intention to amuse. The jester always acts wantonly: he knows and recognizes the "inanity" of his words, logic, and deeds, and doesn't care. On the contrary, he seems to be highlighting it and hinting: "don't you catch the absurdity here?" But in jokes about foolishness, unworldliness, naivet', and ignorance the humor is unwitting. The simpleton, the unworldly person, the naif, and the ignoramus (who in a certain sense belongs to the same species as the first three) act inadvertently: for them, the whimsical meaning of their words, logic, and deeds are absolute reality and plain meaning. We, however, who do not share their simpleness and unworldliness, or their naivet' and ignorance, cannot acknowledge this reality and plain meaning, and see their words, logic, and deeds as humorous. On close examination we see that the difference here is not of content, but only of form.

(8) *Wordplay:* Now we have a better idea of what this type of humor is about. Its core is a spurious meaning that is attributed (whether intentionally, for the sake of the jest, or unintentionally) to familiar words and locutions, even though this is not their sense and the feigned possibility has no substance whatsoever. Consider, for example, the well-known m'lange of biblical verses and liturgical passages strung together by common words [the words that belong to both the preceding and following passage are italicized]: "The sixth day. Completed

were the *heavens* proclaim *His glory* fills the universe, His servants ask one another, *where is* Sarah your wife; he replied, *behold* the God who gives me triumph! I am confident, unafraid; For Yah the Lord is my strength and might, *and has been* in the days of Ahasuerus."[48]

I cannot, of course, enumerate all the types of joke, because that would take too long. For this reason I will offer only one more example to reach the end of this examination.

(9) *Casuistry:* "The yeshiva students are sitting around and splitting hairs: Which end does a person grow from–the bottom or the top? From the feet or the head? One says, 'two years ago my father bought me a pair of pants. When I put them on, they dragged on the ground. But now, when I put them on they don't even reach my ankles. It follows that a person grows from the bottom.' The second replies, 'on the contrary! Yesterday when I was in the market I saw a platoon of soldiers. Looking at them I saw that at the bottom all their feet were the same; but at the top, one was short and another was tall. It follows that a person grows from the top.' " I don't know a clearer and more successful example of bogus meaning than this.

As I continue to consider this last example I realize that it can teach us about the entire subject. Not only is this joke based on hair-splitting; hair-splitting is the technical crux of *every* joke. What, in fact, is hair-splitting if not a logical thread that has the appearance of logic, but not its reality, so that you can use it to suspend illusory and ephemeral images, pedantic ideas, and flickering truths, which seem to have a real meaning? It is not by chance that it was said of the champion hair-splitters of all times and all people[49] that they could "suspend mountains from a thread"[50] and "push an elephant through the eye of a needle."[51] For example, Rabbi Judah ben Taddai makes an a fortiori deduction: "If [we consider the case of] my wife, with whom I am permitted [to have relations], but I am forbidden to [have relations with] her daughter, then in the case of a married woman, who I am forbidden to [have relations with], does it not follow that I should be forbidden [to have relations with] her daughter?" (Tractate Derekh Eretz 1).[52] What name should we give to this a fortiori reasoning, if not hair-splitting? And what name should we give to its converse: If I am forbidden [to have relations] with a married woman, but I am permitted [to have relations] with her daughter; then in the case of my wife, who I am permitted to [have relations with], does not follow that I am permitted [to have relations] with her daughter?" A joke. The fact is that our jokes contain many such a fortiori deductions:

The townsfolk of Chavuss were interested in getting rid of their rabbi, Moses Hefetz, because of his irascibility. The rabbi himself, who wanted to be called to the pulpit of Pinsk, reasoned a fortiori: "If Chavuss, which does not want me to serve as its rabbi, wants me to be the rabbi in Pinsk, then it follows that Pinsk, which does want me to serve as rabbi in Chavuss, wants me to be its rabbi."

Similarly, Meir-Jozi the thief reasoned a fortiori: "If my pocket, which is off-limits to my comrade, is permitted to me, then it follows that my comrade's pocket, which is permitted to him, is permitted to me as well."

Another jester reasoned as follows: "If vinegar, which is not sweet, is sour, then does it not stand to reason that honey, which is sweet, is sour?"

It is true that we must distinguish between the hairsplitter and the jester just as we distinguish between the naif and the jester: sometimes the hair-splitter does not intend to split hairs. On the contrary, in his innocence he may believe that his reading is the deep meaning of the text. By contrast, the joker fully intends his jest and knows that his interpretation and

"logic" distort the plain meaning. As we have already seen, however, this is not a distinction of content, but only of form. With regard to the content, it makes no difference whether the hairsplitter knows and recognizes that his reasoning rests on a familiar technique of clowning, or only we feel this.

In sum, if you properly analyze every joke you encounter, you will find that it contains an element of hairsplitting. It goes without saying that to the extent that this element is smaller, the joke will be less biting–and vice-versa. This, in fact, is one of the secrets of the acerbity of Jewish humor: if any species of humor in the world knows how to incorporate all the wondrous tricks of hairsplitting, it is Jewish humor. As I mentioned above, Sigmund Freud is the foremost author who uses examples of Jewish jokes to illustrate his theories. He is also the first, so far as I know, to decide explicitly that *sophismus*–hairsplitting–is one of the basic techniques of humor in general. It is clear to me that the explicit hairsplitting that Freud detected in our humor is what led him to discover what had eluded previous authors. Had he continued to investigate the findings of his observation of Jewish humor he would have become aware of the fact that that hairsplitting is not merely one element of humor, but its key ingredient. He would also have realized that Jewish humor is necessarily extremely sharp because no other variety is so rich in this element.

There are, however, two other reasons for the extreme acerbity of Jewish humor.

Most European jokes are merely jokes. Jewish jokes–at least many of them–are both anecdotes and jokes. This is quite understandable. European jokes, which are based mainly on the external, linguistic technique, have a narrow and limited compass: the jesting statement itself, and no more. Once that statement has been created, we have the entire joke. This is not the case with Jewish jokes. Because they are based on an internal technique that involves thought, it follows that there must be some situation prior to the joke that lays the ground for the witty thought. In this way the joke itself–that is, the punch line–is merely the last stroke of the entire picture. Such a joke arouses to a high degree because its energy level is so high. The stimulus keeps growing stronger, until the punch line arrives to make the tension evaporate in a flash. It is this mounting stimulus and its sudden disappearance that give the Jewish joke its particularly sharp flavor.

By way of illustration, here are two such jokes.

> Every Friday afternoon, when Rabbi Joseph Loksh would go to the public bath, his wife would give him a clean robe for the Sabbath. The rabbi's wife used to store the robe, after laundering, in an unusual fashion–folded inside out–to keep it from getting dirty. She would tell Rabbi Joseph to be sure to turn the robe right side in before putting it on. But Rabbi Joseph always forgot what she told him, and every Friday afternoon he came home from the bathhouse wearing his robe inside out. When the rabbi's wife saw that all her reminders and nagging were for naught, she decided to turn the robe right side out before sending it to the bathhouse with Rabbi Joseph. But wouldn't you know it, precisely that Friday Rabbi Joseph did remember his wife's instruction to turn the robe. So he did, and came home wearing his robe inside out. When his wife saw this she began scolding and cursing him: "You idler, fool, ne'er-do-well! I gave you the robe right side

out to begin with!" The rabbi scratched his nose. "Wife, it must be from heaven. You reversed the robe and so did I–but it's still not reversed!"

Pini of the long beard was sitting and learning by candlelight: "A person with a long beard is a confused person" (BT Sanhedrin 100b). Rashi explains, "someone who has a thick beard is a fool." Pini looked at his beard and considered the matter–what could he do about the situation? To shave is forbidden; to leave the beard the way it is–made a statement about himself. He thought hard until he found a solution. He measured off two hands-breadths of his beard and brought the rest close to the burning candle. The fire flamed up, burned the entire beard, and scorched Pini's face. Pini added a note in the margin of the Gemara: "Tried and proven."

Finally, the third reason why our jokes are so sharp is that they are really mockery rather than comedy.[53] Later we shall see that both comedy and mockery are intended to alleviate the heavy burden that weighs down the human mind and spirit, to restore our depressed soul–to bring us out, even if only for a moment, from the world that presses down on us with the full weight of its rocks and terrors of its distresses, to melt them in all the juice of a single laugh. All the same, the fundamental difference between comedy and mockery is that between humor and satire.[54] Comedy is serene–or, more precisely, forgiving–by its very nature; it has in it more of the soothing caress than a painful blow. Mockery is quite different. It knows only to scoff, sneer, deride, ridicule, condemn, to reveal the nakedness of everything, to fight against everything, to rebel against everything. Mockery by its very nature is a hard-hearted fighter and is always assiduously honing its arrows and smearing them with poison so that their wound will not be inconsequential. This, and no other, is the stuff of Jewish humor: it has almost none of the serenity of comedy; it is all war, all rebellion.

Here, though, we have gone beyond the essential limits of humor per se and entered the territory of the absurd.[55]

From the Treasury of Jewish Humor

I

There is nothing in the world that Jewish humor will not assail. Jews make fun of everything–because jokes give them a fleeting ability to reject and rebel against everything, to quaff a large mouthful from the intoxicating goblet of freedom and to elevate and exalt, for that brief moment, their own "simple ego" over everything. How far the rebellion reaches can be seen from a small collection of typical Jewish jokes, most or all of which are familiar to those who are used to hearing Jewish jokes. It is precisely because they are so well known that I have chosen them from the vast store that I have collected.

The most difficult subjection that the Jew knows is that to the non-Jew–the *goy*; it is no wonder that one of the favorite themes of our humor is "Israel among the nations." Were it pos-

sible to collect and publish all the Jewish jokes on this theme, they would certainly constitute a large volume. With what alacrity do our jokes retaliate against the goy and stir the Jew to rebel against him!

A Jew and a goy are riding in a cart. The goy keeps reviling and cursing the Jew, who listens in silence. Suddenly the former turns to him and demands, "Jew, why did you open your mouth so wide? Are you planning to swallow me up?"

"Heaven forfend!" replies the Jew. "The Torah forbids us to eat swine."

A goy is standing in the marketplace by the carcass of a dog and railing against the Jews. "There is no escape from the accursed Jews. They even throw their carcasses here in the market."

"You are mistaken," replies a Jewish passerby. "It's a goy–if you look you'll see that he isn't circumcised."

The composer Meyerbeer turns to the well-known humorist Speyer. "Tell me, please, Mr. Speyer, without any bias, what do you think of my operas?"

"They are all estimable," says Speyer, "but the *Huguenots* is the happiest among them."

"The happiest?!" replies the composer with astonishment.

"Just so, the happiest," reiterates Speyer. "In that opera the gentiles kill one another and the Jew writes the music for it."

At the beginning of the antisemitic period in Germany, Stoecke[56] was lecturing to a small group of his supporters:

"Do not try to dismay us that few rally to our banner. Many hearts respond to it. Thousands and the ten of thousands are with us."

"And with us, reverend priest," interrupts a Jew from the group, "with us–the millions."

A tall and beefy officer is browbeating Hershel the peddler, who stands before him submissively. "Tell me, Hershel," he says "why are you so small, pale, and thin?"

Herschel grins and answers, "because I only had one father."

Motke Habad is sitting on a park bench next to a goy. The goy starts up a conversation with him about the various plants growing there. "The Russians are like the oak," he says, "the terebinth represents the Germans, the lily symbolizes the Poles. And those"–adds the goy, pointing to the briars by the fence–"are the Jews."

"You're right," agrees Motke. "They can all be used for a certain purpose, except the briars."

Night has fallen and the Day of Atonement is over. A certain Jew is the very last to come out of the synagogue, recite the prayer for the new moon, and go home. There he chants the benediction over the light and immediately sets to work hammering in the first nail for his sukka. After fulfilling all these obligations he remains outside for a while and does not go inside for the evening meal. His hunger has disappeared, his thirst has disappeared–the evil

inclination within him is totally subjugated. While he is standing there, full of holy thoughts and so close to heaven, a three-horse carriage passes by, bearing a lord and his lady, who are preoccupied with lust and pleasure and the evil inclination. The Jew looks at the carriage and its passengers, raises his eyes toward heaven, smiles, and says, " 'Your justice is like the great abyss!' [Ps. 36:7; the rest of the verse reads, 'You deliver human beings and beasts, O Lord']. Even them You consider to be human beings."

II

How wonderfully do our jokes take revenge on that culture which has sought to subjugate the Jews for the last two thousand years:

A certain bishop asked Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschuetz,[57] "Why do you believe in God and not in the son of God? The way of the world is that a rich man's son enjoys his father's credit."

"But that," replied Rabbi Eybeschuetz, "applies to a rich man's son whose father will not live forever."

A Jew's house stood next to that of a non-Jew. One night a fire broke out in the neighborhood; their houses burned down, leaving both the Jew and the goy penniless. The next day the two burned-out men meet each other. The gentile is downcast, but the Jew looks no different than before. The gentile, astonished, says to the Jew, "How is it, Yankel, that I'm crying; but you–you behave as if nothing happened."

"That's appropriate for you and this is appropriate for me," replies the Jew. "Your god, too, was incinerated,[58] but mine still lives."

"What is the most important gentile holiday?" someone asked Caleb Letz.

"Purim," replied Caleb.

"Purim?!"

"Absolutely! If Haman had won and killed all the Jews, we would only be missing Jews. But the gentiles would be missing their god."

A sick Jew is sitting with a gentile doctor and complaining about his aches and pains. He is afraid he is going to die. "All you Jews are afraid of death!" says the doctor angrily. "We Christians are not afraid of death."

"Why should that be surprising?" replies the Jew. "The Christians had one great one who died for all of them. But we Jews–each of us has to die for himself."

Two neighbors in the village, a Jew and a gentile, were friends. Once the gentile cut down a tree in the forest, made it into an icon, and set it up outside his front door. From that time on the two neighbors were no longer friends. Every time the Jew passed his neighbor's house the latter scowled at him.

One day the Jew accosted his neighbor and asked him, "What misdeed did you find in me, my friend, that suddenly you started hating me?"

"It's because you disdain my God," replied the gentile, "and don't take off your hat when you pass in front of him."

"But, my friend," countered the Jew in astonishment, "I remember him when he was still a tree."

Jonah Moses brought two barrels of pickled cucumbers from the village to sell in the city. When the barrels were opened it turned out the pickles had spoiled and Jonah Moses had to throw them into the river. He returned to his village with a heavy heart, mourning his loss. En route he noticed a crucifix. Jonah Moses looked at the humble face of the crucified, looked again, and asks, "And did you also deal in pickles?"

A Jew bought a lottery ticket. He took a vow that if he won he would give a tithe to the poor, renovate the synagogue, and donate a goodly sum to the dowry fund for poor brides. But the vow was in vain. The ticket did not win.

When the Jew bought another ticket he went to the priest and said to him, "My God did not hear my vow. Pray to your God to help me this time, and if my ticket wins I and my family will convert, give a tithe to your poor, and renovate your church."

The drawing came and the ticket won. A day passed, and then another, but the Jew did not come to the priest to fulfill his vow. Finally the priest went to him. "Give thanks, my son, that our God is more excellent than yours. Now do as you promised."

"Reverend priest," replied the Jew. "I acknowledge that when it comes to generosity your God is greater than our God. But you too must acknowledge that when it comes to wisdom our God is greater than yours: He sees into the heart and does not allow a man to cheat him."

III

Even more than their jokes express the Jews' rebellion against their external subjection and oppressors, they express their rebellion against their internal subjection and oppressors. The Jew is not simply a shopkeeper or a merchant or a jobber; he is enslaved to his shop, to his merchandise, to his job, instead of ruling over them. They dominate him. He does not get up in the morning for the sake of his own day, in order to live his own life, but for the sake of his business, in order to be a shopkeeper, a merchant, a jobber. Hence no one makes so much fun of his business affairs as the Jew does.

They asked one joker: "Perhaps you know why Rabbi Judah provided a mnemonic for the ten plagues? What did he profit from that?"

"Of course I know," replied the joker. "Rabbi Judah gained what every Jew does–plagues. Figure it out:

"For the first three plagues–Blood, Frogs, Lice–his mnemonic is BFL. For the second three plagues–Beasts, Murrain, Boils–his mnemonic is BMB. For the last four plagues–Hail, Locust,

Darkness, the Plague of the First-born–his mnemonic is HLDF. So what he 'gained' was a *plague*."

A ship, carrying passengers and barrels of wine, was about to be swallowed up by a whale. The captain took a barrel of wine and hurled it into the mouth of the whale, but still it came on. Then he hurled one of the gentile passengers into its mouth, but still it came on. Finally he hurled one of the Jewish passengers into its mouth–and the whale relented and turned away.

Some time later the whale was taken. The whalers hauled it ashore, split it open, and found the Jew standing there pouring wine for the gentile.[59]

"You're asking about the portion of the week,[60] " says a Jew to his friend. "By the divine service,[61] I don't know what to answer you. I have many portions. Life teaches me the portion of "When you go out to war" (Deut. 21:10-25:19); my wife, the portion of "The generations" (Gen. 25:19-28:9); the dowry, the portion of "It went away" (Deut. 31:1-30);[62] business, the portion of "Standing up" (Deut. 29:9-30:20); bills, the portion of "He presented" (Gen. 44:18-47:27);[63] and a bailiff comes and teaches me the portion "He sat" (Gen. 37:1-40:23).[64]

Two Jews from the same shtetl come to Nizhny-Novgorod during the great fair, looking to make a few rubles. A day passes, two days, a week–nothing. Every evening they recount their troubles to each other: they are about to spend their last farthing and there are still no leads for business.

One afternoon, when the trade is at its zenith, one of them sees the other riding in a carriage and urging the cabby to hurry. "What luck!" he thinks, with a sigh of envy. That evening, when they both return to their inn, it's the "lucky one" who begins his sob story first: "Another day gone for nothing! The fair is almost over and there's no hope of anything."

Wide-eyed, the other looked at him and asks: "In that case, where were you rushing today?"

"It shouldn't happen to you, my friend," he replies. "My stomach was upset. While in the marketplace I had an attack of cramps, so the only thing I could do was hurry back to our inn."

Hershel the peddler is a real nudnik. He walks away from a group of merchants who are eating together in a restaurant, only to return a minute later: "Perhaps one of you gentlemen needs fine kerchiefs, elegant neck scarves, quality purses?"

"Watch," says one of the diners to his comrades. "I'm going to get even with this pest. Rabbi Jew, do you have any epaulets?"

"Absolutely," the peddler answers with alacrity. "Good-looking, strong, pure silk–here!"

"How much are they?"

"Two rubles–just two rubles."

"All right, give me the epaulets and here are your two rubles."

Hershel takes the money, hands over the epaulets, and goes away, scratching his brow and looking downcast.

"It serves him right," says the merchant. "Now he'll curse himself for not asking three rubles."

"Rabbi Meir," Luria the jobber asks his innkeeper on the first day of Rosh Hashana, "why were the prayers in the Great Synagogue so drawn out today? Do you use a different prayer-book than we use in our small prayer house?"

"We don't have a different prayer book," responds the host, "but a different cantor. Your cantor–you should forgive me for saying so–only the mice can hear his voice. But our cantor has a voice like a lion. When he stood before the lectern and chanted his prayer, 'Here I stand, poor,' you could hear him in the next street."

"Oh," smiles Luria. "Does it all depend on the voice? I'm not a cantor and I don't have a voice at all. All the same, when (with God's help) I begin after the holiday with 'Here I stand, poor,' you'll be able to hear it in the next county."[65]

A famous jobber is telling his children's tutor about his first deal. "Not only did I lose my wife's dowry in that unfortunate business," he says. "I lost other people's money, too."

"So how did you fix things up?"

"I did what every jobber does. I found myself a bigger deal than the first one. First I took an advance, as is customary. Some of it I gave to my creditors and some I used to support my family."

"And was that the deal that made you wealthy?" the teacher breaks in.

"Heaven forbid! On the contrary, I lost even more than in the first affair."

"So what did you do?"

"What everyone does, I found myself a third business, even larger than the second. First I took an advance, as is customary. Some of it I gave to my creditors and some I set aside to support my family. Only. . . only, this deal proved to be an even greater loss."

"If so," the teacher asks in panic, "if so, what will be the end of the affair?"

"The end of the affair? Relax. Everyone dies in the end."

IV

The burden of marrying off his daughters is the albatross around a Jew's neck. Along come our jokes to tell us what we think about this albatross.

A wealthy Jew is recounting his troubles to the matchmaker. "Look, you're telling me that for less than 20,000 I won't find a husband for my daughter. I suspect you're right. But tell me, how did we Jews get into such big trouble? Two weeks ago my neighbor Wenslavsky married off his daughter and gave her 2,000 rubles. What does that gentile have on any of his estates I don't have in all my business."

"Your analogy is inexact," responds the matchmaker. "When a gentile marries off his daughter, tells his son-in-law, 'everything you see will be yours when I die.' But a Jew, when he marries off his daughter, tells to his son in law, 'everything you see will be yours after I reach 120.' Who is foolish enough to want to wait that long?"

A Jew says to a matchmaker who is sitting with him. "So, you ask, how much will I give my daughter? What is that like? It's like an ox that gave the butcher 60 pounds of suet. Did he

really *give* it? Did he want to? What happened? They slaughtered the ox, skinned it, slit open its paunch, cut it up, and took out 60 pounds of suet. So instead of your asking me, how much are you willing to give, I'm asking you: how much are they going to take out of me after they skin me and cut me up into little pieces?"

A father and a mother are sitting with the matchmaker. "Reb Jacob," asks the matchmaker, "is that your last word–10,000?"

"Not a penny more," replies the father. "I am a merchant and I keep my word."

"If so," says the matchmaker, "it's no deal from the beginning. Less than 12,000 is impossible. He too is a merchant and keeps his word."

"I tell you what, Jacob," puts in his wife, "don't be stubborn. Give the bastard his 2,000–and let him choke on it."

A Jew is pouring out his cares to his friend. "What can I do to marry off my daughter? I worked so hard until I found her a groom. But now that I found one and its time for the wedding, the whole affair is about to collapse."

"What's holding it up?" asks the other.

"I promised a dowry of a thousand, but I don't have more than half of it."

"I'm astonished. Someone as energetic as you are, who already has half the dowry in hand, doesn't know how to cheat the groom with regard to the second half!"

"You fool! It's the phony half I already have."

Two beggars meet. Says one to the other, his face glowing: "Congratulate me, Lazar, I've married off my oldest daughter."

"Mazal tov!" says the other. "Who's the groom?"

"Itzik the hunchback."

"A good match. Itzik can make a living. What dowry did you give?"

"That bastard knew how to strip me naked. I only hope I can give so fine a dowry to my younger daughter. I gave him Lithuania and Zamut[66]–from now on I'm not allowed to beg in either of them."

Lipa the shopkeeper had great sorrow from his daughter. Although she was offered many fine matches, she held out stubbornly: "Only a doctor!"

Her beauty began to fade. One after another all the young fellows who were attracted to her started to look elsewhere. But she stood firm: "A doctor!"

One day Lipa went to his daughter's room with a big smile on his face–he had found a husband after her heart.

"A doctor?" she asked.

"Well, not exactly a doctor," stammered Lipa, "but . . . sort of a doctor–a paramedic."

"No way! Either a doctor or no one."

"But, daughter," pleaded Lipa, "have you ever seen a person climb to the top rung in one go? Everything is done gradually. First a woman marries a paramedic, and only later a doctor."

A hasid is recounting his woes to his rebbe. "Rabbi, my business is terrible. People still think I'm worth tens of thousands, but to you, Rabbi, I have to confess the truth, no oil is left in the jar. My daughter is of a marriageable age and I don't know where my help will come from. Now the Lord has brought me a handsome lad with good lineage, a scholar and well to do, and he wants to marry my daughter just as she is, even without a dowry. What do you think?"

"Why do you ask?" asks the rabbi in astonishment. "Give him your daughter and be happy."

"But, Rabbi, the fellow has one defect."

"Which is?"

"I am afraid that he is a little bit of a freethinker."

The rabbi jumps out of his chair as if bitten by a snake. "Heaven forbid! May the Lord protect you! Better you should marry your daughter to a shoemaker, to a carter, than to a freethinker."

"But Rabbi, my daughter too has a defect."

"Which is?"

"I suspect that she is a little bit pregnant."

V

Our jokes overflow with defiant venom when they take up the topic of man and wife.

Why does a bier have two columns and a bridal canopy four columns?
Because only one person is carried to the grave on a bier, and two people under the canopy.

"Why aren't you crying?" a mother asks her daughter the right before her wedding. "Tears are a good sign for a bride."

"Why should I cry?" replies the daughter. "Let him cry: he's marrying me."

How do we know that Balak didn't have a wife?
Because he had to hire Balaam to curse for him.

Shmerl Shnitkever used to say, "All my life, whenever I came to the verse, 'and I inflict a leprous plague in a house[67] (Lev. 14:34), I used to hesitate: what is a plague in a house like? But since I married Sheindl I say, 'Moses spoke true and his Torah is true.' "

When Shaike Feffer's first wife died he married her sister. After she, too, died, he married the third sister. People said to him, "Isaiah, why is it that you only marry sisters?"

He replied, "I can't stand that family and I'm trying to kill it off."

When Yossi Goldis (a famous cantor and wit in Vitebsk) fell ill and sensed that the angel of death was standing by his bed, he asked his wife to put on her holiday clothes and jewelry and come to him. She thought his illness had made him delirious. Nevertheless, so as not to distress

him, she did as he asked. When she stood before him, in her festival finery, Yossi gathered his strength, lifted his head, and said "Angel of death, look over there–isn't she better looking than I am?"

A Jew came to the rabbi. He wanted to divorce his wife. The rabbi looked at him in astonishment; the man was far from young. "When did you marry your wife?" the rabbi asked.

"Forty years ago, Rabbi."

"Do you have any children?"

"Two sons and three daughters."

"Where are they?"

"They're all married."

"And now, in your old age, you want to divorce your wife?"

"Yes, Rabbi. . . . Before our marriage I didn't know my wife. My father arranged the match. After I saw her I wanted to divorce her. My father objected. 'She's pregnant,' he said. After she gave birth I wanted to divorce her. My father objected. 'She's nursing,' he said. And then again she was pregnant and again nursing. When she stopped having children I wanted to divorce her. My father objected. "You have two sons,' he said, 'and three daughters, they can't manage without a mother.'

"But now, Rabbi, I don't have any more children at home, thank God. If not now–when?"[68]

VI

It goes without saying that our jokes help the Jew rebel against his richer and stronger brother.

Rabbi Baruch Mordechai of Sedlitz used to say: "The world is upside down. A rich man, who always has money in his pocket–everybody runs to sell to him on credit. But a poor man, whose purse is always empty–to him no one will sell except for cash. If people thought about the matter they would reverse the order and sell on credit to the poor and for cash to the rich. You may object that because the poor man has no way to pay, anyone who gives him credit is throwing his money away and will eventually become poor too. What difference does that make? On the contrary, he would be better off poor, because then he too could get everything on credit."

They asked the jester: Why is a poor man forbidden to transgress all the negative commandments, but a rich man may do so?

"For both of them it's a question of destiny," replied the jester. "When Moses shattered the first set of tablets, which were made of sapphire, all the Jews in the camp hurried out to gather up the fragments. The rich, who are always lucky, got the big pieces, on which were written, "thou shalt steal," "thou shalt commit adultery," "thou shalt covet," while the poor, unsuccessful as always, only got the small bits: "not," "not," "not."[69]

A poor guest is dining at the table of a rich host, who is showing off his new silver service and delighting in it. The poor man, too, exclaims over it.

The host say to him, "It's only natural that I get pleasure from the silver–it's mine. But why do you get such pleasure from it?"

"It give you pleasure to look at it," replies the guest, "and it also gives me pleasure to look at it."

"But I can put it away when I want to," says the host, "and you can't."

"If you put it away," says the guest, "it won't delight either of us."

"I," says the host, "can sell it if I have to, but you can't."

"If you have to sell it," says the guest, "only I will be delighted."

A rich man encounters a poor man. The latter extends his hand and the rich man gives him a ruble. An hour later the rich man enters a restaurant and sees the poor man sitting there eating a fish mousseline. The rich man explodes: "Is that why a man stands at the roadside and sticks out his hand to beg?"

The poor man retorts in kind: "Tell me something. If before I had a ruble I couldn't eat a mousseline, and now that I have a ruble I'm not allowed to eat a mousseline–then when may I?"

People said to Hayim Luria, a scholar with an illustrious ancestry: "How can an important person like you lower and abase himself before Leizer Shatzkin, an ignoramus and the son of an ignoramus, who has nothing in this world except for money?"

"That's the way of the world," replied Hayim. "Nothing in God's creation is more important than man and no creature is lower than the beast. Nevertheless it has been decreed that a man must lower himself beside a beast when he wants to milk it."

Rabbi Eisel Harif went to ask a rich miser to make a donation for public purposes. "Rabbi," said the rich man, "why have you exerted yourself in vain? Don't you know that I am a son of Noah [i.e., a miser]?"[70]

Rabbi Harif replied, "I indeed have heard that you are a son of Noah. Nevertheless I am astonished at you. Noah had three sons, so why did you choose to be Ham?"

All Vilna was agog. Several days earlier the leaders of the community had assembled and decided to remove Yudel the magnate, who had got involved in a scandal, from his position as head of the community. Now it had become known that Yudel had slandered the community and the authorities would not allow someone else to be appointed in his place. The notables assembled again and decided to inform the rebellious magnate that if he did not submit to the community's will he would be excommunicated.

When an emissary of the notables reported this to Yudel in the name of the community, he smashed his fist on the table, and said: "All of Vilna can kiss me on what comes after Makhelot!"[71]

In the middle of the night, a voice called through the rich man's door: "Open up!"

"Who's there?"

"It's me, Mordechai (Habad); I have to speak with Reb Yudel."
"Reb Mordechai, may the Lord be with you, is this a time for talking?"
"It's essential, a community need that cannot be deferred."
The magnate got up, put on his coat, and went out to Mordechai. "What's the problem?"

"Rabbi Judah," said Mordechai, "Shnipishok, which is on the outskirts of town, sent me to you to ask whether or not it's included in Vilna."

VII

Of course our jokes also touch the failings of our clerics.

Two Jews brought their case before Rabbi Joseph Loksh: They had leased a ship and loaded it with wheat. But there had been a leak in the hold and the lowest layer of the wheat had been drenched. One says: your wheat got wet; the other says: no, your wheat got wet.

Rabbi Joseph looked into the chapter [of the Mishnah] that begins, "A person who sells a ship,"[72] but was unable to fathom anything about the matter of a ship. He got up and said to the litigants, "There's nothing to be done about it: You'll have to bring the ship here."

"Rabbi," a Jew argues before Rabbi Joseph, "I have no life with my wife and the law gives me the right to divorce her. She spirits away whatever is in the house. I had a timepiece and she stole even that."

"And how," asks Rabbi Joseph, "do you know that she stole it? Perhaps you are suspecting an innocent person?"

"Rabbi, they searched her–excuse me for saying so–and found the watch under her slip."

"The timepiece in question," continues the rabbi, "is it a pocket watch or a wall clock?"

A Jew goes to see his rebbe. On the table in front of the rebbe there is a platter full of plump and piping-hot dumplings. The rebbe picks up the salt cellar and dumps all the salt onto the dumplings. The rabbi's beadle whispers an explanation to the Jew, "it's so he will get pleasure from them."

On his way out from the rebbe he encounters his wife, a beautiful women, glowing with health and arrayed in all her finery. The Jew turns to the beadle and whispers, "How much salt does he (may he live long) toss on her?"

Two Jews are conversing. One extols the greatness of his rebbe: "Once he was traveling, may he live, along with his disciples. Without warning the sky turned grey; lightning flashed, peals of thunder split the air, and a driving rain began to fall. He raised his eyes heavenward, spread his hands to the right and the left, and at once a miracle took place: on his right there were clouds and fog and torrential rain, on his left clouds and fog and torrential rain, while in the middle–only warmth and light and a sky like a pavement of sapphire."

The second replied, "That would be a small thing for my rebbe, may he live. Once he and his beadle were on their way to a village, the home of one of his close circle, for a circumci-

sion. It was Friday. On his way back, though, it suddenly turned dark. He raised his eyes heavenward, spread his hands to the right and the left, and at once a miracle took place: on his right it was the Sabbath, on his left it was the Sabbath–but in the middle, it was still Friday afternoon."

Why does an itinerant preacher deliver his sermon first and only then go door to door requesting donations? Because of the verses, "They come growling like a dog" and then "they roam the city" (Ps. 59:7 and 15).

The cantor Yossi Goldis stood before the lectern to recite the prayer for rain. Before he had even finished rain began to fall. Yossi went over to the sexton and said to him, "You must admit that I was answered from heaven."

"What wonder is that?" replied the sexton. "There's already been something like that, when people like you brought not only rain, but even a flood on the whole world."

In the *heder,* Rabbi Leibel is teaching his students the verse: "all flesh had corrupted its ways on the earth" (Gen. 6:12). On this Rashi comments, "even the beasts, animals, and birds were having relations with other species."

One student jumps up and asks, "Rabbi, what does that mean, 'having relations with'?"

Rabbi Leibel gets angry and answers shortly, "For example, a flea on an elephant."[73]

VIII

I cannot offer examples of all the themes touched on by our humor, for I cannot fill an entire article with examples only. I must make do with the few themes presented above. But I see that I cannot be overly fastidious and omit the theme of "privy affairs": no theme is more abundantly treated in the humor of all peoples and languages, and also–or perhaps we should say and especially–in our own humor. From what we have already learned about the essence of humor in general we can understand why this theme is so common. The appetites that enter into "privy affairs" are stronger and more ardent; they fill up the heart and their hunger is always ravening in a person's soul. At the same time, the inhibitions and obstructions erected by civil law and the tenets of religion and morality–and of course also the watchful eye of the superego–weigh heavily on them. A certain appetite and a certain transgression are promoted to the level of notoriety. This being the case, it follows that precisely these repressed desires urge their case and find their satisfaction in dream and intoxication, in all sorts of deceptions, and in the supreme among them all–the joke–which undercuts the subservience to the judge and eludes his strong vigilance. For us Jews, the sixth (seventh) commandment[74] has become the Mt. Hor of injunctions and admonitions, restrictions and limitations; hence it is only natural that our humor, too, goes out by 77 paths to chase the judge away and unleash the pent-up desires. It is for this very reason that our jokes sometimes become so savage that they scald the ear. In their special language they lay bare what lies hidden in the deepest recesses of the heart. In order not to offend, however, I have chosen examples that–

as those who are familiar with our humor will recognize at once–are among the tamest and most pallid.

A Jew was caught in the act and brought before the rabbi. "You must," the Rabbi decrees, "fast every other day."

"Rabbi," demurs the transgressor, "I can't do that. I'm not well."

"If so, then you must recite many prayers and supplications. Perhaps the Lord will forgive you."

"Rabbi, I can't. I don't have free time for that."

"Then give a lot of charity. Charity atones for all sins."

"Rabbi, I can't do that either. My children depend on me."

"So what do you want, you miscreant?" fumes the rabbi.

"Rabbi," replies the transgressor, "I want her!"

They caught a transgressor and brought him to the rabbi. The rabbi scolded him: "Miscreant, on account of your sin innocent children die!"

After the man left the rabbi's house he was surrounded by children in the street, who ran after him crying, "Sinner, sinner!"

The transgressor turned to them and rebuked them, "Children, if you leave me alone at once everything will be fine. But if not, I'm going right back to *her*–and all of you are dead meat!"

It was a dry year. Prayers and fasts had been in vain, for still no rain fell. The rabbi convened his tribunal to probe for sins: perhaps the disaster was punishment for transgressions. They made their inquiries and investigations, and found it. The entire town was agog. Old and young, men and women–all hastened to bring the sinners before the rabbi.

The transgressors walked with pale faces, their heads covered in shame. The vast throng surrounding them kept insulting them, cursing them, pelting them with stones.

Until Shmerl (Shnitkever) came on the scene. Spreading his arms wide he called out loudly, "Jews, have mercy! Don't harm them. We may need them."

"Need these scoundrels?" the crowd roared.

"Shmerl has gone out of his mind!"

"Jews!" Shmerl silenced the mob. "Perhaps next year will be very wet–then who will we get to stop the rains?"

Shmerl's wife complained to the rabbi: Her husband was carrying on with the servant girl in their own house. The rabbi sent for him. "I'm surprised at you, Reb Shmerl; that a distinguished person and scholar like you should behave like Zimri,[75] Heaven forbid!"

"Rabbi," responds Shmerl in a hurt tone, "you are impeaching an innocent man."

"It is not I who suspect," says the rabbi, "but your wife who testifies."

"Now you'll see, Rabbi, that she is bearing false witness. Do you have a servant girl in your house, Rabbi?"

"Y-yes," the rabbi admits uncertainly.

"If so, Rabbi, tell her to come in here naked as a newborn, if you'll pardon me. Then you will see for yourself whether it bothers me at all. On the contrary!"

An elderly haskalic author brought his book to a wealthy and educated scholar, hoping for a generous contribution. The old man tried two or three times, but never found the scholar at home. The fourth time he asks the man's wife, "Please, perhaps you will tell me where your bed is."

Abashed, the woman stammered, "My bed? Why do you ask?"

"I want," replies the old man, "to wait for your husband. Doesn't he ever go there either?"

They asked the jester, "Why is it forbidden to be alone with an unmarried woman?"

"Because of the verse 'Do not place a stumbling block before the blind,' "[76] he replied. "In other words, to keep from making people jealous."

The biblical exegesis of a jester: " 'Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk' is written three times in the Torah–once to forbid cooking, once to forbid eating, and once to forbid getting any enjoyment from it.[77] 'Thou shalt not commit adultery' is written twice in the Torah. From this we learn: Cooking is forbidden, eating is also forbidden, but to derive enjoyment from it–that is permitted."

IX

Finally, our jokes break through all limits, obliterate all inhibitions and barriers, throw off all yokes and controls, and turn into an insurrection not only against the Torah and the precepts and the tradition, but even against Heaven itself.

A famous rabbi wrote to his son, who had abandoned religious observance. "My son, I have one request of you. At the very least do not touch the divine image on your face–keep your beard!"

The son shaved off his beard and sent it to his father with a note: "Father, I can't keep it–maybe you'll keep it for me?"

It was the fast of the Ninth of Av. An exciseman came to the village, went to a Jewish inn, and ordered a meal. The innkeeper, afraid of the official, did as he was bidden, though unwillingly. But because of what people might say, he hurried to inform the rabbi of the matter. The rabbi summoned the exciseman. When the latter reached his home, the rabbi scolded him: "How can a Jew eat a full meal on the Ninth of Av?"

"Rabbi," replies the exciseman, "don't be angry. I am not an ignoramus, Heaven forbid, and I too know to distinguish the prohibited from the permitted. Tell me, Rabbi, if I am dangerously ill, what is the law? Am I permitted to eat today or not?"

"A seriously ill person is different," the rabbi answers. "But I look at you and what do I see? If only all sick Jews looked like you."

"Then, Rabbi," the exciseman retorts, "I am permitted to eat, and you are rebuking me only because I am healthy. Are you not ashamed of yourself, Rabbi, for envying a Jew his health?"

"I am totally disgusted with the Jews and their customs," says one freethinker to his comrade. "From now on I won't have anything to do with them."

"And when you die," his fellow threatens him, "your carcass will be tossed aside and they won't give you even a donkey's burial."

"Don't worry, they'll be sure to bury me: I have faith in decay."

When the freethinkers' "rabbi" was stricken with a terminal illness, he asked to have the local rabbi called so he could confess his sins and repent. His disciples said to him, "Master, you're repudiating your own doctrine and nonbelief!"

"On the contrary, my children," he replied. "This merely proves that what the sages said–that the wicked never repent, not even at the brink of hell–is untrue."

On his deathbed, the freethinkers' "rabbi" asked them to feed him a wormy fig. His disciples said to him, "Would our master please teach us why?"

"So that over there, where they punish and beat me for my sins, I will have a sign: When they start flogging me for the wormy fig I'll know my torments are almost over."

A young student came to a famous merchant to ask for a job. "All right," the merchant says. "According to tradition, three days before the Messiah comes Elijah will ascend Mt. Moriah and blow the ram's horn. So go stand near that mountain–when you see Elijah coming, hurry and announce the news in our city."

"All right," says the scholar. "And how much will you pay me?"

"Ten gulden a week."

"But," persists the scholar, "how it is possible to live on such a small amount?"

"I admit," soothed the merchant, "that the salary is small. But don't forget, my son, that this is a guaranteed income for you and your children and your grandchildren and all your descendants till the end of time."

A Vilna joke has it that they found Adam Ha'Cohen[78] going out on the Sabbath with a stout cane in his hand.[79] "Reb Abraham Ber," they said to him, "have you no fear of God?"

"That's just it," the old man replied. "I am afraid of God!"

X

Sixty examples, out of our vast storehouse of jokes, are a mere drop in the bucket. Thousands of jokes circulate in our streets; some wither, while others blossom. There is no event in our lives, great or small, that does not straightaway leave its traces in our jokes. There is no disaster that befalls the Jews, great or small, on which our humor does not hurry to stamp its unique imprint. Nevertheless, I believe that the examples I have presented do highlight the essence of our humor, to which I alluded at the end of the first section: "This, and no other, is the stuff of Jewish humor: it has almost none of the serenity of comedy; it is all war, all rebellion." Perhaps I ought to have said, it has almost none of the conciliatory force of the comic in it.

We have seen[80] that recognizing the absurd makes people free, liberates the simple ego from the chains of servitude to the world. If we are candid with ourselves, however, we must ask whether this release is merely an illusion? For human beings were not created at the start of creation, but at the end of the process. This means that at the same moment that they feel their own being within themselves they also feel the being of the world that preceded them. All their desires, thoughts, and feelings come from their own soul; but they also come from the world. There is no simple ego. What hope do they have, then, of liberating it, that is, of eliminating the bonds between the world and themselves? At best they may seek reconciliation between themselves and the world–not actual elimination of the chains, but mitigation of their enslaving power. This is in fact the difference between the two degrees of recognition of the ridiculous that we encounter every day–satire and humor. M. Lazarus draws so broad a line to separate the domains of humor and satire that he thinks there is almost no natural proximity between them.[81] Even though Lazarus is a wise psychologist, and other researchers agree with him,[82] they are mistaken. Satire and humor differ not in their source, but only in degree. They have the same foundation–that cleavage between the world and human beings and the latter's desire to exalt their own egos over others and over the world. Thus, as long as I see the world rejecting me and my dominion and inverting the mountain over me like a saucer,[83] my entire being and self rebels against it: I am all my own and not yours. That is the rebellious cry of satire. But the moment I see the world acknowledging me and my mastery, I am reconciled and make peace with it: I am both mine and yours, just as you are both yours and mine. This is the harmonizing call of humor.

Both humor and satire represent a human rebellion against the absolute sovereignty of the world; but whereas humor at least acknowledges the relative dominion of the world, satire is total mutiny and complete insurrection, rejecting everything. Sometimes people see God and human beings–the entire universe–weighing them down and seeking to put an end to their very being. Then they gird up all their strength and draw from the depths of their souls all the vibrations of their selves, which seek release and liberation, and turn them into vengeful satire, into merciless venom and defiance. Sometimes, though, the blue sky shines through the torn fragments of the soul, and God and humankind smile at them, too; and then the venom and defiance are sweetened into humor.

Thus mockery and comedy stand on the border between satire and humor. Or, to be more precise, mockery is the firstborn of satire, and comedy, the firstborn of humor. Is it any wonder, then, that as against Jean Paul, Mark Twain, and Jerome Jerome, whose laughter is reconciliation, we have Heine, Bernet, and Abramowitsch, whose laughter is poison and venom? Is it any wonder, then, that the Jewish joke drips poison and venom from its lips. Who knows whether, one day, our jokes will be used to measure the quantity of explosive matter that, over the generations, God and human beings have implanted in the soul of this nation, until we became the nation of rebellion and insurrection, alien to the way of reconciliation; and then this cup of wrath will be taken from our poisoned soul and the nations will be made to drink from it–and they will "drink and retch and act crazy" (Jer. 25:16).

Odessa, summer 1919

Notes

Notes added by the translator are bracketed.

[1] [A note on terminology: Druyanow uses his key Hebrew term, *halatzah*, in both an abstract and specific sense; I have accordingly written "humor" or "joke" (or one of its synonyms) as seemed to best fit the context. But connotation is everything – as Druyanow would certainly agree – and I have been guilty of what may seem like elegant variation in my attempts to render the sense of the related nouns and verbs. This would not matter so much were it not for the fact that Druyanow distinguishes among several types of humor. See below, n. 53.]

[2] [BT Pesahim 112b.]

[3] [Mishnah Avot 3:13.]

[4] [BT Sotah 42a.]

[5] [BT Berakhot 31a.]

[6] [BT Yoma 38b.]

[7] [BT Megillah 25b.]

[8] [BT Avodah Zarah 18b (the order of the clauses is different there).]

[9] [Major ethical tracts, written respectively by R. Jonah Girondi (13th century), Isaac Aboab (late 14th century), Moses Hayyim Luzzatto (18th century), and Elijah de Vidas (16th century).]

[10] Alexander Moskovsky in the introduction to his collection, *Die Yidishen Kuste* (Berlin, 1911).

[11] See, for example, "Yudendaitshe Ertsahlungen ois Zidrusland," in vol. IX of *Antropopitea, Yahrbikher fir folkloristishe erhebungen und farshungen tsur entvikklung-geshikhte der geshlekhtlikhen morol* (Leipzig, 1921). The state court in Berlin banned this book; these Jewish jokes were one of the reasons for its verdict.

[12] [The Hebrew word selection/order of the verse is, "and he lay with her at night *that/he*"–the last word in the sentence, *hu*, normally means "he"; with the prefixed definite article, *ha-hu*, it becomes the deictic "that." What the Talmud is asking, initially, is why the definite article has been omitted and whether that changes the meaning.
This is one place, however, where Druyanow may have forced his sources. The talmudic passage goes on to explain the strange idea of divine participation in the act: "as it is written, 'Issachar is a strong-boned ass (Hebrew: *hamor garem*)' (Gen. 49:14)–an ass was the cause (Hebrew: *garam*) of Issachar" (the son born to Leah as a result of that night with Jacob). Nathan ben Yehiel of Rome, in his eleventh-century talmudic lexicon the *Arukh*, explained that "when Jacob returned from the field, the donkey brayed. Leah heard it and when out to intercept him." Rashi explains that "the Holy One Blessed Be He assisted by diverting Jacob's donkey to Leah's tent."] Many similar examples can be found in the volume by G. S. Lubavitch, *Tishma Yitzchak* (New York, 1907), especially in the introduction; see also the article by I. H. Tawiow, "Witticisms in Homiletical Interpretations of Scripture," printed in *Tequfah* 2 (Moscow, 1915).

[13] It must be acknowledged that yeshiva students have a model for emulation: "It was taught that Rabbi Nathan said: 'for the sin of [unpaid] vows, a man's wife dies, as it is written–'Lest

your bed be taken from under you when you have no money to pay' (Prov. 22:27)" (BT Shabbat 32).

"He who commits adultery is devoid of sense" (Prov. 6:32)–Resh Laqish said: this is someone who studies Torah from time to time." Rashi expands and explains, "and does not study regularly, just as a man who is not married has intercourse now with this one and now with that one" (BT Sanhedrin 99).

The same Resh Laqish is credited with the adage cited above: "At scoffers he scoffs" (Prov. 3:34)–This means that the way is opened for a person who wants to behave impurely." (How wonderful it is! Right after Resh Laqish's homilies on the verse about one who commits adultery comes another homily: "But the person who acts defiantly" (Num. 15:30)– this refers to Manasseh son of Hezekiah, who used to sit and expound scurrilous legends").

"A man should not marry a woman who is pregnant by his friend, nor his friend's wet-nurse; if he does, it was of him that Scripture was speaking: "Do not remove the ancient boundary stones [set up by previous generations]; do not encroach upon the field of orphans" (Prov. 23:10)" (JT Sotah chapter 4). [There is a conflation of several verses here–Prov 22:28 and 23:10, plus Deut. 19:14.]

There are many similar witticisms.

[14] [Two of the most important of the later rabbis of the Talmud, whose discussions of fine points of the law fill many pages.]

[15] See, for example, "Volozhin Wisecracks," *Reshumot* 1 (Odessa, 1918), p. 389. Those who indicted the anthologizers of such jokes had no cause to do so: the wiseacres of Volozhin, too, have precursors who blazed the trail before them.

"R. Judah said that Rav said: Adam was a Sadducee [uncensored texts read 'sectarian'], as is written: 'The Lord God called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" ' (Gen. 3:9)–where has your heart turned? R. Isaac said: He concealed his circumcision. In one place it is written, 'But they, to a man, have transgressed the Covenant' (Hos. 6:7); while in another place it is written, 'he has broken my covenant' (Gen. 17:14). Rabbi Nahman said: he denied the existence or unity of God. In one place it is written 'they have transgressed my covenant' (Hos. 8:1); and in another place it is written, 'They will be told, "because they forsook the covenant of the Lord . . ." ' (Deut. 29:24; cf. Jer. 22:9)" (BT Sanhedrin 38b).

"Avitul the scribe said in the name of R. Pappa: The pharaoh in the time of Moses stood only a cubit high, and his beard was a cubit, and his penis was a cubit and a span, to fulfill what is written, "He may set over it even the lowest of men" (Dan. 4:14) (BT Mo'ed Qatan 18).

There are many other similar homilies.

The well-known principle that a proselyte who has just converted is like a newborn child has given rise to many hair-splitting arguments. Rabbi Solomon Kluger, in his book *Mei Niddah*, asks: "Why should we not say that the virginity of a female proselyte is restored?" Along comes another hairsplitter and adds another hair: "Why should we not say that even an elderly female proselyte should be married on Wednesday, like a virgin?" A third hairsplitter adds yet another hair: "Why should we not say that the excrement of a proselyte has the legal status–with regard to praying in proximity to it–of that of an infant?"

Even a great sage like Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz raises a formidable difficulty: "From where do proselytes get a soul? We can allow that for a Jewish child it comes from the mating of the father and mother, but there is a question with regard to proselytes." And he offers a wonder-

ful answer: "From every act of intercourse that is performed in a consecrated state a good act results, and even if the woman does not conceive, in any case a soul is awakened above and inflated.… And these souls that are inflated by virtue of the intercourse of the righteous expand and are assigned to [converts]" (*Shenei Luhot Haberit* [Zhitomir, 1857], part 1, p. 154). Are not these and similar casuistries not like the wisecracks of Volozhin? And is not the well-known question of another hairsplitter (I think it was Rabbi Akiva Eger) also affiliated with the "wisdom of Volozhin"? "How is a man permitted to have intercourse with his wife when she is pregnant? For we hold that the fetus is like its mother's limb. Hence there is room to fear that if the fetus is female he is having intercourse with his daughter?"

And then there is the entire area known as "hairsplitting homilies" (Ahasuerus and Haman followed their interpretation of the laws of *Yael Qagam*, etc.) [I have been unable to track down this reference; yael qagam, in any case, is the acronym designating the six matters on which the halakhah is according to Abaye and not his colleague Rava]. What is that if not the "wisdom Volozhin"?

[16] [From the *Neilah* (late afternoon) service of the Day of Atonement: "May the cry of Your worshippers ascend to Your throne of glory; grant the request of the people that proclaims Your oneness, O You Who hears the prayer of those who approach you.]

[17] [I do not know what D. was referring to, though the meaning is clearly sexual.]

[18] [Also part of the High Holyday liturgy.]

[19] For many examples of puns in various languages, see Rudolf Kleinpaul, Sprache ohne Worte (Leipzig, 1888), pp. 400ff. See also Kuno Fischer, *Über den Witz: ein philosophischer Essay* (Heidelberg, 1889), pp. 74ff.

[20] It should not astonish us that even a profound scholar like Kraepelin erroneously believed that "the crux of the joke is bridging and dividing, generally by linguistic means, of two figures of thought that are in some respect contradictory." His eye, which perceived that this is the situation in European humor, misled him to consider this to be characteristic of jokes in general. Had he had been familiar with Jewish humor he would never have arrived at this false assumption.

[21] [Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742-1799).]

[22] See *Georg Christoph Lichtenbergs Gedanken und Maximen* (Leipzig, 1871).

[23] See D. Minden, *Der Humor Kants im Ferkehr und in seinen Schriften* (Dresden, 1892). For example: "What's the difference between a pastor and a physician? A pastor builds up God's land (Acker Gottes), and a physician, the graveyard (Gotte-sacker)"; and so on.

[24] [2 Kings 6:16.]

[25] See his article, "Fum yidishen vits," *Illustrirter yidisher familienkalender* 5669 (1908/09), pp. 40-46.

[26] Printed in Dr. Bloch's *Oesterreichische Wochenschrift* 44, 46-52 (1912), 1 (1913).

[27] See Ed. Koenig, *Stilistik, Rhetorik, Poetik in bezug auf die biblische Literatur* (Leipzig, 1900), pp. 285ff.

[28] [Judah Leib Gordon (1831-1892).]

[29] [Shalom Jacob Abramowitsch (1935-1917), the Hebrew and Yiddish author better known as Mendele Moikher Sforim.]

[30] Incidentally, a large fraction and perhaps even a majority of our jokes of this type are: (1) the witticisms of ignoramuses; (2) jokes based on biblical passages and talmudic sayings; (3)

biblical exegeses that are close to a joke or at least a witticism. Of course, almost all of these are impossible without wordplay. For example, if an ignorant "scholar" offers a "proof from the Torah" the all gentiles have many sons, as it is written, "herbs spawning seed" (Gen. 1:11), it comes down to the near-homophony of *esev* 'herbs' and *esav* 'Esau'. (Compare the similar gems by Sholem Aleichem's Tevye the Milkman.)

Then there is the well-known gag based on the verse (Num. 16:1) "Korah son of Izhar took...." [The Hebrew word order puts the verb first, so the verse can be read, "Korah took (a) son (of) Izhar."] The punster asks, "was this Izhar male or female? If male, why would Korah take him to wife [a frequent meaning of the locution "to take someone"]? If female, why 'son'? Obviously Izhar was female, and here 'son' has the sense of 'old', as in 'Abraham was 99 years old' [the Hebrew idiom for a person's age is, literally, 'son of *nn* years']. That is, Izhar was an old woman. This is the source of the question raised by the Midrash Tanhuma: 'Why did Korah, who was intelligent, do such a silly thing?' as to marry an old woman instead of a young one?" This parody is nothing but wordplay from start to finish.

Another example has to do with the wisecracking disciple who went to visit his rabbi on the Sabbath of the weekly portion Bo. When the rabbi asked him why he had not waited to come the next week, for the weekly portion Beshalah and the special occasion of the Sabbath of the Song, he replied, citing a talmudic principle (BT Qiddushin 41a): "The mitzvah is greater mitzvah in himself [Hebrew bo] than in his messenger [Hebrew *be-sheluho*]." Many more examples could be presented.

[31] See Elazar Schulman, "The Judeo-German Language and its Literature" (Riga, 1913).

[32] Julius Dessauer, *Der Judische Humorist* (revised by Prof. August Wunsche) (Budapest).

[33] [Grigorii Isaakovich Bogrov (1825-1888).]

[34] [Karl Emil Franzos (1848-1904).]

[35] [Israel Zangwill (1864-1926).]

[36] "Overt and Covert in Language," *Knesset* (Odessa, 1916), p. 253 (Hebrew).

[37] [The full verse reads, "the one responsible for the pit shall pay: he shall give money to its owner and the dead shall be his." The Talmud (BT Baba Qama 11a) expounds the verse without the last words, to mean that, in addition to monetary compensation, the carcass of the dead animal must also be returned to its owner.]

[38] [The mystic prayer attributed to the talmudic sage R. Neunya ben ha-Kannah, which begins, "By the great might of Your right hand set the captive free."]

[39] [Numerological exposition of biblical words and phrases.]

[40] [Explication of unusual terms, sometimes in the bible but more often in the text of the Mishnah, as abbreviations or acronyms.]

[41] [The reference is to the bitter struggle during the first decades of the twentieth century, waged mainly in the growing Jewish community in Palestine, to establish Hebrew as the daily language for all purposes, while banishing Yiddish as "exilic" and European tongues as "alien."]

[42] [1814-1893.]

[43] [Maskil = an adherent of the Haskalah, the Jewish enlightenment or opening to secular western culture that gained momentum during the course of the nineteenth century.]

[44] See the article by Dr. I. L. Cantor on Dick, printed, if my memory does not betray me, in the first number of the Petersburg anthology *Dos Leben* (founded by the "Freind").

[45] H. Tawiow, in his important article "Our Parables and Sayings" (printed in *Knesset*) decides quite simply that "there are many wordplays, many puns (without number!) in jargon [i.e., Yiddish]." This, he says, is because "[Yiddish] is an open city with no wall, and is consequently extremely adept at wordplay, parodies, twists of meaning, and all sorts of puns and inventions" (pp. 208-209). I ask Mr. Tawiow to forgive me if I say that his warped attitude toward Yiddish has also caused him to produce a warped judgment. Precisely a language that is an open city without walls is not particularly given to word play, inventions, and like. If Mr. Tawiow will be so good as to recall that no languages are as rich in wordplay and inventions as are French and Hebrew (with regard to Hebrew see, for example, the wonderfully sharp feuilletons of "One of the Satirists" published at the end of the last century in *Ha'Melitz*) – he will acknowledge that the truth is just the opposite of what he said. Indeed, Yiddish jokes make scant use of the linguistic technique, as do Yiddish parables and sayings.
Compared, for example, the first hundred sayings in the volume by Y. Piroznikov, *Yidishe Shprikhverter* (Vilna, 1908) with the first hundred sayings in the book by Y. Ilustrov, *Zhizn russkavo narodavego poslovitsakh i pogovorkakh* (The life of the Russian people in its proverbs and sayings) (Moscow, 1915): only about 30 of the first hundred Russian sayings can be translated into another language without losing their unique verbal linguistic form, but at least 70 of the first hundred Yiddish sayings can be so treated.

[46] Ahad Ha'am, *Al Parashat Derakhim* (1904), p. 122.

[47] [The conventional punctuation/syntax of the verse is: "His breath departs; he returns to the dust; on that day his plans come to nothing."]

[48] [Gen. 1:31-2:1; after Ps. 19:2; the daily liturgy; Gen. 18:9; Isa. 12:2; Esther 1:1] For another version of this, see *Reshumot* 1, p. 382; there are other versions, too. I also know one in Yiddish, whose technique is similar to that of the Hebrew versions. Molière used the same method to highlight the ridiculous character of Dom Juan's servant Sganarelle (see *Dom Juan* V 2).
[It is somewhat astonishing that D. failed to pick up on a similar stringing together of verses that is a familiar and very ancient part of the Sabbath-morning service: "The King who sits on his throne, *high and exalted*, dwelling in eternity, His Name is exalted and Holy" (Isa. 6:1 conflated with 47:15).]

[49] [D. means the sages of the Talmud.]

[50] [BT Hagigah 10a.]

[51] [BT Berakhot 55b, BT Baba Metzi'a 38b.] See Kant's statement that the dialectic of the ancients–that is, of the Greeks–was merely the logic of imagination (*Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Hartenstein, III 28). It is astonishing that scholars, with their healthy logic, are used to calling a hairsplitter with an acute mind a *vitsiger kopf*. My late father, who was a rabbinical scholar, used to say of such hairsplitters that they turned the Torah into a laughing-stock. Who knows? Perhaps it was from this perspective that someone added a gloss in tractate Derekh Eretz, with regard to Rabbi Judah ben Taddei, "and Rabban Gamaliel excommunicated him" (see Dr. Aryeh Schwartz, *The A Fortiori Method in Talmudic Literature* [Cracow, 1905], p. 153) [the phrase is found in the standard text of the tractate, but is missing in the parallel text in the *Yalqut*–whence the supposition that it is an interpolated gloss]. Our profound and commonsensical scholars generally distinguish hairsplitting, which means beating one wall against another, from drawing distinctions, which means a keen and precise analysis of a passage based on its content, fundamental assumptions, and history.

[52] [Derekh Eretz is one of the "minor" tractates appended to but not technically part of the Talmud.]

[53] [Here D. makes a distinction between two Hebrew words that are generally taken to be synonymous: *halatzah and bediḥah*. The former, used in the title of this article and commonly throughout (where, as noted above, I have rendered it most frequently as "humor," "joke," or "jest") is uncommon in modern Hebrew, where the latter word–which Druyanow uses infrequently (*I think* this sentence marks its first appearance in his text) has won out. D. was working in a tradition of scholarship (many of the German studies he refers to, and especially Freud) that endeavored to draw fine distinctions between terms such as "wit," "the comic," "humor," and so on. I do not know what predecessor(s) and what terms in German or Russian, if any, D. may have had in mind when he drew his distinction. It is probably worth noting, however, by way of explaining his own lexical choices, that the root of *halatzah* is associated with *letz*, the terms used in Psalm 1 for one who scoffs or scorns; whereas *bediḥah* is related to the Hebrew/Yiddish *badhan* 'wedding jester'.]

[54] [Here D. "transliterates" the European terms.]

[55] Part 2 of this article was not translated, as it relies on well known stories about jokes and humor.

[56] [Adolf Stoecker (1835-1909), one of the founders of political antisemitism.]

[57] [Rabbi in Prague, Metz, and Hamburg (1690-1764).]

[58] [Referring to the icon or crucifix that adorned the gentile's house.]

[59] [An allusion to one of the common Jewish professions in eastern Europe–tavern-keeping.]

[60] [I.e., the weekly Torah reading; these are named after the first important word in them.]

[61] [A talmudic oath.]

[62] [Really "he went"; but Hebrew has no neuter pronoun.]

[63] [In the biblical context, "he drew near."]

[64] [Evidently referring to the Hebrew idiom for doing jail-time; in the original context, "he lived *or* was settled."]

[65] [The cantor's prayer actually begins, "Here I stand, poor in deeds."]

[66] [A district in Lithuania.]

[67] [In the biblical context, the preposition *be-* means "on" rather than "in."]

[68] [A famous dictum of the talmudic sage Hillel (Mishnah Avot 1:14).]

[69] [It is hard to render the jest in English, whose word order is different from the Hebrew. In Hebrew, each of the negative commandments takes the form of the two-letter word lo 'not' followed by a positive verb (four letters or more) in the future tense, e.g., *tin'af* 'you shall commit adultery'.]

[70] [The double meaning of "son of Noah" is based on a folk exegesis of BT Avodah Zarah 71a, which states that law that "a son of Noah is killed for a penny's worth"–i.e., a non-Jew is liable to capital punishment for stealing any sum, however small.]

[71] [I.e., "kiss my ass"–based on the list of the Israelite encampments in the wilderness (Numbers 33), where, according to v. 26, "they set out from Makheloth and encamped at Taḥath" = *toḥos*, Yiddish for "backside."]

[72] [Baba Batra 5. The point of the joke may be (as Eastern European Jews of the time would probably recognize, even those who were not talmudic scholars) that this chapter contains the tall tales of Rabba bar Bar Hanna and thus (ostensibly) is irrelevant to practical matters.]

[73] [I plead my incapacity to render the pun adequately (although the contemporary idiom "hooking up" comes close). The Hebrew term that means "have sexual relations with" can also mean "be attached to," "need," or "be dependent on."]

[74] [In the traditional Jewish enumeration, the prohibition on adultery is the seventh commandment; why Druyanow, in an article written in Hebrew, should use the Christian numbering and relegate the Jewish to a parenthesis is beyond me.]

[75] [The prince of the Simeonites who was involved with a Midianite princess (Num. 25:6ff.).]

[76] [Lev. 19:14.]

[77] [This is indeed the standard rabbinic exegesis of the fact that the prohibition is stated three times (Ex. 23:19 and 34:26; Deut. 14:21).]

[78] [Pen-name of Abraham Ber Lebensohn (1794-1878), a leading light of the Haskalah in Lithuania.]

[79] [Carrying is a forbidden labor on the Sabbath.]

[80] [In the second section, not translated here.]

[81] See his study, *Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomenon* (Berlin, 1856).

[82] See for example, Dr. Ewald Hacker, *Die Physiologie eund Psychologie das Lachens und das Komischen* (Berlin, 1873).

[83] [The image derives from BT Shabbat 88a, where we read that in order to "encourage" the Israelites to accept the Torah, the Lord inverted Mt. Sinai over them and told them to accept the Torah, or "this will be your grave."]

CHAPTER V

REGINA LILIENTHAL AND THE STUDY OF FOLK CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS

Regina Lilienthal, nee Ayger (1857-1924) was born in Zawichost, Poland. She moved to Warsaw in 1895 after her marriage, where she taught in a girl's high school. Her interest in Jewish folklore was spurred by her university studies, especially a course taught by Ludwik Krzywicki.

Lilienthal is an outstanding representative of the circle of Jewish folklorists who wrote in Polish, a group that included Samuel Adelberg, Henryk Lew, and B. W. Segel (who also published in German). Their most important backer was Jan Karlowicz, the editor of the Polish ethnographical periodical *Wisła,* who was sensitive to the need for ethnographic research focused on the ethnic minorities in Poland, especially the Jews (Goldberg-Mulkiewicz 1989, 11). Believing that only persons who were fluent in Jewish languages and intimately acquainted with Jewish culture could conduct such research, he endeavored to establish a cadre of scholars to collect items of Jewish folklore.

Lilienthal was part of the ethnographic community in Poland and lectured on her work to the Polish Academy of Sciences. Her work was published in Polish journals of ethnography and folklore, such as *Wisła* and *Lud*, even before the First World War, and later in the publications of the philological section of the Academy of Ethnography. She also published in the Polish-language Jewish press, mainly *Izraelita* and *Głos Żydowski*. *Izraelita*, which was the mouthpieces of Polonized Jews who wanted to be partners in Polish culture, was receptive to articles about Jewish folklore, especially under the direction of Nahum Sokolow, its editor (1897–1901), who was strongly conscious of the importance of Jewish traditions. In 1901 *Izraelita* even published a sort of program for Jewish folkloristics, by Henryk Lucjan Kohn.

Lilienthal's main contribution to the study of Jewish folklore involves folk beliefs and folk customs, but she also published on folksongs (Lilienthal 1903, 1904) and folktales (Lilienthal 1924). In the realm of beliefs and customs she wrote about the following: superstitions (Lilienthal 1989, 1900, 1904, 1905), engagement and marriage (Lilienthal 1900), life after death and the world to come (Lilienthal 1902), the Jewish child (Lilienthal 1904, 1927), nature (Lilienthal 1905), holidays in the past and present (Lilienthal 1909, 1912, 1918), the cult of the heavenly bodies (Lilienthal 1921), and water (Lilienthal 1921). "The Evil Eye," here published in English translation, was written in Polish, but first appeared in a Yiddish translation by Nehama Epstein in the Warsaw-based *Yidishe filologie* (1924), edited by Max Weinreich, Noah Prylucki, and Zalmen Rejzen. It reflects the scholarly approach and method she applied to other topics as well.

Her scholarly approach reflects the consensus of her time. She sees folk beliefs and customs as relics of earlier periods. In the mid-nineteenth century folklore studies was influenced

by the cultural evolutionism championed by the British anthropologist Edward Tylor, which viewed evolution as reflecting human history. Folklore studies was considered to be a historical discipline that identifies and compares the "survivals" of earlier beliefs and practices (Tylor 1871). Lilienthal traces various Jewish customs and beliefs back to their origins, which she associates with a fear of hostile forces – various species of demons and spirits – that molest human beings. The customs come from the attempts by human beings to protect themselves by wielding various means that these forces are afraid of, by confusing or tricking them, or conciliating them, and by using various forms of sympathetic magic. Lilienthal searches for the roots of such beliefs in the classical Jewish texts, starting from the Bible and especially the Mishnah and Talmud, and proceeding to the Middle Ages and modern times. She documents customs that survive in her own time, citing learned volumes and articles, the collections of Polish museums, and contemporary informants.

She notes the deep roots of the belief in the Evil Eye in the ancient texts and observes how it blossomed anew under the influence of Kabbalah and its subsequent wide circulation among the followers of Shabbetai Zevi and then the Hasidim. She explains how Eastern European Jewish society deals with the euphemistically named "Good Eye," to which it attribute most of the ailments and misfortunes experienced by human beings and which also strikes animals, plants, and sometimes even the inanimate world. She mentions groups that are especially vulnerable to the evil eye, such as children and women in childbirth, as can be inferred from the many rites and procedures to protect them. Lilienthal enumerates various means for warding off the evil eye, some of which she ascribes to an attempt to confuse and trick the hostile forces, such as the ban on counting the number of those present, or the insistence on disparagement instead of praise. Others methods invoke sympathetic magic (e.g., tying a red ribbon around a child's wrist or neck) or statements that deny the efficacy of the evil eye. She explains the use of gemstones, metal trinkets, and amulets that make noise as methods to frighten away the hostile forces, just as other forms of noise repel them. She traces the magical texts that appear on Jewish amulets to Scripture, Jewish symbols like the Star of David, transposition of the letters in God's name, and secret formulas. She also notes prophylactic means drawn from the world of animals (the teeth of a wolf), plants (pepper), and minerals (salt, dirt, pins, coal).

The last section of the article focuses on diagnostic methods, some of which turn into ways to treat those affected by the evil eye. She notes the use of saliva, smoke, salt, fire, amulets, and spells. Then she transcribes and discusses seven such spells, indicating the sources of some of them (Kazimierz 1913, Vitebsk [transcribed by An-Ski], and Kotsk [Kock]).

Based on the material she has presented, Lilienthal concludes that belief in the evil eye stems from fear of hatred and envy, emotions that people can read on the faces of others. Here the eye is the mediator through which things are seen and become common knowledge. The moment the eye is granted independent existence it achieves supernatural power and links up with demonic forces that seek to diminish the success and happiness of human beings.

Among the community of Eastern European Jewish folklorists, Regina Lilienthal was one of two women[1] who also furthered the folklore theory. Because she wrote in the vernacular she

[1] The other one was Giza Frenkel (1895-1984) that held a university position at the Jan Kazimierz University of Lwów was interested in Jewish handicrafts and folk art, and wrote a monograph on Jewish paper cuts (Frenkel 1929).

is less familiar than she should be to students of Jewish folklore outside Poland. Her contribution to the study of Jewish folk beliefs and customs deserves our attention because of the many topics she addressed, the historical discussions that include a study of ancient Jewish texts and associations with the beliefs and customs of the modern age, and her attempt to explain them on the basis of the dominant folklore theories of her time.

The Evil Eye

Regina Lilienthal

The belief in the baleful power of the evil eye, which is to be found in practically every nation, has very deep roots among the Jews. According to the Talmud, "Ninety-nine [have died] through an evil eye, and one through natural causes" (BT Baba Metzia 107b; J Shabbat 4:3; Leviticus Rabbah 16:8). In Mishnaic times, the Jews of Palestine applied the term "evil eye" to feelings of unfriendliness or envy; but in Mesopotamia, a realm given over more to mysticism, a belief in the destructive and frequently even lethal influence of *eina bisha* – the evil eye – emerged. According to legend, R. Johanan could turn a disciple into dust and ashes with a wink of his eye: "He set his eyes on him and [the student] turned into a heap of bones" (BT Baba Batra 75a, Sanhedrin 100a). When he turned his eye on Resh Lakish's son, the mother quickly pulled the child away, apprehensive lest he meet the same fate as the aforementioned student.[1] The same is reported of R. Simeon bar Yohai[2] and of R. Sheshet;[3] similarly, any object on which R. Eliezer ben Horkanos set his gaze would burst into flames.[4] When R. Pappa and R. Huna the son of R. Joshua looked (with envy) at R. Hanina son of R. Ika and praised his intelligence and insight aloud, he fell dead in his tracks.[5]

The Talmud and Midrash offer similar interpretations of various biblical verses. "The Lord will ward off from you all sickness" (Deut. 7:15), asserts the Gemara, should be understood as referring to the evil eye.[6]

The lives of the Patriarchs also provide examples of fear of the dark force. According to R. Hanina, Abraham removed his son Isaac from Sinai[7] at night, so that he would not be harmed by the evil eye.[8] Ishmael fell ill on account of Sarah's evil eye.[9] Jacob warned his grown and handsome sons that they should not enter Egypt together through a single gate, because of the evil eye.[10] Joshua instructed the Israelites to hide in the forests on account of the evil eye.[11] Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah died from the effects of the evil eye, despite the fact that they had emerged safely from the fiery furnace.[12]

This heritage, which grew stronger in the Diaspora because of a series of contributing circumstances, waxed and flourished in its fullest vigor with the Kabbalah, which spread far to both east and west after the expulsion from Spain. Later rabbinical literature absorbed so-called "superstitions." They found particularly fertile ground in the mystical movements of the followers of Shabbetai Zevi and later among the Hasidim.

The Jewish masses of Eastern Europe retain their naïve belief in the evil eye, which they euphemistically refer to as the "good eye." They consider it to be the main cause of most diseases and ailments. Epilepsy and even erysipelas are explained by the evil eye; so are insomnia and melancholy, of which it is the chief cause. In children the evil eye produces pains, sudden

pallor, an irregular pulse, uncontrollable yawning, fever, sweating, nausea, vomiting, black or green stools, a listless appetite, outbursts of crying for no reason, and so on.

In short, the evil eye interferes with normal life, both physical and mental.

The malignant influence of the evil eye extends to animals, plants, and occasionally even inanimate objects. The people hold to the principle of *post hoc ergo propter hoc;* namely, that if one thing occurs after another, it is caused by it. Animals are stricken with disease and their heads droop. Cows stop eating and give less milk. Flowers wither, trees split asunder, objects break, dough fails to rise, chicken fat burns, foods spoil and become contaminated. What is more, any affair that has been targeted by the evil eye will never be successful.

The evil eye harms children, especially infants, as well as women in childbirth. We can get to the crux of the matter when we recognize why a boy has to be guarded against the evil eye more than a girl, and why the evil eye is more likely to attack bridegrooms, important persons, attractive people, successful individuals, and talented persons in general, as well as those who are lucky – those who are successful at games, for example. People tend to be more vulnerable to the influence of the evil eye while they are eating. All of this, of course, gives rise to a whole series of remedies.

It is very difficult to take precautions and guard against the evil eye, people claim, because everyone has a moment during the day when he or she can set the evil eye on others. Even pious persons can do such a bad thing unknowingly and even against their will, that is, in a totally mechanical and unwitting fashion. Sometimes parents cast the evil eye on their children. This is why every person must resolve, early in the morning, that during the day he or she will not cast an evil glance on any person.

Only someone born with a cowl never casts the evil eye. By contrast, special danger lurks in the glance of someone who was born with teeth, or of an infant who was weaned but later returned to its mother's breast (the latter is considered to be a particular source of the evil eye). Persons who rub their eyes with unwashed hands first thing in the morning are prone to cast the evil eye (demons lurk under the fingernails then); so are those who do not wash their hands when they leave the lavatory. If such people are still on an empty stomach, the danger of their glance is even greater. The results of the evil eye are more perilous if the person who casts it is a member of the other sex (some say, if he is a male) and if the person is a Jew: "The evil eye of Jews is worse than the sorcery of non-Jews."[13] Our own maxim adds: "Guard against a non-Jewish hand and a Jewish eye."

Prophylaxis

The deep conviction, which goes back hundreds of years and is crystallized in the Talmudic adage that "ninety-nine [have died] through an evil eye, and one through natural causes,"[14] made it necessary for people to find ways to counteract the destructive power of the evil eye.

On the basis of quite different concepts of the universe, customs emerged that were once the rituals of living belief but are today merely petrified relics. But if we delve past the accumulated layers of detail we can excavate down to the ancient core, which is not necessarily the result of experimental conclusions. We run up against the emotional foundations that are inherent in human nature from birth.

To avoid the evil eye, Jews do not count the number of those present; their number would diminish as a result of an evil glance. This is how tradition explains the biblical verse, "When you take a census of the Israelite people according to their enrollment, each shall pay the Lord a ransom for himself on being enrolled, that no plague may come upon them through their being enrolled" (Ex. 30:12). And when Satan sought to persuade David to enumerate all Israel, "the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel" (2 Sam. 24:15).[15]

One does not willingly answer a question about how many children one has, and generally evades giving an answer, or answers with the addition of "may the evil eye have no power." If it is nevertheless essential to count how many persons are present, this is done in a special way: counting to oneself, using letters instead of numbers, or prefixing each number with the word "not": not-one, not-two, not-three, and so on. Even money should not be counted (when one is playing cards, for instance), so that it will not decrease. When asked how old children are, one always replies with a number larger than their actual age, especially when they seem to be big for their age or precocious. Old people, by contrast, subtract a year or two from their age; sometimes an old person, when asked how old he or she is, will reply, "I'm exactly the same age as my little finger."

The desire to cheat the hostile powers of nature is characteristic of primitive human beings, who really do not know how to get along with the physical world. This is expressed in such undoubtedly strange customs as carrying shirts, or laundry in general, on the left side only, or dressing children only in borrowed clothing. Instead of praising, one disparages: "What an ugly fellow! Phooey!" is the reaction when one comes upon a particularly handsome young man. For safety's sake one spits three times and says, "may the evil eye have no power," as if to suggest that he is really repulsive. One also endeavors not to emphasize children's beauty, not to dress them in fancy outfits, not to brush their clothes and shoes, but to do precisely the opposite: to let them look neglected. Those who go further even smear coal dust on children's faces.

One of the common charms was simply to deny verbally the power of the evil eye and to stress precisely the contrary, its weakness. By means of this unconscious suggestion one hopes to generate the desired countervailing force. Thus, for example, presenting a newborn infant, one says on its behalf, "Look, I don't have any pockets, I don't have any place to hide the evil eye" – and the guest answers, after spitting to the side, "Phooey, phooey, I won't give you the evil eye," or "You have no pants, so you don't carry an evil eye," or "May the evil eye not harm you."

It is also customary that when a person comes as a guest to a house he says:

Friday nigh[16]
The evil eye has no power.

or

There are two cracks in the ceiling,
Where I hid the evil eye.
In every corner, wherever there are cracks
I have hidden the evil eye.[17]

The Talmud recommends that "if a man on going into a town is afraid of the Evil Eye, let him take the thumb of his right hand in his left hand and the thumb of his left hand in his right hand, and say: I, so-and-so son of so-and-so, am of the seed of Joseph, over which the evil eye has no power" (BT Berakhot 55b).[18]

If someone is staring at him, a Jew tells him to look above his head or to count nine chimneys, and does well to add, "Don't cast the evil eye on me" or "Cast your eyes on the fifth house." If there is a child in the vicinity, they quickly turn him around so that his back is toward the suspect and make a fig behind him three times. If the child is still a babe-in-arms, it is a good idea to take three steps backward with him.

One must be careful not to eat in front of strangers. And, according to the Talmud, "Do not take your shirt from the hand of your attendant when dressing in the morning" (BT Berakhot 51a).[19]

Another effective means is to divert the attention of the bearer of the evil eye by speaking to him, posing a question, or attracting his "first" and most terrifying glance to some inanimate object. This is the source of the custom of sticking the head of a rooster or hen on a pole placed by the head of a woman in childbirth[20] or of tying a red ribbon around the child's neck or wrist. Sometimes the ribbon is sewn to its chemise, or a string of coral beads (some say that coral becomes colorless when it comes under the influence of the evil eye). It may be that a role is played here by the color red, which is the color of blood and the sun. In Talmudic times they would daub red paint on trees that had shed their fruit,[21] or – a sort of sympathetic magic – tie knots on them. They even thought that tying a broomstraw around a child's neck could shield it from the evil eye. It is here, I believe, that we should seek the origin of the amulets in the form of earrings, rings, and lockets that were worn in antiquity.[22] Isaiah explicitly enumerates *lahashim* 'charms' among the types of jewelry (Isa. 3:18–23; the *lahashim,* generally rendered as "amulets," appear in v. 20). These were amulets inscribed with magical formulas. Talismans of this sort could also be found on soldiers who had fallen in battle, as is mentioned in 2 Macc. 12:40: "Then under the tunic of every one of the dead they found sacred tokens"[23]).

Jewelry itself, with its glitter and other eye-catching properties, possesses the power to ward off the evil eye. In the Mishnaic period, too, this function was played by the earrings and rings[24] that were worn even by members of the poorer classes;[25] girls[26] would adorn their ears with strands of brightly colored wool or with wooden pins.[27] In the same way, coral beads, whose prophylactic powers were mentioned in the Middle Ages by R. Meir of Rothenberg in his responsa,[28] were considered to be amulets, because the Bible expresses great esteem for them.[29] A similar role seemed to have been played by the golden bells on the vestments of the high priest (Ex. 28:33 and 39:25). According to primitive belief, noise can chase away the dark powers. In Talmudic times this ornament was associated with children of royal blood: "Boys may go out with garlands and royal children may go out with bells" (M Shabbat 6:9). They would also attach rings, pebbles, or strings of glass or metal beads to children's clothes.[30] Also used as amulets in those days were coins,[31] whose prophylactic power has two sources: they are made of metal (and iron is a classic protective material) and they have an intrinsic value that can serve as ransom money.

To this day, a coin over which a pious Jew has uttered a spell retains its potency against the evil eye. The simple lead amulet for children, called a *heh'ele* (because it is marked with the Hebrew letter *heh* – a contraction of God's name), also resembles a coin.

There are amulets in the shape of a hand, because the hand symbolizes might and power;[32] frequently the divine name *Shaddai* is inscribed on them.[33] Later it became customary to hang a bone handle around children's necks, as a dual charm against the evil eye.

The beliefs and concepts of each age also affected the amulets, leading to changes in their material and shape and in the nature of their inscriptions. Relics of the old beliefs were pushed aside by the elements of official religion.

The Mishnah frequently discusses amulets[34] made of metal plates (see T Kelim 1:11) bearing appropriate inscriptions, such as divine names or biblical verses. Incidentally, phylacteries and mezuzahs are essentially amulets, too.

The model for amulets of the Middle Ages, and even of some written in our time, can be found in an amulet that goes back to the period of the amora Abbaye, the head of the academy of Pumpedita (circa 280–338), as recorded in the mystical tract known as the *Book of the Angel Raziel*.[35]

In a later period, Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschuetz (1690/95–1764) won himself a reputation as an amulet-maker. What is considered to be the most effective amulet is described in the aforementioned *Book of the Angel Raziel,* written, according to tradition, by Adam, and intended to protect women in childbirth and newborn babes against all forms of sorcery, demons, and the evil eye. It includes, inter alia, the names of the four rivers that flow from the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:11–14), a verse from Psalms ("For He will order His angels to guard you wherever you go" [Ps. 91:11]), a verse from Exodus ("Depart, you and all the people who follow you!" [11:8]), Divine names, and the name of angels and the patriarchs, as well as "Begone Lilith!" and "Rend Satan."

Typical is an Eybeschuetz amulet[36] whose magical formula includes a verse from Isaiah ("For a child has been born to us, a son has been given us . . ." [Isa. 9:5]), written backwards. The hexagram (Star of David) and the inversion of the order of words or letters (quite frequently the letters of the Ineffable Name) are a hallmark of textual amulets. Other frequent features are, as stated, the divine name *Shaddai,* the names of the patriarchs and angels, and the names of magical figures, which frequently surface from the old text and its secret formulas.

The *heh'ele* amulets take various forms. One may find, for example, the inscription: "May the child grow up to Torah, the wedding canopy, and good deeds" – with the additions of a formula such as:

IRMDAWA[37]
May You save the infants of
Your people Israel from the evil eye
And fear of pain and diphtheria
To raise them to Your Torah
In Your mercy
Amen[38]

An amulet against the evil eye may also guard against other calamities and even cancel out various kinds of baleful influences.[39] But according to the popular opinion, 99 of every 100 deaths are caused by the evil eye. That is, even other calamities are most often produced by the evil eye, against which the amulet defends.

An amulet of this sort was made for a certain Israel son of Sipa.[40] It was supposed to protect against the evil eye, worms, diphtheria, croup, evil spirits, demons, witches, nocturnal spirits, epilepsy, muscle cramps, and various terrors, pains, ailments, and toothache.

The itemization of all of the perils is explicitly intended to counteract their power in any form whatsoever and in any guise they may assume under the influence of the arch villain responsible for all woes – the evil eye.

The *Shulhan Arukh* does not forbid the wearing of amulets. Consequently, amulets are extremely widespread among Jews (especially in Poland), even though the Priestly Blessing (Num. 6:24–26) protects the Jewish people against the evil eye; that is, "The Lord bless you and protect you" against the evil eye. The Torah protects them fully, as is stated in a midrash:

> To what may the matter be compared? To a king who betrothed his daughter. Now that was only betrothal, and she was affected by an evil eye. When the king was about to give his daughter in marriage, what did he do? He gave her an amulet and said to her: "Keep the amulet upon you so that the evil eye may have no power over you any more." The Holy One, blessed be He, did the same. When He came to give the Torah to Israel He arranged a great demonstration for them; as it is written, "And all the people perceived the thunderings," etc. (Ex. 20:15 [RSV 20:18]). But that having been no more than betrothal *(qiddushin)*, as is borne out by the text, "Go unto the people, and consecrate them *(ve-qiddashtam)* today and tomorrow" (Ex. 19:10), an evil eye affected them, and the Tables [of the Law] were broken; as you read, "And he broke them at the foot of the mountain" (Ex. 32:19). Next time He did differently; when Israel had made the Tabernacle the Holy One, blessed be He, gave them the blessings first, in order that no evil eye might affect them. Accordingly it is written first, "The Lord bless you and protect you" (Num. 6:24), namely, from the evil eye; and after that, "On the day that Moses finished setting up the Tabernacle, he anointed and consecrated it . . ." (Num. 7:2) (Numbers Rabbah 12:4).

Even though the people believe in the prophylactic power of the Torah, they nevertheless look for other remedies. One of them is the sachet or locket. What is placed inside this sachet to guard against the evil eye? The answer is pepper, salt, mercury (in a tube made of a goose quill or a nutshell), amber, a pinch of dust swept up from under the threshold of the house and a pinch of dust from the cemetery, a spider, pins, a piece of shroud cloth. A concept that determines its effectiveness for a particular purpose is associated with each of these items. For example, the pungent materials expel the dark forces; mercury is included because of its various chemical and physical properties; dust in general is a well-known magical material – especially dust from under the threshold (the threshold being a boundary or partition) or from the cemetery (against destructive influences); pins are sharp and are made of metal; the spider, an animate object, evidently has the same significance as the snout of a fox,[41] the teeth of a wolf, a rooster's comb, or hairs from the tail of a dog, all of which are sometimes placed in this pouch.

Some of the items in the sachet have their own functions, such as amber (over which a pious Jew has uttered a spell), or a pinch of salt, wrapped up and sewn into the hem of the

boy's shirt, or even sprinkled on the pillow with breadcrumbs or a piece of matza left over from Passover, with the addition of a small piece of coal. In addition to the pouch, a piece of coal is also placed in an infant's bath because of its association with fire, which is well known for dispelling evil spirits. Garlic, which is placed or sewn into a child's garment, shirt, or cap, repels catastrophe with its sharp aroma.

When they had run through the entire collection of tried and true remedies, the people believed that blessing can rest only on an object that is hidden from eye, as was taught in the academy of R. Ishmael.[42] The evil eye has no dominion over fish, because the water covers them (this may be the reason for the depictions of fish on amulets meant to guard against the evil eye). Accordingly the Talmud says that garments should not be exhibited in front of guests.[43] To this day people hang a curtain in front of the bed of a woman in childbirth. No personal belongings should be shown to strangers, because the articles would surely be lost. This same principle applies to amulets: rather than being worn in open view, they should be kept out of sight, under one's clothes, next to the skin. This is unlike the *reyzelech* on Shavuot[44] and the *mizrachs*,[45] which are hung in plain view and used to decorate the windows and walls in homes, although their purpose, too, is to neutralize in advance any influence of the evil eye – or so conjectures Wawdzieniecki.[46]

Diagnosis

In order to determine whether a particular illness is the result of the evil eye, one conducts a sort of magical ceremony that also is a cure, since discovering the evil eye is the initial step in combating it.

The first thing to do after the peculiar symptoms of the evil eye have been detected is to lick the patient's temples. A salty taste is a clear sign that the conjecture was correct. It is also customary to place a new knife by the patient's head. If the knife turns black, this too is an indication of the evil eye. Then one uses the same knife to slice bread (and the diagnosis at once turns to treatment). Trimmings from the patient's fingernails are stuck into the slice of bread, which is then given to a dog to eat.

Definitive clear proof that one is dealing with a case of the evil eye is provided when pieces of coal tossed in water sink to the bottom of the bucket at once. We shall expand on this test below.

Saliva, too, is used: one spits three times after licking the child's temples or eyelids. One can also spit into the child's mouth when it is yawning. Most effective is the spittle of a first born.

Another proven means is to raise the child aloft. One picks up an infant off the ground and swings it up into the air three times. This is a means to protect it from the evil eye and also – when necessary – to cure it. Another effective treatment to wipe the child's face three times with the edge of a woman's blouse.

All of these methods undoubtedly derive from the idea of making contact loathsome to the hostile power. This is a primitive mode of thought but also contains some logic.

Smoke is also used, because it expels evil spirits. A child that is wrapped up (symbolically) in smoke is as it were clad in armor. It is also customary to burn the umbilical cord[47]

(perhaps this is symbolic of a sacrifice), or willow branches, palm fronds, the tip of a havdalah candle, wood chips gouged from the threshold of the House of Study (in other words, an object imbued with holiness), a devil's finger,[48] dust that was collected from three thresholds and mixed together, or a scrap torn from a garment of the person who is suspected of having cast the evil eye. In this last case, the charm is also retaliation, causing injury to the person who activated the hostile force; if he suffers, he is only being paid back for his wickedness. For the same reason, there is a custom to throw pieces of coal into the house of such a person, over the threshold, or to sprinkle salt on his footprints.

The smoked material is placed under the child's bed and the following incantation is spoken aloud: "May the evil dissipate with the smoke. Just as I do not know where the evil eye comes from – so may I not know what becomes of it."

So that the child will fall asleep quickly after the incantation ceremony, one walks around it three times holding a pinch of salt in the right hand, and then throws the salt into the fire. When the child falls asleep, all the smoked material is also thrown into the fire.

It is customary to take a child that has been struck by evil eye and run with it to a crossroads, avoiding the main street and proceeding from the courtyard of one house to another, passing between the legs of a firstborn or of three firstborns, standing one after another. Also essential is a procedure with chips of coal, which is even more effective when performed by a firstborn son or even daughter. One throws three times nine chunks of glowing coal into a bucket full of water (on the Sabbath one uses pieces of the Sabbath loaf instead of coal), counting "not one, not two, not three, not four, not five, not six, not seven, not eight, not nine" – and the second time in reverse order – "not nine, not eight, not seven, not six, not five, not four, not three, not two, not one." One adds a pinch of salt to the water and uses it to bathe the child that has been struck by the evil eye – mainly its face and chest. Then one throws the water on the door hinges and lintel behind the threshold and into the furnace, or into a place that is entered infrequently. The child is dried with its own or its mother's gown and its face is wiped three times.

There are many formulas for or variants to this ceremony, since it can involve various numbers. Three and seven are never omitted,[49] but the same counting method (with the negative prefix) is always used. The water, which is drawn close to sunset, must come from a flowing stream, because only running water has the power to drive off the evil eye.

An entire complex of ancient concepts and secret ceremonies are involved in a set of charms that must be applied as soon as possible, because delaying and "missing" the evil eye can intensify the illness and risk making it lethal.

On the basis of the principle that evil can be counteracted by the same forces that caused it,[50] the blow can be warded off precisely by the persons who instigated it. But since it is difficult to discover who they are, experts must be called in to counteract the evil eye. This is usually the province of old women, who know incantations against the evil eye. In fact, however, the people have greater faith in the spells of pious and learned Jews.

One can learn a spell only until age thirteen.[51] The power and meaning attributed to a spell are varied and different. But wherever frozen relics of a worldview that has otherwise passed from the world survive, one can discern stability in the variants found in different places.

The common lineament of all the spells, as well as of written amulets, is that an individual's name is associated with his or her mother rather than father. These are traces of a matriarchal society that, although banished from the official cult, survives here and there in superstitions.[52] The very fact that the spells are recited in an undertone attests, we may conjecture, that there is a fear of countervailing activity by the hostile powers.

Now we can provide a few examples:

The following spells partially reflects both the process of their stability and the evolution they went through, as they include different elements of no more than fragments of long lost formulas.

I

> Three women are standing on a crag. One says, I am sick. One says, I am not sick and will not be sick. If anyone did anything to him (*or* her), may the hair of his head and beard fall out. And if any woman did anything to him (*or* her), may her teeth and breasts fall. Just as there is no path through the sea and the fish in the sea have no illness, so may no substance and no illness and no evil eye act against such a person, amen. "He is of the seed of Joseph over which the evil eye has no power." "Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall" (Gen. 49:22); "Then Moses and the people of Israel sang: Spring up, O well – sing to it – 'The well which the chieftains dug, which the nobles of the people started with maces, with their own staffs.' And from Midbar to Mattanah, and from Mattanah to Nahaliel, and from Nahaliel to Bamoth, and from Bamoth to the valley . . ." (a conflation of Ex. 15:1 and Num. 21:17–20). Just as Hezekiah king of Judah was healed of his illness and Miriam the prophetess of her leprosy, so may so-and-so son of so-and-so be healed by the name A-G-L-H. Amen, selah.[53]

As can be seen, this spell is a patchwork of biblical verses. The reference to Joseph (Genesis 49:22) is based on the Talmud's report of R. Johanan's answer to why did he not fear the evil eye.[54]

Second version

> Three women are standing on a crag.
>
> One says, sick. One says, I am not sick. And one says I am not ill and there will not be any languor. If a male person did anything bad to him, may the hair of his head and beard fall out; if a woman did anything bad to him – may her teeth and breasts fall. Just as there is no path through the water and fish and ants have no kidneys, so may so-and-so son of so-and-so suffer no weakness and no evil eye and no damage, for he is of the seed of Joseph, of whom it is written, "Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall" (Gen. 49:22).[55]

Third version

Phooey! Phooey! So-and-so the son of so-and-so must be rid of the evil eye! So-and-so son of so-and-so must be rid of the evil eye! So-and-so son of so-and-so has been rid of the evil eye. Three women are sitting on a rock. One says, So-and-so son of so-and-so has the evil eye. The second says, No. The third says, may it return whence it came, to all the desolate fields, to all the abandoned forests, a place where no human walks, a place where wild animals live, and may it remain there and withdraw from so-and-so son of so-and-so and no longer trouble the rest of so-and-so son of so-and-so. In an auspicious and fortunate hour we have released you with our spell: Ha-a, ha-a, ha-a. [Here the "patient" yawns.][56]

II

In the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. "I, so-and-so, am of the seed of Joseph over which the evil eye has no power, as it says: 'Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine by a fountain' (Gen. 49:22). Do not read *'alei 'ayin* [by a fountain] but *'oleh 'ayin* [overcoming the (evil) eye]. R. Jose b. R. Hanina derived it from here: 'And let them grow into a multitude *[weyidgu]* in the midst of the earth' (Gen. 48:16); just as the fishes *[dagim]* in the sea are covered by the water and the evil eye has no power over them," so may the evil eye have no power over so-and-so son of so-and-so.[57]

This spell, too, is based on the Gemara (BT Berakhot 20a and 55a, Sotah 36b, Baba Metzia 84a, Baba Bathra 118b), in which R. Abbahu wishes to continue with the same verse (Gen. 49:22) while R. Jose son of Hanina refers to a different verse (Gen. 48:16).[58]

III

I adjure you, all types of evil eye that have dominion in the world, whether of Jews or of Arameans,[59] that gazed and looked with the evil eye at so-and-so, son of so-and-so, yellow eye, blue eye, round eye, crooked eye, narrow eye, straight eye, broad eye, peering eye, protruding eye, sunken eye, attracting eye, eye of a young man, eye of a virgin, eye of a non-virgin, eye of a married woman, eye of a widow, eye of a woman and her relatives – I decree on all of you by the force of the upper eye that is always present, the only eye, the white eye, the eye that is white within white, the eye that contains all the whiteness, the eye that has no eyebrows, the eye that it entirely on the right side, the eye that is open, the eye that does not sleep, as is written: "See, the guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps!" (Ps. 121:4). By this upper eye I command all of you to turn away and depart and flee from this house and from this district and from so-and-so son of so-and-so. And may you have no power over so-and-so son of so-and-so, neither by

day nor by night, neither waking nor dreaming, in none of his 248 limbs and 365 sinews, and may be he protected and closed about and guarded and watched and delivered and saved, as is written: "See, the guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps!" (Gen. 49:18) "For Your deliverance I wait, O Lord! I wait, O Lord, for you deliverance! O Lord, for Your deliverance I wait![60]

IV

With the help of the Lord, who heals all those who are ailing among His people Israel, may there depart from so-and-so son (or daughter) of so-and-so all pains and all evil encounters! And what has befallen you from an evil glance, whether of man or of woman, elder or youth – may it not harm you, your body, or your life, neither your head nor your heart! Elijah the prophet encountered the angel on his way and asked him, "Where are you going?" He replied, "I am going to so-and-so son (or daughter) of so-and-so to sit at his head and suck his blood." Elijah the prophet said to him, "Just as you do not have permission to drink all the waters of the seas, so may you not have permission to harm his body or any of his limbs, neither his nor those of any other person in the world." And if someone has set the evil eye on him, may it do him no harm whatsoever, neither by day nor by night, just as for the descendants of the righteous Joseph, may he rest in peace, who could not be harmed by the evil eye. And now he must recover, because you are his child, and at this very moment may he get up fresh and healthy, and may this be fulfilled in the name of the Lord. Amen![61]

In Spell III, the evil eye is treated as an independent being, against which the divine upper eye fights. In Spell IV, by contrast, which is itself assembled from various fragments, the evil eye takes on the form of an evil angel.[62] In the next spell, too, we find this sort of anthropomorphism.

V

With the help of the omnipotent God. Heal all those who are ill, and turn away all diseases of Jewish men and Jewish women, of uncircumcised men and uncircumcised[63] women, of the evil Flim'asi [?]. The angelic prophet Elijah[64] is walking and meets the angel Duma. "Where are you going?" He replies, "I am going to sit by the head of so-and-so son of so-and-so, to devour his flesh and drink his blood." And just as he did not have the power to drink all the waters of the Jordan, so may he not have power to harm – and may all of his 248 limbs be healed. Count to nine. May the Blessed Lord help so that in the third hour he (or she) will again be hale and healthy. Not-one, not-two, not-three, not-four, not-five, not-six, not-seven, not-eight, not-nine. May the Blessed Lord help heal so-and-so son of so-and-so. Today I take an oath on nine generations, on ten

Torah Scrolls, on 20 mezuzahs. The cock does not crow. The man does not walk. The black bird flies back to its nest.[65]

In this fifth spell the evil eye is embodied by the evil angel Duma,[66] the cruel angel of graves. It is interesting that the spell employs sympathetic magic, the symbolic number nine (3 x 3), and finally the magical influence of silence and immobility.

VI

Moses cried out to God, saying: "O God, pray heal her!" (Num. 12:13). Just as it is impossible to count higher than nine, may evil have no power over so-and-so son of so-and-so. Not-nine, not-eight, not-seven, not-six, not-five, not-four, not-three, not-two, not-one. Not-one, not-two, not-three, not-four, not-five, not-six, not-seven, not-eight, not-nine. In the Torah there are the Ten Commandments. And because one cannot count past the number nine – because there is no nine – so too may the evil eye depart and not harm so-and-so son of so-and-so.[67]

In the course of the gradual elimination of evil we frequently encounter oriental magic (such as abracadabra). In the Talmud there is a typical incantation of this sort, which nullifies the power of the demon Shabriri by contracting his name syllable by syllable.[68]

VII

Topsy-turvy,
Oaken, husk,
Wheat bran:
By morning the good eye[69] will not be enough.
And just as on the ceiling
The corn cannot succeed
So the good eye will not harm so-and-so.[70]

Various prayers serve as incantations to exorcise the evil eye, but they are more general in nature. It is customary to repeat them again and again, taking account of the "proven" numbers. One prayer used for this purpose comes from the evening service for the conclusion of the Sabbath: The first part ("The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm – Bless the lads. In them may my name be recalled, and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they be teeming multitudes upon the earth" [Gen. 48:16][71]) is said seven times. The second part ("Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the country" (Deut. 28:3) is said three times.[72] Use is also made of numerology, a common method in mystical speculations; in this case, a spell to counteract the evil eye involves repeating the following ten words[73] 40 times: "But I, through Your abundant love, enter Your house; I bow down in awe at Your holy temple" (Ps. 5:8; part of the introductory prayers before the Morning Service). Ten times forty is 400,

which is the numerological value of the Hebrew '*ayin ra*[74] 'evil eye'. In this way one obtains power over the evil eye, reinforced by the words of the prayer, which have an immediate effect. What is more, this was done by the well-known talmudic sage R. Huna.

The spell is recited rapidly and in a whisper;[75] the person saying it faces east, does not look behind him, and places his hand on the patients' head or forehead. The spell may also work even if the person who has been struck by the evil eye is not present. In this case one must hold something that belongs to him, like a kerchief or hat. An infectious yawn, which influences all those present, can also work as a charm to help a person who has been struck by the evil eye. The yawn is an essential component in the middle or at the end of the incantation.[76] The end is always, "to health!"

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On the basis of the material presented above,[77] let us try to find the origin of this belief.

The Hebrew term *'eyin ha-ra'*, generally rendered as "evil eye," really means the "eye of the evil man" and this provides us with a hint. We also have certain verses from the Bible, such as "An evil-eyed [usually rendered as 'miserly'] man runs after wealth" (Prov. 28:22) or "Do not eat of an evil-eyed [again, usually rendered as 'stingy'] man's food (Prov. 23:6). We may go on to think about the nature of the evil-eyed man: a jealous husband, an unfriendly person. A similar conclusion is reached by R. Joshua in the extra-canonical tractate Avot de-Rabbi Natan (16:1): "The evil eye and the evil inclination and hatred of people remove a person from the world. How does this work with the evil eye? It teaches that just as a person views his own house, so should he view the house of his fellow" – that is, without envy, which is usually aroused when one sees another person who is enjoying security and good fortune. With a similar intention, R. Abbahu, in the name of R. Huna, in the name of Rav, ruled that a person may not stand alongside his neighbor's field before reaping his own harvest.[78] R. Hanina the son of R. Ika died because R. Pappa and R. Huna the son of R. Joshua gazed on him enviously (BT Berakhot 58a). Sarah's hostile glance made Ishmael feeble (Genesis Rabbah 53:13). In brief, in all of the examples handed down to us by tradition, it was hatred and envy that gave rise to the evil eye.

The evil eye has dominion over beings that arouse envy – notably children, who provoke the jealousy of the childless; greater envy is aroused by boys than by girls, because sons are more desirable;[79] and so on.

Primitive man was afraid of the hostile emotions that were easy to read on a person's face in the presence of another individual's good fortune. Centuries have passed, but civilization has not managed to eliminate this fear, even though it has come up with new and advanced concepts derived from other categories.

The conviction that blessing attaches exclusively to things hidden from the eye is a direct result of that same fear, even though the cause is not necessarily inherent in the eye. It is possible to cast the evil eye or express praise behind a person's back, and the result is the same. Thus the eye plays the role of an intermediary, through which things become public knowledge. As such, it arouses disquiet and became the object of curses.

Because, however, the eye has taken on an autonomous existence, it has acquired – the evil eye, of course – the character of a paranormal force. To this day the demonological element,

signs of which can still be detected in some exorcisms, remains dominant in this belief. This explains why the charms against the evil eye incorporate methods that were applied against many diseases, and against spirits and demons, and why, for example, the contents of the sachets to avert the evil eye were almost the same as those of sachets to ward off convulsions.[80]

Now we have a better understanding of amulets, too, that "repel" evil and play the role, as it were, of a lightning rod, as well as all the customs that work to "deflect" the evil eye or totally nullify its influence.

Under the influence of modern concepts that have percolated into the masses, the people, too, are endeavoring to provide a more rational basis for the belief in the evil eye. But they still are apprehensive about expressing admiration out loud, as if the air were full of hostile spirits waiting to devour human prosperity and happiness.

Notes

This essay was first published in the Warsaw-based *Yiddish Philology* 4–6 (1924), edited by Max Weinreich, Noah Prylucki and Zalman Rejzen, pp. 245–271. Originally written in Polish, it was translated into Yiddish for publication by Nechama Epstein (I. Katz verified the classic Jewish texts and added a few notes). The present English translation is based in turn on a Hebrew translation of the Yiddish by Shalom Lurie, but has been checked against the Yiddish and corrected as necessary. The distinction between main text and notes in the Yiddish text has not always been adhered to here, in the interest of smoother reading. In what does appear as notes, however, an attempt has been made to indicate which of the many hands who have contributed to the present version is responsible (NE = Nechama Epstein; IK = I. Katz; SL = Shalom Lurie; bracketed notes without attribution have been added by the present translator).

Biblical passages are rendered on the basis of the New JPS translation and the Revised Standard Version, as seemed most appropriate in each case. Passages from the Talmud and Midrash Rabbah are based on the Soncino translations. I have, however, modified these "copy texts" wherever the sense or present context seemed to warrant this.

[1] "[R. Johanan] lifted up his eyes and stared at him, whereupon the boy's mother came and took him away, Saying to him, 'Go away from him, lest he do to you as he did to your father' " (BT Ta'anit 9a). [Resh Lakish himself died as the result of R. Johanan's ire (see BT Baba Metzia 84b). – IK]

[2] "He cast his eyes upon him and he became a heap of bones" (BT Sabbath 34a).

[3] "R. Sheshet cast his eyes upon him and he became a heap of bones" (BT Berakhot 58a).

[4] "Great was the calamity that befell that day, for everything at which R. Eliezer cast his eyes was burned up" (BT Baba Metzia 59b). A similar story is told about R. Simeon bar Yohai and his son R. Eliezer (BT Shabbat 33b). Consider, too, another passage about the power of sages: "Warm yourself before the fire of the wise, and beware of their glowing coals, that you may not be singed, for their bite is the bite of a fox, and their sting is the sting of a scorpion, and their hiss is the hiss of a serpent, and all their words are like coals of fire" (M Avot 2:10).

[5] "They cast their eyes on him and he died" (BT Berakhot 58b).

[6] " 'The Lord will ward off from you all sickness' (Deut. 7:15): Said Rav: By this, the [evil] eye is meant. . . . [He] said: 'Ninety-nine [have died] through an evil eye, and one through natural causes' " (BT Baba Metzia 107b). Thus too in Leviticus Rabbah 16:8. In both places it is noted that this was merely the opinion of Rav, who was a supporter of the belief in the evil eye.

[7] Evidently Mt. Moriah is meant. The midrash is trying to explain why, after the binding of Isaac, he temporarily disappears from the story: "So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-Sheba" (Gen. 22:19).]

[8] "R. Jose b. R. Hanina said: He sent him [home] at night, for fear of the [evil] eye. For from the moment that Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah ascended unscathed from the fiery furnace they are no more mentioned. Whither then had they gone? . . . R. Jose b. R. Hanina said: They died through an [evil] eye" (Genesis Rabbah 56:20).

[9] "This, however, teaches that Sarah cast an evil eye on him, whereupon he was seized with feverish pains" (Genesis Rabbah 53:13).

[10] "Do not all enter through one gate for fear of the [evil] eye" (Genesis Rabbah 91:21).
[11] "And Joshua said to them, 'If you are a numerous people, go up to the forest' (Josh. 17:15). He said to them, 'Go, hide yourselves in the forests that the evil eye may not have sway over you' " (BT Sotah 36b, Baba Bathra 118a).
[12] BT Sanhedrin 93a; and see above, n. 8.
[13] Bernstein, *Yidishe shprikhverter un lebensart'n* (Warsaw, 1908), p. 6.
[14] BT Baba Metzia 107b, etc.
[15] See 2 Samuel 24:1–15 and the parallel account in 1 Chron. 21:1–8. See also BT Yoma 22b: "R. Isaac said: It is forbidden to count Israel even for [the purpose of fulfilling] a commandment. . . . R. Eleazar said: Whosoever counts Israel, transgresses a [biblical] prohibition. . . . R. Nahman b. Isaac said: He would transgress two prohibitions."
[16] Or whatever day is appropriate.
[17] This formula seems to be part of a charm or spell.
[18] The thumb played an important part in purification rituals. See Lev. 8:23–24. The same applies to exorcisms (B Pesahim 106b).
[19] It is interesting that this admonition is reported by R. Ishmael the son Elisha in the name of Suriel the Officer (i.e. angel) of the Divine Presence, and by R. Joshua ben Levi in the name of the Angel of Death.
[20] B. Segel, "Lecznictwo Ludowe Żydow," Lud III, 60.
[21] BT Shabbat 67a.
[22] See Gen. 24:30 and 47, Ex. 35:22, Num. 31:50, Ezek. 16:12, and Job 42:11. They were worn by both men and women.
[23] [In the context, the amulets are those of pagan gods, and the author of 2 Maccabees believes that the men had been slain precisely *because* of this sin: ". . . sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. And it became clear to all that this was why these men had fallen."]
[24] M Shabbat 6:1, M Sotah 1:6; M Kelim 18:5.
[25] M Kelim 11:8, M Shabbat 6:1, M Sotah 1:6
[26] Before they were betrothed.
[27] "Young girls may go out with threads, and even with chips in their ears" (M Shabbat 6:6). [Rashi explains that the reference is to the threads and dowels placed through the holes in the earlobes of girls who will later wear earrings. – IK]
[28] Berliner, *Aus dem innern Leben der deutschen Juden im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1871), p. 39.
[29] [The Hebrew "peninim" is rendered as "jewels" or "rubies" in Proverbs (3:15 and 8:11 and Job 28:18), but as "coral" in Lam. 4:7. In modern Hebrew (and in the RSV of Job 28:18) it means "pearls"; but Lam. 4:7 proves that the reference is to a reddish gemstone.]
[30] See BT Kiddushin 73b: "If he . . . has beads hung on him, wears a tablet [with an inscription] or an amulet, he is not considered a foundling."
[31] M Kelim 12:7: "If a dinar that had been invalidated was fashioned for hanging around a young girl's neck" [Since the reference is to girls, perhaps the text means a coin intended to serve as jewelry? – IK]
[32] See Jewish Encyclopedia, vol. 1.
[33] [This same divine name appears prominently on the *mezuzah* affixed to the doorpost.]
[34] The Hebrew word for amulet, *qamea*', is derived from a root that means "bind, tie."

[35] The book's title refers to an angel who was considered to be the angel of magic and the hermetic arts. It was compiled at various dates. Some dates back to Geonic times (the eleventh century). The second part is much more recent.

[36] See *Yevreiskaya Entziklopedya* 2:263.

[37] [These are the initial letters of the standard invocation, "May it be Your will, O Lord our God and the God of our fathers."]

[38] An amulet like this can be found in the ethnographic collections of the Museum of Industry and Agriculture in Warsaw. It also bears two small fish, on account of the traditional belief that fish are not subject to the evil eye.

[39] An amulet like this can be seen at the Berson Museum in Warsaw.

[40] *Yevreiskaya Entziklopedya* 2:371.

[41] In Talmudic times they would hang the tail of a fox on the tail of a horse to protect it against the evil eye: "A horse must not be led out with a fox's tail" (T Shabbat 4:5; BT Shabbat 53a). Rashi ad loc. explains that the fox's tail "was suspended between its eyes to ward off the evil eye."

[42] "R. Isaac further said: Blessing is only possible in things hidden from sight, as it is said, 'The Lord will command the blessing upon you in your barns' (Deut. 28:8). In the school of R. Ishmael it was taught: Blessing is only possible in things not under the direct control of the eye, as it is said, 'The Lord will command the blessing upon you in your barns' " (BT Ta'anit 8b, Baba Metzia 42a). [A comparison of the two versions, those of R. Isaac and R. Ishmael, reveals that R. Ishmael gives more emphasis to the evil eye. – IK]

[43] "If he was visited by guests, he may not spread it [a lost article] over a bed or a frame, whether in his interests or in its own! – There it is different, because he may thereby destroy it, either through an [evil] eye or through thieves" (BT Baba Metzia 30a).

[44] [Paper cuts for Shavuot in the image of roses.]

[45] [A hanging or sign, ranging from simple to elaborate, featuring the Hebrew word mizrah 'east', hung on the eastern wall of synagogues and homes to indicate the direction to be faced during prayer.]

[46] See: *Nowe naukowe stanowisko pojmowania i wyjaśniania niektórych przejawów w dziedzinie ludoznawstwa i archeologji przedhistorycznej* (Warsaw, 1910), pp. 14–17. Wawdzieniecki's conjecture applies to all types of disturbances.

[47] The umbilical cord would be saved for this purpose. Some would burn and powder it and have the child drink a small amount of the ashes, mixed with water.

[48] The remnants of the hard parts of a squid.

[49] For the meaning of these numbers see my *Święta żydowskie*, part 2 (Cracow, 1914).

[50] According to the Latin proverb that "maleficia posse per artem per quam facta sunt destrui."

[51] In the case of a girl, only until menarche. The whole matter is an arcane secret, and anyone who reveals it to an outsider loses the power to use the spell forever.

[52] Note that this method of designating a person has also penetrated the prayer service, but only those that are "semi-official" (such as the prayer said when the Torah is taken from the ark on the three Pilgrimage Festivals). – IK.

[53] [Original text in Hebrew.]

[54] "I come from the seed of Joseph, over whom the evil eye has no power, as it is written, 'Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well'; R. Abbahu said with regard to this, do not read

'*ale 'ayin* [by a well] but *'ole 'ayin*" ['rising above the (power of the) eye,' i.e., superior to the evil eye] (BT Berakhot 20a, Baba Metzia 84a).

[55] This incantation was transcribed by Kalman Neihaus in Kazimierz on the Wisła in 1913.

[56] From the Vitebsk district, as presented by S. An-Ski in *Yevreiskaya Starina* 1909, p. 76. Three other versions of the same spell can be found there on pages 75–76.

[57] This spell, which is based on the Gemara (B Berakhot 55b [also Baba Metzia 84a]), can be found in the ethnographic collections of the Museum of Industry and Agriculture in Warsaw. [Original language: Hebrew and Aramaic.]

[58] [The verse cited by R. Jose, too, refers to the descendants of Joseph; it is part of Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh.]

[59] [I.e., non-Jews.]

[60] [Original language: Hebrew and Aramaic. The last paragraph plays on Gen. 49:18, a three-word sentence in Hebrew which can, rather exceptionally, be read in "circular order" (1-2-3, 2-3-1, or 3-1-2) without deviating from idiom or affecting the meaning. Along with its correspondingly triune Aramaic translation (appended to the Hebrew in the original text but left out of the present translation), it has found a place in the standard liturgy, for example, near the end of the prayer before retiring.]

[61] This version of the spell was provided by Mrs. Neihaus from Kazimierz on the Wisla in 1913. [Original language: Yiddish.]

[62] Because this angel is not recognized as part of the heavenly retinue, it is possible that its name has been garbled.

[63] [That is, of course, "non-Jewish."]

[64] [In Jewish legend, Elijah, although generally viewed as a human being who was taken up to heaven alive and consequently may be encountered walking the earth by those who merit to see him, is also referred to as an angel; he is, for example, specifically referred to as the "angel of the circumcision ceremony."]

[65] This incantation comes from Kotsk. [Original language: Yiddish]

[66] [The name, derived from Ps. 94:17 and 115:17, is Hebrew for "silence" or "land of silence" – i.e., the grave or the nether-world.]

[67] In Lilienthal's manuscript the text of this spell is given in Polish translation only.

[68] "Your mother has warned you to guard yourself against Shabriri, briri, riri, iri, ri, which prevail in blind [or white] vessels" (B Avodah Zarah 12a; the parallel text in B Pesahim 112a ends, "I am thirsty for water in a white glass." [The Soncino translation adds the following instructive note: "SHAVRIRI Aram. 'blindness'; v. Targum to Gen. XIX, 11. Generally taken as a contraction of the words SHOVER RE'IYAH breaker of the eyesight. Kohut, s.v. BERIRI asserts that the correct reading is shab-khiri, Persian for night blindness. – 'A demon appointed over the affliction of blindness' (Rashi)."]

[69] A euphemism, of course, for "evil eye."

[70] [In this rhymed Yiddish incantation, the sense is definitely subordinate to the sound:

Orene, vorene,
Dembene, korene,
Veytsene klayen:
Biz frimorg'n zol dos gut oyg nish dayen.

Un azoy vi af'n balt'n kon keyn kor'n nisht gerot'n,
Azoy zol ploni ben ploni dos gut oyg nisht shot'n.]

This rhymed incantation comes from Vohlynia. See also my book, Dziecko żydowskie (Cracow, 1904).

[71] [We have already encountered this verse: see above, n. 57.]

[72] [Both verses are included in the prayer before retiring.]

[73] [Ten words in Hebrew.]

[74] [70+10+50+200+70]

[75] [In Hebrew, it is worth noting, the verb "to whisper" and the noun "spell, incantation" come from the same root.]

[76] [See above,]

[77] I will not pile on comparative material from other nations, because they would not make things any clearer.

[78] "R. Abbahu said in the name of R. Huna in the name of Rav: One may not stand over his neighbor's field when its crop is full grown" (B Baba Metzia 107a, Baba Bathra 2b).

[79] "R. Hisda said: [If a] daughter [is born] first, it is a good sign for sons. Some say, because she rears her brothers; and others say. because the evil eye has no influence over them" (B Baba Bathra 141a).

[80] It was believed that convulsions were caused by demons.

CHAPTER VI

THE HISTORIAN MEIR BAŁABAN AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY AND FOLKLORE OF POLISH JEWRY

Majer Bałaban's contribution to the study of the history of Polish Jewry is well known and requires no demonstration. Much has been written about this contribution; Jakub Goldberg got it right when he referred to Bałaban as "the chief historian and principal mover in the study of the history of Polish Jewry" (Goldberg 1991, 85). Israel Biderman, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on Bałaban's scholarly endeavors, shares this estimation and cites similar views expressed by many others (Biderman 1976, 75–79). The scope of Bałaban's work is immense, both in terms of quantity and the number of topics covered. Gerber counted 300 separate publications (ibid. 309). Biderman, relying on the bibliography prepared by Philip Friedman (Friedman 1933, 340–351), identifies 242 items (Biderman 1976, 309–326).[1] Scrutiny of this list reveals that Bałaban published mainly in European languages – Polish, Russian, and German – and much less in Hebrew and Yiddish. One may hypothesize that this is the reason for the limited attention that folklorists have paid to his contribution to our discipline. Here I shall survey a small part of his contribution to the study of the ethnography and folklore of Polish Jewry, in the hope that in the future it will receive the appreciation it deserves from Jewish folklorists in general and from students of Eastern European Jewish folklore in particular.

Let me begin with a few words about the man himself. Bałaban (1877-1942) came from a family of misnaggedim in the city of Lwów (Lemberg), in Galicia. In his youth he received a religious education and then attended the gymnasium in Lwów. He began studying law at the local university, but his family's difficult economic situation forced him to drop out. For a number of years he taught in a Jewish school. When he was at last able to return to the university he chose history instead of law. In 1920 he became director of the Tahkemoni rabbinical seminary in Warsaw. Five years later he received teaching positions at both the Free University of Warsaw (Wolna Wszechnica) and the University of Warsaw. He also served as director of the Institute for Jewish Studies in Warsaw when it was founded in February 1927. When an academic advisory council was established for the Department of Judaic Studies at the Hebrew University, Bałaban was invited to join. In 1937 he visited Jerusalem and gave a lecture at the university. His professional standing and authority were recognized in Poland as well. In 1930, when the Polish Historical Society devoted one session of its annual conference to Jewish history, Bałaban was invited to deliver the keynote address. His article, "The Tasks and Needs of Jewish Historiography in Poland" was published in the historical quarterly (Bałaban 1931) – a

[1] Biderman arranged the bibliographical entries chronologically and by language of publication Biderman 1976, 309–326.

rare honor for a non-assimilating Jew in those days. His most productive period, in terms of research, was between 1920 and 1939. In those years he expanded his academic interests from the history of Galician Jewry, his original specialty, to Polish Jewry as a whole.[2]

Many of his publications contain references to ethnography and folklore. Bałaban can be described as a historian interested in all the cultural endeavors of Polish Jewry – the works of individual artists and, even more so, the collective productions. His main contribution to the study of ethnography and folklore is his three monographs on the Jewish communities of three large cities: Lwów (Bałaban 1906), Cracow (Bałaban 1931a; first published 1913), and Lublin (Bałaban 1919). Along with his *Zabytki Historyczne Żydów w Polsce* (Historical antiquities of the Jews in Poland) (Bałaban 1929), these monographs also constitute his most important contribution to the study of Polish Jewry history.

His interest in ethnography and folklore was concentrated in two areas: (1) material culture and folk art and (2) the folk legends of Polish Jews. In the realm of material culture he studied Polish synagogues and their furnishings, cemeteries, buildings with a historical character, ritual objects, clothing, jewelry, and household goods.

In all of the works mentioned, as well as in others,[3] Bałaban offered detailed descriptions of the synagogues in various places and went into depth about the two major types – wooden synagogues and their origins and fortress synagogues and the reasons for their construction in various Polish cities (Bałaban 1909, 45–105).[4] He links his ethnographic discussions to the historical discussion. For example, when he considers an architectural feature typical of Polish synagogues – an entrance down a short flight of stairs – he challenges the ethnic interpretation of the phenomenon, which explains it on the basis of the biblical verse "out of the depths I call You, O Lord" (Ps. 130:1) and demonstrates that the real explanation was the Jews' attempt to circumvent the Polish law that set limits on the height of synagogues (Bałaban 1909). From the folklore perspective this is an interesting example of how a disadvantage is turned to an advantage and of coping with an externally imposed constraint by providing an explanation from within the culture itself.

Bałaban provides a detailed description of the interior of synagogues with all their appurtenances: Torah scrolls, Torah crowns, the pointer, the Holy Ark, the basin and laver for washing the hands, the wedding canopy, the shofar, the ark curtain *(parokhet)* and valance *(kapporet)*, and more. These descriptions contain fascinating ethnographic material, of which I shall present a few examples.

His description of the special ark curtain used in Dubno on the eighth day of Sukkot (Shemini Atzeret), when the prayer for rain is recited, includes the following details: it is embroidered with a well and a giant-horned ox that is drinking water. The date given is 1729, along with the information that the curtain was made by the artists Jacob son of Judah and Zevi Hirsch son of Judah, two brothers who were both craftsmen of ritual objects. Thus we learn that in addition to the names of the donors and the events commemorated by the dona-

[2] For an exhaustive survey of Bałaban's life, see Biderman 1976, chapters two and three.

[3] In this context we should mention Bałaban's guidebook to Jewish antiquities in Cracow (Bałaban 1935), in which he leads his readers through the streets of Jewish Cracow and introduces them to its streets, buildings, synagogues, cemeteries, and more. He provides his readers with a similar tour in his book about Jewish Lublin in the fourth chapter of his book on the Lublin ghetto (Bałaban 1919).

[4] See also Bar-Itzhak 2001, 134-138; Bar-Itzhak 2004, 98-100.

tion, ark curtains also bore the names of the artist-embroiderers. This set Bałaban to trying to identify all of the artists whose names are embroidered on ark curtains, along with their places of origin (Bałaban 1925, 82).

In his description of the ark curtains that were kept in the quasi-museum attached to the Old Synagogue of Cracow, Bałaban interweaves the ethnographic and historical investigations. He shows how the legends on the curtains sometimes refer to key figures in the history of Polish Jewry. For example, there is an ark curtain dated 1761, embroidered on a sky-blue background and bearing the notation that it was donated by Isaac Landau, rabbi of Cracow in 1754–1768, in memory of his wife Taube and his daughter Esther. Taube was the daughter of Dr. Emmanuel de Jonah, the court physician of King Jan III Sobieski (Bałaban 1935, 58).[5] One by one Bałaban lists the ark curtains, with their designs and the events and persons mentioned on them. In the process he calls attention to a key omission: the town is never indicated. He explains this by the situation of the Jews in Poland, which caused them to move ark curtains from place to place. This leads him to caution scholars against drawing hasty conclusions based on the place where a curtain was found (ibid. 85–86).

Among the distinctive items in Polish synagogues described by Bałaban are the wall plaques bearing the prayer for the sovereign, which could be found in the synagogues until 1918. The prayer had a standard text, was written in a special calligraphic script, and decorated with miniatures. Bałaban lingers especially on a plaque preserved in the Old Synagogue of Cracow and bearing the name "Casimir King of Poland." He associated it with Jan Casimir rather than Casimir the Great, because all older documents and objects were lost during the Swedish occupation of 1655–1657 (Bałaban 1929, 97–98). He even describes the *kune*, the "pillory" in the synagogue where the community locked up transgressors (Bałaban 1929, 101).[6]

In addition to synagogues, Bałaban also focuses on building associated with key figures in Polish Jewish history and relates the customs and legends attached to them. For example, he describes the house of the Maggid of Koznitz (Koznice), in which his room had been preserved since his death in 1814. On Friday evenings, after the evening service and before the Sabbath meal, his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, along with their wives, would enter the room and wish him *Gut Shabbes*. As an ethnographer Bałaban himself participated in this ceremony in 1918 (ibid, 127).

Bałaban evinces great interest in household items and personal belongings. He writes about clothing and jewelry in detail when discussing the restrictions that the *kahal* (the autonomous Jewish community government) imposed on women's apparel (Bałaban 1929, 132–140). He describes gold and silver engagement rings with the inscription *mazal tov,* wedding rings with the inscription "he who finds a wife has found happiness" (Prov. 18.22), rings engraved with the figure of candlesticks and inscribed "to kindle the Sabbath lamp." He presents a detailed account of signet rings, chiefly those found in the Behrson Museum in Warsaw, noting their weight, size, and ornamentation. His discussion focuses on the connection between the design of the seal and the owner's name, such as one with the image of a lion and a stag's horns above the name Aryeh Hirsch Katz (*aryeh* being the Hebrew for "lion" and *hirsch* the Yiddish for "stag") (ibid, 135). He describes the medallions worn by women and amulets, bringing

[5] On Dr. Emmanuel de Jonah, see Bałaban 1920, 49–57; Bar-Itzhak 2004, 98-103 ; Piechotka 1959.

[6] On the *kune* see also Elzet 1919, 29; Davidovich 1982, 84; and Bar-Itzhak 2001, 139.

them, too, into his historical survey. For example, there is the peculiar amulet he received from Hillel Seidman. On one side it depicts a cross above a Holy Ark that bears the inscriptions "may this child attain maturity, wisdom, and good deeds" and "the righteous is an everlasting foundation"[Zaddik yesod olam] (Prov. 10:25), and, below the ark, "I wait for Your deliverance, O Lord!" (Gen. 49:18). The other side is inscribed, "in the name of the Lord God of Hosts may the evil eye have no dominion over this child, nor pain nor weakness, under a good sign and a good constellation, amen selah." From the presence of the cross, plus the provenance of the amulet (Podolia) and its date (the second half of the eighteenth century), Bałaban infers that it is a Frankist artifact, dating from the period when the sect had not yet formally abandoned Judaism but had drawn closer to Catholicism, that is, 1757–1759 (ibid., 137).

One topic that Bałaban suggested deserved greater attention is *kvitlekh* or letters to hasidic rebbes. He describes their fixed format, which include the name of the petitioner, his or her mother's name, the request or problem, and so on. He himself attests that he had gone through thousands of *kvitlekh* that had been sent to Rabbi Elijah Guttmacher (1796–1874) and had been sold when the Jewish community of Grodzisk Wielkopolski ceased to exist. Bałaban notes the importance of *kvitlekh* as a source for both historical and folklore studies. For example, in a petition submitted in 1863, a synagogue warden asks Rabbi Guttmacher to try to persuade Rabbi Isaac Meir Alter, the first rebbe of Gur, not to make common cause with the Polish nobility, which, the warden believed, would prove disastrous for the hasidic court of Gur (ibid., 138). Bałaban says that the thousands of *kvitlekh* he studied had been sent to the National Library in Jerusalem and expresses his hope that they will be studied extensively in their new home.[7]

Bałaban describes genealogical charts found in Jewish homes, family documents written on parchment scrolls or eggshells, and much more (ibid. 139–140). There is hardly an area of the material culture of Polish Jewry that he did not describe or consider in his research. Anyone who wishes to deal with the synagogues, cemeteries, and Jewish houses of Poland will find a vast treasure in Bałaban's works.

Another area in which Bałaban had special interest was the folk legends of Polish Jewry. This is manifested in two ways. Bałaban set down texts from the oral traditions and incorporated them into discussions about historical figures, places, objects, and the like. For example, in his book on Lublin he presents the story of the miracle that took place in the old cemetery of the city (Bałaban 1919, 97, 98).[8] When he writes about the seventeenth-century Reb Aizik Reb Jekeles synagogue in Cracow, he inserts the legend about how it was saved (Bałaban 1935–89). In his discussion of the *kune* in Lwów he does not forget to mention the legend about the Rabbi David Segal, son-in-law of Rabbi Joel Sirkes, known as the *TaZ* after his commentary on the *Shulkhan Arukh* and *Arba'ah Turim* (Bałaban 1925, 189).

Bałaban was not a folklorist. It is true that he states explicitly that he transcribed some legends from the living tradition, but he offers no documentation of the transcription, not bothering to record the name of the informant and certainly not presenting a description of the circumstances of the transcription, such as the situation, the audience, and so on.

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[7] There is some confusion about what happened to this material. Guttmacher's *kvitlekh* are now at the YIVO Institute in New York, not in the National Library in Jerusalem. I have not been able to arrive at a reliable conclusion as to how they reached YIVO—directly from Poland or by way of Jerusalem.

[8] For a discussion of this legend see Bar-Itzhak 2007, 239-259.

Alongside texts he brings as anecdotes there are also legends that occupy an honored place in his work. Here he offers parallels, draws comparisons among them, and discusses the legend at length. The most prominent legends that received such favored attention are those about "Gildene Roize" – Golden Rose – who saved the Lwów synagogue from the Jesuits (Bałaban 1906, 165–186; Bałaban 1920, 20) and about Saul Wahl, the Jew who according to the lengend served as king of Poland a short period. Bałaban's long article on the latter is included in the present volume.[9] Here, too, we must not be misled; Bałaban is not a student of folk literature and is certainly not interested in the poetics of folk legends. The main difference between his perspective on the legend and the approach of folklorists is summarized in his comment about the legend of Saul Wahl:

> History and legend – truth and fantasy – are fierce enemies. As the legend moves farther away from the truth, from the right time and the right place, the historian seeks to restore it to the place from which it grew, so that he can research and inquire precisely, to the extent possible, pruning it of spurious branches that have been grafted onto it over the years by the fertile imagination of hundreds of minds and present it as it truly was, in the place where it took place and the time when it transpired.

Here we see Bałaban dealing with legend the way that historians have always done. The historians' goal is to extract the factual core of the legend, which is what interests them, from the fictional accretions that do not.

By contrast, folklorists have long realized what some historians have begun discussing in recent years, in the wake of the French *mentalités* school; namely, that all components of a legend relate the truth, though a different truth than that which Bałaban sought. A legend does not reflect the characters who are active in its plot or the events it recounts, but the society that tells the story, with its own desires, anxieties, and problems.

Nevertheless, Bałaban's discussion of legends is fascinating. On more than one occasion he deviates from the credo cited above. For example, in his discussion of the legend of Gildene Roize, in addition to his fascinating historical treatment of the characters, Bałaban compares three versions of the legend and explains his preference for the oral version (Bałaban 1906, 165–186). Attempting to explain the process of its creation, he compares it with the story of Adil Kikinesh[10], rejects the hypothesis of a link between the two legends, and associates the origins of the Gildene Roize legend with historical figures and specific historical events. Even though Bałaban's last conclusion is, I believe, mistaken, his error stems from his lack of familiarity with analogous Jewish legends, recounted in other communities, about women who came

[9] The article was published in Yiddish in a collection of Bałaban's studies about Polish Jews, published in Vilno (Bałaban 1930, 17–38). Bałaban's article about the historical Saul Wahl was published as the introduction to the second edition of *Gedullat Sha'ul*, compiled by Hirsch Edelmann and first published in London in 1854. On the legend of Saul Wahl, see also Bershadski 1890, Karpeles 1895, 272–292, Bar-Itzhak, 2008a, vol. 2, 1989.

[10] See a discussion of this legend in the context of blood libel legends in Bar-Itzhak 2008, 227-235.

into conflict with a non-Jew and saved a synagogue but were ultimately killed or committed suicide.[11] All folklorists will find interest and illumination in his discussion.

It is impossible to conclude a survey of Mayer Bałaban's contribution to the study of ethnography and folklore without mentioning how he himself became a legendary hero and the legend about the death of this historian of Polish Jewish culture.

Bałaban died in the Warsaw ghetto. When the Wehrmacht invaded Poland in September 1939 Bałaban gave no thought to flight and concentrated on saving his library. In the ghetto he was placed in charge of the Judenrat archive and continued his scholarly work, especially his study of Jews in Polish culture. There are several versions of his death, which evidently occurred in December 1942 or January 1943, the result of a heart attack caused by the harsh living conditions in the ghetto (Biderman 1976, 80–81). But a different story about the death of Majer Bałaban made the rounds of post-war Warsaw. Bałaban, people said, had been summoned by the commandant of the ghetto or by some Nazi historian and ordered to write the final chapter of the history of the Jews, one that would end the story of the existence of the Jewish people. Bałaban returned home in despair. Knowing that he would never allow his pen to serve as an authority for the end of his people's existence, he committed suicide (ibid.). This story spread like wildfire outside Poland as well and even received various literary treatments, such as Opatoshu's story "The Last Chapter" and a ballad about Bałaban by Kahat Kliger of Buenos Aires.

Bałaban would certainly have demanded that we separate the kernel of fiction from the historical fact. But we shall leave this to the historians. For folklorists, the legend of Majer Bałaban's death, told by the survivors in Poland, conveys a truth that is no less important. It exposes the need of Polish Jews, in the wake of their trauma, to turn the man who had transcribed and studied their history and culture, the man who perpetuated what the Germans had attempted to destroy, into a hero of that very culture.

[11] See the discussions of the legend of Mirele of Brahilov, which also deals with a Jewish woman's struggle with a gentile to save a synagogue (Bar-Itzhak 2001, 150-154).

Saul Wahl, the Jewish King of Poland: Truth and Legend

Meir Bałaban

I

About 30 years ago an interesting incident took place in a school in Lemberg: A Jewish girl was restless and disturbed the lesson. To punish her, the teacher sent her to stand in the corner of the classroom. Her eyes full of tears, the agitated girl said to the teacher, "you have no right to treat me that way, because I am princess. My great great grandfather was king here in Poland, when your great great grandfather may well have been lighting the oven in our houses!"

A tumult broke out in the classroom. The Christian teacher went into spasms and the whole matter was referred to the principal.

This is how I first became aware of the name of Saul Wahl, the Jewish king of Poland. I have been full of curiosity about this subject ever since.

I frequently asked myself whether it was at all possible that in Poland, a country of noblemen and Catholicism, where the Jew was always an "unbeliever," who was not allowed to live outside the street of the Jews, not allowed to trade in certain commodities, not allowed to appear on the gentile streets on Sunday – was it possible that in Poland, where today they won't even make a Jew a bailiff, a Jew could be king, even for only one day or one night?! When was he king? When did he live and when did he reign? After all, we know the list of all the kings of Poland and their dates and their histories are like an open book for us. But there has to be something to this, because this legend has passed from generation to generation, the old people telling it to their children and the children passing it on.

It is not only among the Jews that this tradition exists. When I started looking in old books I found that the Polish historian Lelewel writes about a legendary king in Poland in ancient times, even before the Piasts came to power in Poland. Our great defender Smołka spoke with great enthusiasm about this king – Reb Abraham – in the Galician *sejm* in 1868, when he sought to shatter the medieval restrictions and gain equal rights for the Jews. In other words, even "their" scholars know something about a Jewish king, but they call him Abraham, whereas we call him Saul. It is the same subject, but under a different name. But even with both names I did not know when and where to insert this king into the history of Poland.

When I searched further I found that the only book that dealt with this subject was *Gedullat Sha'ul*, compiled by Hirsch Edelmann and printed in London in 1854. In this book, commissioned by several rich members of the Wahl family, and especially Dennis M. Samuel of London, Edelmann published several versions of the legend, genealogical lists, and considerable number of imprimatur-letters written by famous people, thereby reinforcing the belief in

the kingdom of Saul. Members of the family bought up the book quickly and kept it in their houses like a sacred relic, and it was passed down to their children and grandchildren. Thus the legend spread among the people, dressing up in different versions. In various cities and countries it was shaped in diverse ways, as every grandmother retold it differently and every grandfather added his own details. But they all agree that Saul Wahl was king of Poland, for a long or short time – perhaps only for twenty-four hours, or even only one night; but whatever, the case he was king, and his descendants – the Wahls, the Katzenellenbogens, and the Katzenellenfogens – are very proud of his kingship.

The older generation was quite pleased with this tale. Lineage was very important when they arranged matches for their children, and if someone did not want to believe the legend, they invited him to the Loyfer-shul (The Runners' Synagogue)[1] in Lublin, where to this very day they distribute the processions and Torah portions on Simhat Torah "with the permission of the prince Reb Saul Wahl."

The matter was not totally clear to the younger generation. True, they were interested in lineage, but the story seems to contradict Polish history. They were unable to reconcile the contradiction: a Jew, king of Poland? Could that be possible? Perhaps the nobles were playing a trick on a Jew, as they did frequently. They must have seated him in the royal throne as a joke. Perhaps he wasn't king at all, but only the king's servant?

Some 20 years ago, one of the descendants of this extremely ramified family came to me with an idea like this. In those days I was up to my ears in ancient documents. Suddenly the door opened and a tall and handsome man with a long black beard entered, holding a thick case under his arm. He introduced itself in a loud voice: "I am Saul Wahl."

I was very much taken with this voice and imposing figure and was ready to recite the blessing, "blessed be He Who restores the dead." But the newcomer continued to introduce himself: "I am an artist and live in St. Petersburg. All my life I have been collecting documents about my great ancestor. My ancestors and their ancestors believed that 'he' was king of Poland, but that isn't the truth. The truth is that he was only a royal court official. I have been quarreling with my relatives about this." He said all of this with great emotion.

I did not fathom the reason for this emotion and asked him quietly what he wanted. The visitor opened his large document case, took out various papers, and began to read to me document after document, slowly and painstakingly. When I realized that there was no end to the story I asked him to explain briefly why he had come to me.

And thus I learned that "in his opinion the Polish king used to select his court officials only from among the nobility. What is more, if someone was not a nobleman, then the appointment itself ennobled him. And there is a law in Russia" – my visitor explained – "that grants the privileges of Russian nobility to all those whose ancestors were ministers. This I intend to demand of the tsar, which is why I need a solid pedigree."

All my attempts to explain that he was mistaken, since many Jews had been court officials and none of them had been ennobled, did not move him a bit. My visitor departed, quite upset, and I never saw him again. As his brother told me many years later, the man died in Cracow and all his papers were lost somewhere.

The artist from St. Petersburg was a member of the Wahl family who, interested in clarifying the affair of their great ancestor, searched and rummaged in libraries and archives in order to demonstrate his lineage.

But it was not only grandchildren who searched the archives. The episode attracted the attention of professional historians in the late nineteenth century and two major monographs were written about Saul Wahl, one in Posen and the other in St. Petersburg. In 1888, the late rabbi of Posen, Dr. Philip Bloch, published an interesting article in the *Zeitschrift der historischen Gesellschaft für die Provinz Posen*. A year later (1889), Prof. Bershadski published on the same topic in *Voskhod*.

Bloch had no sources and the crux of his article was a rationalistic explanation of the legend. Bershadski, by contrast, had examined documents and offered the first picture (though very faint) of the real Saul Wahl to appear in the historical literature.

Much research since then, using various archives, has made it possible for us to illuminate the episode more brightly. Even though we are still very far from being able to present a portrait of Saul Wahl that is clear and reliable in every detail, today we have a picture of the hero of the charming royal legend and are beginning to understand how much of it is truth, and how much fantasy.

II

The Legend

(1)

Saul was the son of the famous Rabbi Samuel Judah Katzenellenbogen, the head of the rabbinical court in Padua. Everyone knows that he received the name "Wahl" because he was elected (Yiddish *vayl'n* from the German *wählen*, to elect) king of Poland. He was elected unanimously by the Polish nobility.

It happened this way:

Reb Saul was well-liked and much esteemed by the nobles, because he was learned and very smart. In those days the king of Poland died suddenly and the nobles had to elect a successor immediately. There was a law in Poland that when it came time for the election, if a particular date had been set for the election it was absolutely forbidden to postpone it. The day came when the nobles assembled from the four corners of Poland and pitched their tents in the field, about four versts (slightly more than 2.5 miles) from Warsaw, and began to discuss the candidates. Afternoon arrived and then evening, and they were still not able to reach a consensus. They were alarmed that they might not be break the law about the designated election day, so as night fell the nobles decided to name Reb Saul king for the nonce – until they could select the right candidate. And so it was. They summoned Reb Saul, seated him on the Polish throne, and all the nobles and clergy made obeisance to him and cried aloud in Polish: "Long live the king! Long live the king!" Presently they brought the great book of privileges, and Reb Saul proceeded to write down in his own hand various decrees to benefit the Jews.

The night passed, the nobles ate and drank, and Reb Saul wrote and signed. The next morning the nobles reached agreement, elected the proper king, and Reb Saul stepped down from the throne and returned to being a prince in Israel.

(2)

The question arises: How could a Jew attain such a dignity in Poland? How, in fact, did Reb Saul come to Poland in the first place, if his father was a rabbi in Padua and Venice?

It was this way: Reb Saul was a curious young man who had a yen to travel through various countries and learn about their customs. He set out on his journey, over hills and dales, until he reached Lithuania, where he settled in the town of Brisk. Here he married the daughter of Reb David Drucker and lived with his wife and children in straitened circumstances. Around that time the richest nobleman in the country, Prince Radziwiłł, made a pilgrimage to Eretz Israel to pray at the graves of the saints and do penance for his sins. He returned home through Italy and found himself short of funds. So as not to be humiliated among his peers, the prince turned not to noblemen but to the rabbi and acquainted him with his distress. Rabbi Samuel Judah gladly loaned the prince a large sum of money and would not hear any thanks whatsoever. Before he continued his journey Prince Radziwiłł ask the rabbi whether he had any relatives in Poland. When he heard that the rabbi's son lived in Poland he made haste to write down his name and in fact did not forget him. When he reached Brisk he gave orders to summon the young man and showered him with largesse. From then on luck was with Reb Saul until he reached the royal throne.

(3)

When a Jew is rich and important and has entree with the nobles and even the king, he also accumulates enemies. This happened to Reb Saul as well. Jews in Brisk became envious and searched for ways to harm him. Informing against him did not help, nor were they able to harm his business interests. Their envy and hatred intensified and almost caused a catastrophe. Reb Saul's enemies, who knew that he had a beautiful daughter, made sure to make the royal officials aware of this when they were looking for a suitable match for the king, who had been widowed.

Hannah – that was the girl's name – delighted the courtiers, and she was also a princess, so right away the night was fixed when they would abduct her from her father's house and bring her to the royal palace in Warsaw.

But one nobleman, who was Reb Saul's friend, warned him in advance. The latter decided to marry the girl off at once. It was clear that no one would dare offer the king a married woman.

But where could he find an appropriate groom on the spur of the moment? In those days the rabbi of Brisk was the well-known sage Rabbi Zalman Schor, the author of the book *Tevu'os Shor*, a Jew of sixty, who had just been widowed. Reb Saul revealed the secret to this rabbi and made him swear to marry the girl as soon as possible. The rabbi did as Reb Saul asked and even had a son, who was later known as a great scholar and sage, by his young wife.

*

This, in brief, is the content of the legend, as it was written down in the early eighteenth century by the rabbi of Leipnik. As is known, legends never stagnate but develop more and more. Every teller, every grandfather and every grandmother embellish it and add their own and other people's tales, resolving various questions and interweaving the legend with other legends that were originally told in various places about various people.

The fate of all legends also affected the legend about Reb Saul Wahl. The moment it exceeded the bounds of common sense and people stopped being concerned with historical truth or historical possibility, it was soon inflated with accounts of miracles and wonders. And as the

story became more wonderful and unbelievable, it became more charming and better-suited to the common folk, and gave greater satisfaction to the descendants of that "Polish king."

For example, someone seeks to explain why Prince Radziwiłł suddenly wanted to make a pilgrimage to Eretz Israel. He recounts a long story about the prince's grave sins and his intention to repent in his old age. Another person knows nothing about the pilgrimage and merely recounts that Radziwiłł had journeyed to the pope in Rome, from which he came directly to Padua.

The scene in the rabbi's house, too, is presented in diverse ways. Some tell that the prince came to the rabbi dressed in royal garb so that he would know that a great nobleman stood before him. Others say that Radziwiłł stood before the rabbi's house in rags and tatters (he was, after all, a penitent); but when a gust of wind blew off his filthy tunic Rabbi Samuel Judah saw an expensive crucifix on the man's bare chest and at once concluded that he was a great nobleman in disguise.

Others associate the rabbi's meeting with Prince Radziwiłł with a story about a blood libel and tell how the rabbi took advantage of the meeting to prove to his visitor that the Jews had no need for blood.

The story about the daughter, too, is recounted in different ways by different narrators. Even her name varies. One teller calls her Hannah, others Hindele or even Hennele. Thus the legend grows longer and wider until no one can imagine what form it will take in future generations and what it will sound like centuries from now.

But history cannot wait until the legend has turned into a splendid edifice. History and legend – truth and fantasy – are fierce enemies. As the legend moves farther away from the truth, from the right time and the right place, the historian seeks to restore it to the place from which it grew, so that he can research and inquire precisely, to the extent possible, pruning it of spurious branches that have been grafted onto it over the years by the fertile imagination of hundreds of minds and present it as it truly was, in the place where it took place and the time when it transpired.

When we come to study this legend from that perspective, we must ask as follows: (1) Was there ever really a man named Saul Wahl? (2) If so, who was he? (3) Where and when did he live? (4) Was he a king? (5) What is the truth about Prince Radziwiłł? (6) What is the value of the book *Gedullat Shaul?*

III

The Historical Figure

Two Hebrew sources from the period in which Reb Saul is supposed to have lived mention his name: (1) a letter from the famous rabbi and author Leone (Judah Aryeh) Modena to Rabbi Phinehas Horowitz in Cracow; (2) a plaque affixed to the women's gallery of the synagogue in Brisk, dating from before the time when Czar Nicholas I (reigned 1825–1855) ordered the destruction of the synagogue to erect a fortress in its place.

In the letter, Reb Saul is called "the prince, our honored teacher Rabbi Saul Katzenalbogen"; on the plaque he is referred to as "the chief, Reb Saul son of the sage our teacher Samuel Judah of Padua."

In state sources, that is, various documents that survive from the time, he is referred to simply as Saul Judycz (Judah's son); it was only his son, the rabbi of Brisk, who signed his name "Meir Wahl."

Reb Saul Katzenellenbogen was, as stated, the son of the rabbi of Padua, Rabbi Samuel Judah, and the grandson of Rabbi Meir of Padua. This grandfather Rabbi Meir was a German Jew (originally from the town of Katzenellenbogen in Nassau) who spent his youth at the great yeshivas of Poland and only then moved to Italy, where he married the daughter of the rabbi of Padua, Rabbi Abraham Halevi Minz, and eventually succeeded to his position in the rabbinate of that town.

After Rabbi Meir died he was succeeded in the rabbinate by his son, Rabbi Samuel Judah, who held it until his death in the year 1597.

As can be seen, Poland with its yeshivas was very well known in the Katzenellenbogen family, so it is no wonder that Rabbi Samuel Judah sent his son there. What is more, Reb Saul was not the only one in that age who made his way to that country. In those years there was a significant migration of Italian and Turkish (Sephardi) Jews to Poland. This wave included physicians and merchants who established entire communities in Cracow and Lemberg. All the personal physicians of the kings of Poland (Solomon Ashkenazi, Solomon Califari, and others) and of the landowners (Joseph Solomon Rofe [i.e., the physician] of Candia [Crete]) came from southern countries. A fairly large colony of Sephardim, who carried on a lively trade in Greek wine and fruit, developed in the town of Zamość, with the protection of the well-known Polish magnate Prince Jan Zamojski. The young Reb Saul migrated to Poland along with many other Sephardim and reached Brisk. In those days Brisk was the largest Jewish community in Lithuania and also the site of the largest yeshiva. We still do not know particulars of his life from that time. What we do know is that he married the daughter of Reb David Drucker (her name was Deborah) and that they had eleven children.

Evidently Reb Saul did not stay with his Gemara for long, but soon turned to commerce, and in a big way. In Lithuania there was an old tradition of Jewish merchant princes, as well as excise men, tax farmers, toll collectors, mintmasters, and the like. In the time of King Sigismund I (1506–1548) we know of a Jew, Abraham son of Joseph (Abraham Jan Ezofovich), who was court banker and, after being baptized, even became the royal treasurer. His brother Michael son of Joseph, who did not convert to Christianity, was also a court banker. In the time of King Sigismund Augustus, too, the Jew Abraham Borodavka held the concession for the Lithuanian mint.

Our Reb Saul was another merchant on this scale. His business dealings with noblemen and the state were well known. Lithuanian state documents are full of diverse agreements that he concluded concerning forests, salt, customs, tolls, and so on. In 1578 the production of salt was resumed in Lithuania. The salt pan was in the town of Keidan, and Reb Saul was the lessee. His secretaries sat in the factory and supervised the packing of the salt in barrels and its transport along the Bug and Vistula rivers to Warsaw, Toruń, and Danzig. Reb Saul conducted this business for two years, since it is recorded that on March 20, 1580, it passed into the hands of three other Jews from Brisk.

Because he knew about the salt business, Reb Saul got involved in the famous salt mine in Wieliczka near Cracow. Its revenues accrued to the governor of Cracow, Pioter Zborowski,

for whom the business was managed by a Jew named Jonah, the son-in-law of Queen Bona's famous personal physician, Samuel son of Meshullam. Reb Saul became a partner in this business and developed it energetically. Under his direction salt production became so cheap that it was economically worthwhile to transport it on the Vistula to Stężyce and from there by horse to Brisk and the Lithuanian depots. For their efforts the partners took 20 groschen for every 15 barrels. While he was in Cracow (there was no Jewish community in Wieliczka), Reb Saul did not neglect his old business in Brisk and continued to farm all the revenues of the governor *(starosta)* of Brisk, such as the income from tollbooths, rivers, mills, distilleries, breweries, wineries, and the like.

In a lease dated February 11, 1588, king Sigismund III records the following:

At the recommendation of our great landowners and governors, who have greatly praised the honesty of the Jew of Brisk, Saul Judycz, who in the reigns of our glorious predecessors on the Polish-Lithuanian throne brought much money into the royal treasury, by his intelligence, integrity, and ability, and in particular in matters of taxes and tolls, . . . and as a sign of gratitude we convey to him for 10 years the lease of the revenues from our fortress in Brisk.

The actual conduct of the major enterprises required a large measure of intelligence and tact, and especially in light of the fact that Reb Saul's secretaries and tellers and all of his people were Jews, whereas most of those who paid were Christians, some of them noblemen. From time to time disputes broke out between his employees and various landowners. In Brisk Reb Saul found himself opposed by the bishop of Luck, whose word was decisive in religious matters and who dissuaded the Christians from purchasing brandy from the distilleries and ordered them not to pay customs duty at the tollbooths and city gates. This priest caused Reb Saul much grief; his business partner, a certain Reb Joseph, suffered even more. But Reb Saul always found a way out. He had great influence with the large landowners. And because this affair involved the revenues of the royal exchequer, he won most of the cases and became even more powerful than before. King Stefan Batory (1576–1586) esteemed him greatly, and his successor, Sigismund III, who was no great lover of the Jews, also benefitted from Saul's services and gave him the highest title that a Jew could obtain in those days, that of *servus regis* or royal servant.

The decree promoting him to his new rank was recorded, along with many other important documents and grants of privilege, in the so-called *Lithuanian Metryka* (register), still to be found in the state archives in Vilna, and from which it was printed in the first volume of the *Akty Iuzhnoi i Zapadnoi Rossii* (Documents of Southern and Western Russia), number 190. In the decree published on June 7, 1589, the king writes, in archaic high-flown Ukrainian:

Whereas we have seen the devoted work and the rare diligence of our subject, the Jew from Brisk Saul Judycz, we grant him the title of our servant, so that he may be aware of our great favor toward him. At the same time we release his own person, as well as all of his chattels and property, from the jurisdiction of all feudal, municipal, or rural officials, with no distinction of who they are and to which class they belong. . . . By this letter we have made him and his free and exempt from all officials, and we release him and make him free until his death, that is: he has no obligation to appear or make any response on any matter, great or small, whether regarding torts or fines, before any person or any judge, in any town or any province. It is also forbidden to seize or impound any of his belongings, houses or money; his person, too, is immune to arrest or seizure, judgment or punishment. And to us alone, his lord, is he

obligated to account for his actions and only our court of law is permitted to summon him to appear before it. . . .

*

This is the decree about Reb Saul and the letters patent to which his descendants refer. When we examine this royal document and compare its content to similar writs from that period we see at once that there is nothing unusual about it. As early as the time of Sigismund I, similar privileges were granted to the well-known court bankers and customs collectors Abraham Bohemus and Ephraim Fishel son of Moses and to the chief rabbis Moses son of Ephraim Fishel and Shalom Shakhna. During the reigns of Sigismund Augustus and Stefan Batory they were granted to the jeweler Jacob Ezra of Cracow, to Isaac son of Nachman of Lemberg, and others. All of these privileges use the same formula: the king releases the Jew from the jurisdiction of all judges and forbids any violation of his property.

From this it may be seen that the privilege that Jews of that time esteemed so highly (and still esteem today) was granted by the king not so much to benefit the Jew as to benefit himself and the state assets. In those insecure times no Jew could be secure in his person or property. He might readily fall into the hands of some landowner who could quite "legally" harm him or make him wretched. Because these rich Jews were in possession of royal property, they received these titles and "iron letters" so that this property would not be lost.

It is understandable that a letter of this sort conferred honor and was a great benefit to a Jew in his personal and public dealings. The standing of such a Jew in his own community, and even among all the Jews of Poland, was significant. The Jews were proud of this royal servant who could appear before kings and princes and need fear no one.

*

The rich and powerful Reb Saul, the prosperous merchant and court Jew, became an important magnate in his community and among all the Jews of Lithuania. As head of the Brisk community he conducted a case that lasted for years against the local magistrate, visiting various estate owners, seeking and receiving protection from judges, and endeavoring to obtain needed information from the archives. For hundreds of years the Brisk community had been associated with a quarter of all the city's revenues, such as, for example, from the wax foundry, from the municipal scales and balances, and from the sheep-clipping establishment. King Sigismund I confirmed the privileges in 1529, but two years later the townspeople persuaded him to revoke them. From that time the Jews of Brisk did everything they could to win back their privileges. The case dragged on for nearly 50 years. Reb Saul renewed the suit and, by a decree of February 10, 1580, King Stephan Batory appointed a commission to resolve the dispute. On March 14 the members of the commission (Ostapej Wolowich, the Lithuanian chancellor; Nikolai Patz, the governor (starosta) of Brisk and Kobryn; and Adam Poćej, the district judge of Brisk) summoned the representatives of the two parties to appear before them. The Jewish community was represented by several leading householders, headed by Reb Saul, while the Brisk municipality was represented by the burgomaster and several members of the town council.

The townspeople exhibited their privileges. The Jews were in a very precarious situation. The community archives had been destroyed in the great fire of 1568 and it proved almost impossible to obtain copies from the state archives. The case dragged on for a number of years. Ultimately the verdict was that the community was not entitled to a quarter of the city's revenues, but Jews could be tradesmen and artisans.

In 1592 Reb Saul filed a suit against the municipal judge, because he ruled in cases involving Jews and disputes among Jews according to German (Magdeburg) rather than Polish law, thereby causing severe damage to the Jews. King Sigismund III accordingly issued a decree, on October 10, that required judges to rule in the future in disputes involving Jews according to Polish law only. A year later (in 1593) Reb Saul, in the name of the Lithuanian communities and the Jews of Brisk, complained that the governor (starosta) of Brisk was wrongly interpreting the Jews' ancient privileges with regard to the law of torts and was also intervening in disputes among Jews that had nothing to do with him. On June 14, 1593, King Sigismund III published, "at the request of the royal servant Saul Judycz," the correct interpretation of the law, namely, that financial disputes among Jews were to be handled exclusively by Jewish courts.

The Brisk community had all of the privileges that Reb Saul endeavored to resurrect inscribed in the *Summarius* (register) of its acts and requested future kings to ratify what was written there. Among these confirmations we find the following sentence: "Our servant, the Jew from our town of Brisk, Saul Judycz, complained to us, in his own name as well as in the name of all the Jews of Brisk, that. . . ." Subsequent generations emphasized this sentence and always highlighted Reb Saul's great services for the Brisk community and all Jews. Reb Saul's name quickly spread beyond the confines of Brisk and became known throughout the country. When the roof organization of Jewish communities in Poland and Lithuania, known as the Council of the Four Lands, was founded (1581), Reb Saul took an active part in this enterprise. It is true that we have no definite reference to him in Council documents. As is known, its record book has been lost. But his name does not appear in copies from those years, either. There are only two references; namely, the synagogue in Lublin and his son Meir's prominence in the Lithuanian Council.

As long as the Lithuanian communities participated in the Council of the Four Lands their delegates traveled each year to Lublin. There they established their own synagogue (at 12 Podzamcze Street, which is still standing and is known as the "Loyfer-shul"[2] or as Reb Saul Wahl's synagogue. In the absence of documents we cannot prove that it was indeed Reb Saul Wahl who erected this synagogue, or even that he prayed there during the sessions of the Council. One thing is certain: his descendants ran the synagogue for centuries and even today his name is mentioned, as noted above, on Simhat Torah, at the time of the processions with the Torah scrolls.

One can point to the prominence in the Council of his son Reb Meir, who was the son-in-law of the well-known and well-connected Cracow community leader, Rabbi Phinehas Halevi Ish-Horowitz, a relative of Rabbi Abraham ben Shabbetai Sheftel Horowitz and his son Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz.[3] Reb Saul made the match when he was engaged in the salt trade in Wieliczka and was himself living in Cracow. Rabbi Phinehas was a great scholar; his first wife was a granddaughter of the Maharal of Prague and his second wife was the sister of Rabbi Moses Isserles.[4]

The two fathers-in-law, Rabbi Phinehas and Reb Saul, played central roles in Poland and their names spread throughout the world and reached as far as Italy, where people have been telling wondrous tales about Reb Saul.[5]

In those days (1604), all the rabbi's children[6] were forcibly baptized. The unfortunate community sent emissaries all over the world to raise money to ransom the children. When he reached Poland, the emissary Eliezer of Nice immediately met with Rabbi Phinehas in Cracow, who sent him on to Reb Saul in Brisk. With the help of these two leaders he managed to raise the handsome sum of one thousand Rhenish gulden. He thanked them for their help in the letters that he and other Italian rabbis later sent to Poland, asking Rabbi Phinehas "to endeavor along with his in-law, the prince Reb Saul, to collect the rest of the money and send it to Rome, because the distress there is very great."[7]

It is not hard to understand that all doors were open to the son and son-in-law of such men. Meir easily obtained the post of rabbi of Brisk. Even while his father was still alive he had great influence in the councils. He seems to bear major responsibility for the secession of the Lithuanian communities to establish their own council (1623). Meir became president *(parnas)* of this council. No one knows whether he in fact caused the break-up of the Polish-Lithuanian organization in order to obtain this dignity and position.

The following decision is inscribed in the record book of the Council of Lithuania for its first year (1623): "Whereas Rabbi Meir is an old man and cannot travel from the city, it has been decided that as long as he is alive the Lithuanian Council will convene in Brisk. And whereas Rabbi Meir is the linchpin and cornerstone and the eyes of all Lithuania are directed toward him, no person who is his relative or in-law shall be selected to the Council, so that it not be forced to draw lots and exclude Rabbi Meir from sessions."[8]

It was Rabbi Meir who was the first to bear the family name Wahl.[9]

What about his father, Reb Saul? It seems that in his last years he lived peacefully in Brisk. He built a large and handsome synagogue, house of study, and talmud torah, and endowed a large fund to support his relatives.

When this synagogue was razed in 1840, on the orders of Tsar Nicholas I, they discovered the following inscription in the women's gallery: "The chief Reb Saul, son of the sage our teacher Samuel Judah of Padua, built the women's gallery for a sign and testimonial, in memory of his wife Deborah of blessed memory, the pious and righteous woman, daughter of [Reb David Dr]ucker, his memory for eternal life [. . .] [the month of] Teveth in the year [. . .] in her house [. . .]."

According to tradition, Reb Saul died in the year 1617; according to Bershadski, in 1622. His tombstone has never been located.

Conclusion

This, in short, is the portrait of Reb Saul Wahl according to sources available today. We see that he was indeed a prince, a sort of king of Israel, but a wealthy Jew and a "Jewish king" is still quite a distance from king of Poland. For the legend, what was once associated with a play on words is no distance at all, and thus the king in the metaphorical sense ("rich as a king," "happy as a king," "just a king") has become the king of Poland. And once they had taken this step they

had to look for reasons, explanations, clarifications: why Reb Saul became a king. From this emerged all the legends about him, the explanations, and the explanations of explanations.

And here we must remember that in those days in Poland the crown did not pass by inheritance; after a king died all the noblemen elected his successor. And if they were electing, then it was possible to elect even a Jew, a rich and fine Jew! The Jewish legend did not see its hero's Jewishness as an obstacle to his election and thus could elect Reb Saul as king. This was, evidently, the first stage in the development of the legend.

Later narrators were more expert in the domestic situation in Poland and understood that a Jew could not be elected king in the normal fashion. So they added the one-day voting limit, the disagreements among the electors, and the "temporary nature" of the election. In this way Reb Saul became king for one day (one night). This was the second version and stage.

The third stage developed as an answer to the question of why they chose Reb Saul and not some other Jew. This is where the story about Prince Radziwiłł fits in. There indeed lived in Lithuania in those days a prince named Karol Mikołaj Radziwiłł (known as Sierotka – "the orphan"). In 1582–1584 he traveled to Palestine. On his way back through Italy he was robbed and forced to borrow money to cover his expenses. His story was known in Poland, because the prince set it down in four letters which he printed in a Latin book published in Brunsberg in 1601 (Krasinski Library, Warsaw, No. 27,315). In 1603 the same book appeared in German in Mainz (Krasinski library, No. 23,937); later still it came out in Polish and other languages.

This description tells us something about how a legend draws from every side, without distinguishing between what is true and what is not. The prince states explicitly that he and his companions and servants were robbed, and that he looked for a banker in Ancona from whom he could borrow 100 crowns. After great efforts he was directed to the agent of a Venetian merchant, named Quinctilius, with whom he left as a pledge a number of small items (a crucifix, some soil from the Holy Land, a splinter of wood from the True Cross). He had brought these items with him from Palestine and "by luck" he still had them. After difficult negotiations the agent agreed to take the items and loaned the prince a hundred crowns against these pledges.

As we see, the monetary transaction did not take place in Venice or in Padua, but in Ancona. The lender was not a Jew. And the items left in pledge were such that it is difficult to believe that a Jew, and all the more so a rabbi, would want or be willing to take them into his house.

In addition to all this, there is a chronological problem. According to the legend, Reb Saul was a poor young man living in his father-in-law's house until he met the prince. From the documents we learn that as early as 1578 he was a prosperous merchant who conducted large salt deals. But Prince Radziwiłł did not made his pilgrimage to the Holy Land until 1582, was robbed on his way home on March 13, 1584, and returned to his castle in Nieświez on June 7, 1584.

We can sum up as follows:

Reb Saul was a prince and magnate in Israel and had connections with landowners and even with the king. His son Meir, the rabbi of Brisk, inherited great wealth and lineage from his father as well as the memory of his Italian birthplace. They called him, as they did all other Italian Jews, "Włoch," or in German "Wal," from which the surname Wahl developed.

Later generations no longer understood the meaning of the name and sought to derive it from the German word *wählen,* to elect. Then they combined Reb Saul's Jewish title of prince

with the word *Wahl* and the idea of the election of a king, and in this way the wonderful legend we have related was born.

All the other details were added later, in the normal fashion. Thus in 1733 Rabbi Phinehas of Leipnik could tell the true story, which he had heard from his father, and 121 years later (1854) Hirsch Edelmann could publish an entire book about the Jewish king of Poland. This book became holy to Reb Saul's descendants, who bought up all its copies. And then another descendant had the book reprinted, no earlier and no later than 1925.[10]

Evidently even the Great European War could not erase the belief that Reb Saul was indeed king of Poland.

Notes

This essay was published in Mayer Bałaban, 1930, Yidn in Poiln (Jews in Poland), Vilna: Ferlag Boris Kleckin, 17-38.

[1] *Loyfer* ("runners") was the term applied to itinerant furriers who traveled among the villages and fairs, plying their trade. The rich furriers, who owned stores and workshops, had no need to run from place to place.

[2] See above, n. 1.

[3] [The father is known as the Hesed le'Avraham, after one of his best-known books; the son is known as the Shelah, from the initials of the title of his major work, the *Shnei Luhot Habrit*, a halakhic and homiletic tract.]

[4] [The Maharal is Rabbi Judah ben Bezalel Loew (c. 1525–1609), the famous commentator and sage whose name is associated with the legend of the golem. Rabbi Moses Isserles (known as the Rema) was the head of yeshiva in Cracow and great decisor. His most important work is his glosses, summarizing Ashkenazi practice, to the *Shulhan Arukh*, the code of Jewish law.]

[5] When Reb Saul's father, Rabbi Samuel Judah, died, he was eulogized by Leone Modena as follows: "And the sons, for he left a son of whose fame as a leader of his people we have heard, extremely honored" (*Midbar Yehudah*, Venice 1602).

[6] [Thus in Balaban's text: evidently a slip for "the children in Rome," as the immediately following reference to the "unfortunate community" suggests.]

[7] *Hebrew Correspondence of Leone Modena* (Budapest 1906), letters 205–207: "Also to intercede, by means of the prince, our honored teacher Reb Saul Katzenellenbogen (the Lord protect him), his in-law, with the holy community of Brisk, to send the contribution of 1000 Rhenish [gulden] that was contributed to the aforesaid community [Rome]."

[8] Record Book of the Council of Major Communities in Lithuania, No. 68, 1623.

[9] Wahl or val means "Italian"; the "walnut," for example, is called "an Italian nut." In Polish they referred to all Italian Jews as "włoch" (Wetstein, "The Origin of the Name Wahl," *Estreikhishe Vokhenshrift* 1910, Nos. 34–35).

[10] *Gedullat Shaul, Memories, Stories, and Tales about the Rabbi and Sage Rabbi Saul Wahl, who was, according to Tradition, King of Poland*, second edition with the addition of Shevet Mi-yehudah, the genealogical tree of Rabbi Saul Wahl of blessed memory, by his descendant Aryeh Judah-Leib Lipschitz (Warsaw, 1925), with an introduction by Prof. Dr. Meir Bałaban.

CHAPTER VII

ITZIK MANGER – A JEWISH POET AND AUTHOR AS FOLKLORIST

Many authors and poets of the modern age have made major contributions to folklore studies, whether by making European Jewish society more aware of the importance of folklore or by using it in their own works. We have already mentioned the contributions of I.L. Peretz, S. An-Ski, and Hayim Nahman Bialik, each in own way; each of them collected and studied folklore and also based works on it. In Hebrew prose, S. Y. Agnon drew heavily on folktales, although he criticized folklore research that divorced it from the context of Jewish life (Ben Amos 1999, 228–229; Shenhar-Alroy 1989; Bar-Itzhak 2001, 2005).

Folklore was an important source for both the poetry and prose works of Itzik Manger, one of the giants of Yiddish literature in the twentieth century.[1] He also wrote critical essays about its significance for Jewish literature, of which the most important is "Folklore and Literature," presented here in English translation.[2]

Itzik Manger (1901–1969) was born in Czernowitz, Romania. His father, a tailor, was a skilled rhymester; his mother was a talented performer of folksongs and folktales. Manger absorbed a deep love for Jewish folklore from them. He attended the *heder* in Czernowitz, the German-language elementary school in Iași, and the German-language municipal high school (without graduating). Between 1928 and 1938 he lived in Poland, where he wrote many of his poems, a play, and several prose works. In 1939, when World War II broke out, he happened to be in Paris, and later escaped to London. After the war he published two volumes of poetry in which he mourned for the murdered Jews, as well as two literary folktales, "The Adventures of Herschel Summerwind" and "The Poritz's Mustache" (Manger 1961, 350–377). He intended

[1] His major works include: *Shtern of'n dakh* (Stars on the roof) (Bucharest, 1929); *Lamtern in vint* (Lanterns in the wind) (Warsaw, 1933); *Felker zingen* (People sing) (Warsaw, 1936); *Humesh lider* (Bible poems) (Warsaw, 1935); *Megile lider* (Megilla poems) (Warsaw, 1936); *Demerung in shpigl* (Twilight in the mirror) (Warsaw, 1937); *Velvel Zbarzsher shraybt briv tsu Malkaleh der sheyner* (Velvel Zbarsher writes letters to the beautiful Malkaleh) (Warsaw, 1938); *Noente geshtalt'n* (Near images) (Warsaw, 1938); *Dos bukh fun Gan-Eden* (The story of Paradise) (Warsaw, 1939); *Volkens ibern dakh* (Clouds above the roof) (London, 1942); *Hotsmakh shpil* (Hotsmakh play) (London, 1942); *Der shnayder-gezeln Note Manger zingt* (The tailor's apprentice Note Manger sings) (London, 1948); *Medrash Itsik* (biblical poems) (Paris, 1951); *Lid un balade* (Poems and ballads) (New York, 1952); *Noente geshtalt'n un andere shrift'n* (Near images and other writings) (New York, 1961); and the posthumous *Shrift'n in proze* (Prose works) (Tel Aviv 1980).

[2] The volume of his collected prose works (see previous note), from which the present essay is taken, also includes two other pieces on folklore: "Der Hershele Ostropeler anekdot" (The Hershelne Ostropoler joke) (pp. 310–315); first published in *Literarishe bleter* 15 [April 1929]); and "Di khelemer mayses" (The stories of Chelm) (pp. 316–322); first published in *Literarishe bleter* 20 [May 1929]).

to include them in a collection to be entitled *Di naye maysebukh*, but this plan was never realized.[3]

When Manger traveled to Poland in 1948 as the representative of the Jewish Writers' Union he gave vivid expression to the trauma he experienced: "In every other nation, the people make pilgrimages to the grave of the poets; but among the Jews it is the poets who make a pilgrimage to the graves of the people."

In 1951 Manger settled in the United States, where he published his collected poems in *Lid un balade* (1952) and served on the editorial boards of *Der veker, Di goldene keyt,* and *Vogshol.*

Manger visited Israel several times before settling in the country in the last years of his life. He died there in 1969.

As noted, Manger based his literary works on motives, plots, genres, and symbols taken from Jewish folklore.

In his critical essays, too, he insisted on the importance of folklore for modern Jewish literature. He distilled his ideas on the subject in the essay "Folklore and Literature."

The underlying thesis of Manger's "Folklore and Literature" is that a living literature must be firmly rooted in folklore. Folklore is the virgin soil from which literature grows organically. Manger argues further that the history of civilization demonstrates that any attempt to produce literature without a basis in folklore is doomed to failure. This leads to his observation that the greatness of Yiddish literature is inherent in its close attachment to Jewish folklore. Thanks to its bond to Jewish folklore, Yiddish literature never lost its vital link to Jewish life. Its tie to religious folklore survived, too, even when Yiddish literature was strongly anti-religious.

In contrast to Yiddish literature's strong attachment to Jewish folklore, Manger sees Hebrew literature as having deliberately cut itself off from this font of inspiration. Zionism was a powerful movement for national rebirth that linked itself, and not by coincidence, to the language in which the Jewish people's greatest spiritual achievement – the Bible – was written. It was supposed to provide an alternative to the living Jewish folklore of the Diaspora and permit the creation of modern Hebrew literature. But modern Hebrew literature, having detached itself from folklore, cannot be an organic expression of the life of the Jewish people. Manger goes so far as to assert that Bialik was the last Jewish poet to write in Hebrew,[4] because Bialik remained in intimate contact with Jewish folk literature. Hebrew poetry after Bialik divorced itself from the Diaspora and necessarily also from the folklore of the Diaspora; hence it could not express the life of the Jewish people.

Here Manger is a faithful representative of Yiddishism, a secular ideology that saw the Yiddish language as the unifying force of the Jewish people. Because folklore was the domain most closely identified with the Yiddish-speaking masses it came to be used by metonymy for Yiddish culture as whole (see Chapter 1).

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[3] See Manger's afterword to *Noente geshtalt'n un andere shrift'n* (Manger 1961, 516). According to the manuscript of "The Poritz's Mustache," in the Manger archives at the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem, the story is from "*Di naye maysebukh*". This was also stated when it was first published in *Yidishe kultur* (May 1949). The Maysebookh is a collection of Jewish folktales from various sources published in Yiddish in Basel in 1902.

[4] May also be understood as the last Yiddish poet to write in Hebrew.

Folklore in Yiddish was associated with the study of the present. For the Yiddishists, study of the language and of folklore was a means to bond with the people and a prerequisite for fostering a national movement. This ideology, which guided the vast majority of Yiddish authors, is expressed in Manger's main thesis in "Folklore and Literature" and in his radical assertion that Bialik was the last Jewish poet to write in Hebrew.

Another interesting point made by Manger is the link between the genres of folklore and the genres of written literature. The principal genre of a people's folklore determines the genre in which its literature excels. For example, the crowning glory of English folk art is the ballad, which expresses the English people's sensitivity to the dramatic element. In literature this matured into the drama, whose zenith is the plays of Shakespeare.

For Manger, the outstanding genres of Jewish folklore (in Yiddish) are joke and the legend. Jokes and witticisms express the Jews' sensitivity to the humorous element. In Yiddish literature this reached full maturity in the work of Sholem Aleichem. The legend, the Jewish tale of wonder expresses the element of lyrical pathos, the Jewish religious emotion. In written literature this found expression in the work of I. L. Peretz. It is precisely here that modern Yiddish and Hebrew literature come together, for the Hebrew authors, too, have evinced real sensitivity to the romantic and religious motifs of Jewish folklore, and especially the hasidic tale.

Manger also notes the contrast between Jewish folklore as the foundation of Jewish literature and Jewish writers' attraction to foreign elements, what he calls the "alien myth." According to Manger, only if it ignores foreign elements can Jewish literature rediscover the true values of the Jewish people, as embodied in its folklore.

This opposition drawn by Manger cannot stand the test of reality, of course. It is clear that Jewish folklore always drew on the folklore of the nations among whom the Jews lived. And just as Jewish folklore was able to assimilate these foreign elements and Judaize them, so too Jewish literature that draws on alien myths gives them its own unique interpretation.

Let us not forget, though, that the essay appeared in the periodical *Oyf'n Sheydveg* in April 1939. The antisemitic ravings that soon produced the Holocaust were echoing loudly in Manger's sensitive ears. We may assume that they induced him to draw back from everything foreign and to return to the unifying core of Judaism.

Folklore and Literature

Itzik Manger

Modern antisemitism would seem to have put an end, once and for all, to assimilation as a solution of the "Jewish problem," and precisely because it has erupted in such a brutal form in the classical home of the Jewish Enlightenment. The perplexed Jewish intelligentsia searches for a way back, a way back to the lost hallmarks of Judaism, which were once rejected with a maskilic wave of the hand as "backward" or "Asiatic."

To discover and get to know the path of his own people – this is now the dominant tendency and slogan of the Jewish intellectual, both those who are totally assimilated and those who have remained within their own proper domain. In recent decades both groups have tended to emphasize Europe and flung open the gates to outside influences, which at a certain point began to imperil the innate qualities and values of Jewish folk culture.

The first and most important step toward knowing a people depends on knowing the soul of the people. And the outstanding manifestation of a people's soul is found in its folklore.

When the Polish colonel Adam Koc read out his first call to form the Camp of Polish Unity (Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego [OZON]) over Radio Warsaw, the Polish Jewish intelligentsia shivered in dread. This proclamation was nothing less than the first harbinger of the Hitlerian turn in Poland. The Polish Jewish assimilationists let out a deep moan. The magnificent shadows of Mickiewicz and Słowacki began to pale. The illusion of a shared Polish culture folded its wings.

At that moment, what was the reaction of the simple Polish Jew, the Jew who wore a small round cap on his head?

With a bitter smile he asked another Jew: "What did the 'Kotzker' preach today?"

How great is the self-deprecation and irony latent in this question, a sharp Jewish irony.

Heinrich Heine's flirtation with the anemic Lorelei was something that the Nazis could somehow still endure. But his sharp Jewish irony was an infuriating provocation, even in the eyes of the jolly beer-loving German burgher.

You can get to know a people if you turn an ear to what it thinks, sings, dreams, and says. When the great catastrophe came upon the assimilated Jews of Germany, when the brutal cult of the corporal thundered loudly, *Jude, hinaus*! the Jews woke up from their dream of equal rights, from their trance of German culture and began running ...

But they are carrying inside themselves and with themselves a bastard child – a foreign language and alien melody.

And until they totally discard the foreign elements, their way back to the Jewish wellspring will be blocked.

It is a difficult task. Perhaps they will succeed. Perhaps some village *tsaddik* will be able to expel the dybbuk of foreign culture, which keeps declaiming, as they wander from land to land and nation to nation, Lessing's parable of the three rings and Schiller's *Don Carlos*.

The alien characters inside the Jewish folk-soul and its great treasures, the shadows of Krasiński's *Nie-Boska komedia* (Un-divine comedy), and the symbols of Wyspiański's *Wesele* (The wedding), occupy a totally different domain than the figures of the Ba'al Shem Tov and the rebbe of Berdyczew (of holy blessed memory).

I am not denying the beauty of the alien myth. But now, at the present historical moment, when the people need internal solidarity, we must totally forget everything that is foreign in order to discover what is our own, and, thus, ourselves.

Yiddish literature never lost its contact with the life of the Jewish people, and thus with Jewish folklore, not even at the zenith of its achievements.

Is a living literature even possible without a basis in folklore?

The answer is "no," with a capital N.

The best proof of this is modern Hebrew literature, modern Hebrew theater, and the like. The Hebrew-language movement presents the problem in a clear and unadorned fashion: Exile fragmented the Jewish people, linguistically and culturally. Now the pieces must be collected and fused into an organic whole.

Underlying Hebraism there stands Zionism, a powerful movement of national rebirth. The revival of the Hebrew language is a heroic effort to create a synthetic national form that can bring together what exile fragmented and scattered. Zionism is the movement that has raised high, in our days, the standard of Jewish sovereignty. It is no coincidence that it has attached itself to the language that intrinsically embodies the Jewish people's greatest cultural creation – the Bible. It was in this language that Jews lived their lives when they enjoyed political independence. These two symbolic and romantic arguments were sufficient to create a new Hebrew literature and Hebrew culture.

But is this modern Hebrew literature an organic expression of the life of the Jewish people and its folklore?

If I say that Bialik was the last Jewish poet in Hebrew,[1] it might sound like a paradox. But nevertheless it is so. Bialik's intimate contact with Jewish folk song, with the Slavic landscape, the landscape of the exile (his *Shirei ha-horef*), prove this: we encounter the snowy scenes of the Jewish folk poem, the quivering spirit of the Jewish people against a backdrop of Slavic scenery. The only thing missing was for this verse to be song in Yiddish, and then it would have been a classic.

The greatest modern Hebrew poet was stimulated by Jewish folk song. Bialik's intimate contact with Yiddish and with Yiddish folk literature was modern Hebrew literature's last contact with the Yiddish folklore foundations. Hebrew poetry after Bialik has increasingly moved away from the Diaspora and its folklore and has found itself isolated, suspended in midair. The sentiment in this literature comes from the reminiscences of the Bible that are at work within the Hebrew language itself. When confined to the landscape of Eretz Israel, one has a strong feeling of the absence of an organic and creative Hebrew folklore.

The melody, in fact, is borrowed from the Arabs. The Arab melody brings on its wings a surrogate for Hebrew folk poetry. When the Ohel Workers' Theater in Tel Aviv wanted to stage a biblical play, *Jacob and Rachel,* it took the costumes and pantomime from the desert Bedouin. Starting from the assumption that that must indeed be how our ancestors spoke and

moved, the Ohel Theater put on a Bedouin play rather than a Hebrew play, even though the dialogue between Jacob and Rachel was spoken in Hebrew.

The modern Hebrew experiment is not the only attempt in the annals of civilization to develop and maintain a literature without solid foundations in folklore. A prominent classical example is that of Latin poetry, through the time of the Renaissance humanists in Europe.

We cannot deny the poetic merits of late Latin literature. But without the life of the Roman people and its creative expression in folklore, the new Latin literature was and remained hollow.

A living folklore is the rich soil from which a new and authentic literature grows organically. The folklore element is prominent and one can easily discern and touch the positive and negative, the possibilities of this or that national literature.

The crowning glory of English folk art is the ballad. The crowning glory of English literature is the drama. The acute sensitivity to the dramatic element that the English people demonstrated when singing its ballads gradually ripened into great drama and attained its supreme dramatic vision in the work of Shakespeare.

The crowning glory of Jewish folk art is folk humor, the Jewish joke, which has become a byword even among the Gentiles. The acute sensitivity to the humorous element, so prominent in Yiddish folk art, ripened slowly until it reached its acme and classical perfection in the work of Sholem Aleichem.

If we take into account the active heroic role that the English have played in world history and the passive heroic role of the Jews in modern history, we may be able to understand why things happened this way and not another.

Drama is the crippled child of both Hebrew and Yiddish literature. A people with such a dramatic past and such a tragic present has for all that never achieved drama in its own literature.

The Bible presents a large cast of dramatic characters, but to this day not one of them has achieved his denouement, whether in Hebrew literature or in Yiddish literature. The character of Cain the fratricide, the character and tragedy of King Saul, the Hamlet of Jewish history, the Jewish version of the Iphigenia motif in the story of Jephthah's daughter – none of them has yet found its resolution in literature written by Jews.

Jephthah's daughter and Iphigenia are sisters in destiny, but they have not had the same luck. Iphigenia was taken up by the great Greek tragedians and by the classics of German and French literature. But only one author has ever written about Jephthah's daughter – Shalom Asch – who cast her in a stillborn play.

The utter absence of dramatic feeling among the Jews made the ballad form impossible in its folk literature. Even when it comes to the destruction of the Temple – the tragedy of the national downfall – to this very day the people react only in the ancient dirge of the book of Lamentations, that is, with a lyrical elegy.

The affinity between ballad and drama is not my own theory, hanging in the air with no basis in reality. Every people with a sense of drama has ballads as part of its folklore; and in its literature, when that developed, it has drama.

This can be seen among the English, the Germans, the Scandinavian peoples. Only one of the Latin nations has ever produced great drama – authentic and not artificial drama: the Spanish. None of the Slavic peoples created ballads in their folklore, or drama in their literature.

Two main lines can be discerned in Jewish folklore: the lyrical-sentimental and the grotesque-realistic. The lyrical-sentimental line ties in strongly to the Hebrew tradition and the

distant past – wonder tales, legends, Jewish religious ecstasy. The grotesque-realistic element is associated with the folk joke and folk pantomime. The Yiddish romantics move along the first axis: Peretz, Leivick, Ignatoff, and others. Along the other axis we find Goldfaden, Sholem Aleichem, Moshe Leib Halpern, and others.

Yiddish romanticism picked up and elevated the melody and form of the religious folk-soul and of the wonder tale: in Peretz' *Khasidish* (Hasidic tales) and *Folkstimlikhe geshikhten*, in Leivick's *Der Goylem* (The golem) and *Di Geule Komedye* (The redemption comedy), and in Ignatoff's *Vundermayses fun Altn Prag* (Wondertales of old Prague). Yiddish literature has not yet exhausted all of the motifs, characters, and problems traced out by the religious-romantic folklore.

In any case we should state that on the axis of romantic pathos, modern Yiddish literature meets up with Hebrew literature. Modern Hebrew literature, too, has shown a great degree of sensitivity to the romantic-sentimental motifs and melodies that Yiddish folklore traced out, especially the hasidic folktale. Religious folklore in Yiddish embodied a soul-art, a soul-atmosphere, that is as old as the Jewish people itself.

It was in this soulscape that God said of the light that "it was good." Rabbi Isaac Luria and the 36 Hidden Righteous Men wandered through this very same soulscape. And it was in this soulscape that the figure of the Ba'al Shem – the most recent mystical legend in all European folklore – trembled.

Religious folklore in Yiddish has preserved, like a precious gem, prayer, the lyrical monologue *de profundis* of the Jewish soul with the Creator of the universe, from the intimate lyrical resonances of the Psalms through the bizarre complaints of R. Levi Yitzhak of Berdyczew, with their rebellious but pious lyricism.

Yiddish literature could not ignore this vital source. However anti-religious it may have become in certain periods, it kept bumping into this treasury of folklore, which for it is both a living reality and a memory. When he remembers the prayer that his mother murmured while lighting the Sabbath candles, even someone as stern as Mendele Moikher Sforim loses control. The sober man of the Enlightenment and satirist is overtaken by lyrical exaltation. He has discovered that the woman's prayer in Yiddish is an ocean of love – not only for her family, but also for the whole people, for the whole world.

Both the Jew and the human being are revealed in the religious folktale. It was by virtue of this recognition, too, that Peretz the artist was saved.

Not everything drawn by the romantic-sentimental vein of Jewish folklore has been taken over by modern Yiddish literature. But whenever Yiddish literature returns to this wellspring, it has a Columbus feeling and discovers new motifs, symbols, and beauties.

The other line traced by Jewish folklore, for itself and for Yiddish literature, has a totally different character. This is a more worldly line that has almost nothing in common with tradition. This is the anti-sentimental line, the line of realism – if not slightly, realism on the verge of the grotesque and fantastic, like the Jewish condition during the last few hundred years. This division of Jewish folklore is humming with clowns and fools, with pranks and biting remarks, with curses, with wordplay, with jests and jibes, with play and frivolity.

The truth is that in this division of Jewish folklore, too, there are strong and pious accents: in the love song of the tailor's daughter, in the family song, in the lullabies and children's songs, and so on.

The synthesis of *Purimspil* and folksong created the Yiddish theater: the combination of "*Rozhinkes mit mandlen*" with "*Tsingentang*"; a wanton masquerade plus a pious Jewish folk milieu. Yiddish folk theater rose on the broad foundations of folklore. But, from the time of Goldfaden on, the farther it has moved away from its folklore underpinnings, the worse it has become.

But these foundations exist and it is always possible to return to them. The roots of Sholem Aleichem lie deep in the Jewish folk anecdote. The anecdotes and witticisms add charm and something special to Sholem Aleichem's works.

If Peretz can be seen as the highest expression of the romantic-sentimental line, then Sholem Aleichem is the highest artistic expression of the grotesque-realistic line.

What is this grotesque?

Listen to the words of the simple Jewish man of the people: "Ich bin gegangen, bin ich" (I am gone, am I).

In this mode of speech one can hear the strange and distinctive leap over the comma.

Sholem Aleichem captured the way simple Jews talk and their tendency to monologue. The monologue by its very nature is theatrical, but not dramatic. Thematically Sholem Aleichem is rooted in the Jewish way of life, that is, in Yiddish folklore. In his forms of expression he is the classic representative of the underlying realistic and grotesque folklore. The rabbi of Chelm is the prototype of Rabbi Yosef'l of Kasrilevke. "Der Farkishefter Shnayder" (The enchanted tailor) is built on a tale of Chelm. And so on. Every organic literature must rest on a substratum of folklore, that is, on a living nation, and resolve the problems, motifs, and characters that the people conceived and depicted in its art.

An example of the highest artistic perfection and organic rootedness in the art of his own people can be found in Goethe's most mature work, *Faust*. The Faust motif, of course, comes from German folklore. In the Middle Ages the German people began whispering about the miracle-working magus Doctor Johannes Faustus, who had sold his soul to the devil. This motif found its ultimate perfection in Goethe's masterwork.

But what is remarkable is that the great German poet understood not only the folk motifs, but also the forms used by German folklore. The dialogues in *Faust* are written in the so-called *knüttel* (doggerel) stanza – the same stanza form in which German carnival-players improvised their Shrovetide farces. The lyrical intermezzos of the great tragedy of Faust, the songs of Gretchen and the others, are written in the tone and style of the German folksong.

Here folk art and genius have fused into one entity, with help from each other.

This short essay is meant to emphasize the esthetic and national function of Jewish folklore. For a periodical that has set itself the goal of illuminating Jewish problems in breadth and depth, this problem of folklore and literature is quite important, chiefly from the national and cultural perspective. This essay merely hints at this problem.

Notes

This essay was first published in *Oyf'n sheydveg* 1 [Paris, April 1939], 167-174. It is included in *Shriften in Prose* 1980, Tel-Aviv, 327-334.

[1] [May also be understood "Bialik was the last Yiddish poet in Hebrew".

AFTERWORD

As the first chapter makes clear, the materials they collected constitute the major achievement of the pioneers of Jewish folklore studies and ethnography in Eastern Europe. This is typical of the early years of folklore research among other peoples as well. Their vast collections remain raw material of unsurpassed importance for the study of Jewish folklore in Eastern Europe; this makes it essential to translate them and make them accessible to future generations.

Nevertheless, as I have endeavored to show throughout this volume, the trailblazing Jewish folklorists in Eastern Europe made major theoretical contributions as well.

They dealt with many areas and genres: folk narrative of various types, folksongs, humor and jokes, religious beliefs and customs, folk medicine, folk art and material culture, and the interplay between folklore and history and between folklore and literature.

Most of the research questions they posed continue to engage scholars today: what distinguishes the Jewish folk literature from the folk literature of other nations? What methods can be used to study Jewish ethnopoetics? How should fieldwork be conducted? What is the universal foundation of folk beliefs and customs? What contribution can ethnography make to the study of Jewish history and culture in general? Can there be a viable literature that does not draw on the substratum of folklore?

The answers supplied by the pioneers, each in his or her own field, remain relevant today and can serve as building blocks for future research.

An-Ski coined the term "Jewish ethnopoetics," which has become central to the study of folk literature. The ethnographic expedition he headed and the life-cycle questionnaire it employed have served as the model for much subsequent ethnographic research, including projects conducted in Israel, such as those in Beit She'an and Shelomi (Bar-Itzhak 2008b). Cahan emphasized the importance of the comparative study of folksongs and their universal elements. He wrote about the importance of context and performance, an approach that has become a fulcrum of modern folklore studies, and about the difference between folksongs and popular songs. Druyanow discerned what was unique about Jewish humor and joke as opposed to European joke. He defined Jewish joke as "intellectual midrash" and classified Jewish jokes by the topics they address. Regina Lilienthal catalogued the folk beliefs and customs of Polish Jews using methods that focus on their universal elements, as was standard in folklore studies in her generation. But she also pointed out the importance of classical Jewish texts – the Bible, Talmud, and medieval literature – for understanding the folk beliefs and customs of Polish Jews. Meir Balaban emphasized the importance of ethnography and folklore, especially folk art, material cultural, and folk legends, for historical and cultural research into the Jews of

Eastern Europe. Itzik Manger highlighted folklore as the wellspring of Yiddish literature. We cannot understand Yiddish literature and the unique character of each work, he maintained, if we do not identify the folklore infrastructure – motifs, topics, and symbols – as well as the main genres of this folklore, legends, and jokes, which spawned the works of great authors such as Sholem Aleichem, I. L. Peretz – and, we could certainly add, Itzik Manger himself.

By the nature of things, not everything these pioneers wrote can be accepted by modern scholarship, and I have noted such points during the course of the discussion: "every generation and its expositors, every generation and its scholars."[1] But, to cite Berl Katzenelson: "A generation that innovates and creates does not cast the legacy of generations into the trash." The contributions of the earliest students of Jewish folklore in Eastern Europe still deserve recognition and appreciation today.

[1] BT Sanhedrin 38b, Avodah Zarah 5a.

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