



Reading *Hahazanim*

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One of the wonders of *'Ir umeloah* is Agnon's creation of a narrator who can curate the memory of Buczacz over a period of several centuries. The nearly 150 stories in this volume represent the most ambitious project Agnon undertook in the years between the end of World War Two and his death in 1970. To provide coherence to this epic cycle of stories, Agnon fashioned a narrator-chronicler who is the reader's guide to this ancestral world. The narrator is a man of Buczacz who shares the religious norms of the society he is chronicling but stands at somewhat of a distance. His conspicuous endowment is his omniscience: He knows the intimate thoughts of a lowly shamash in the middle of the seventeenth century as well as the text of a letter of rabbinical appointment a century later. He confirms the reliability of his authority by acknowledging the small details he is not sure of, whether, for example, a traveler paid 12 or 15 coins for a particular inter-city carriage ride at the end of the eighteenth century. The temporal range of his knowledge is similarly magically comprehensive. Although he knows about the extermination of the

Jews of Buczacz in World War Two, he narrates the events of earlier centuries from the point of view of a close contemporary. Above all, the narrator is in charge of the executive organization of the narrative, meting out by the yard the representational coverage allotted to each character and incident, and all the while offering justifications for abbreviating the account of certain plot events and lavishing generous digressions upon others.

Fashioning this narrator required Agnon to make some significant renunciations. One of the most fertile and most familiar modes of Agnon's classic mature style is based on what Arnold Band called the "dramatized ego." A story is typically told in the voice of, or from the point of view of, a middle-aged religious writer very much like Agnon himself, or even, in the case of *Oreah natah lalun*, one who bears his name. Agnon's willingness to leverage his own persona for ironic and even parodic purposes was one of his greatest strengths as a writer. Yet these kinds of reflexive, narcissistic entanglements no longer served when it came to the task of chronicling the spiritual history of Buczacz in periods far removed from Agnon's time. For the same reason, Agnon could not have recourse to a less ironic mode of relatedness to the immediate past that had served him well in such stories as *Hamitpaḥat* and *Shenei zugot*: the sensibility of the child—again very much like the persona of the young author—who savors the grace of family love within the bosom of an enchanted religious world. In both cases the involvement with self had to be put aside in favor of a narratorial stance marked by impersonality and anonymity.

How Agnon constructs the narrator of *'Ir umelo'ah* is not merely a technical question; it goes to the essence of the master's most innovative and ambitious undertaking of his later years. During that period, which we might call "late Agnon," Agnon is busy revising earlier works, compiling thematic anthologies (*Atem re'item*, *Sefer, sofer, sipur*), rethinking the years of his German sojourn (*'Ad henah*, *Beḥanuto shel Mar Lublin*), and writing more stories in the high modernist mode of *Sefer hama'sim* (*Edo ve'enam*, *'Ad olam*). The one project that was a wholly new departure was a cycle of some 150 stories about Buczacz that were written during the 1950s and 1960s. The majority of the

stories were published in *Ha'aretz* during the author's lifetime; all the stories were gathered and arranged according to Agnon's instructions by his daughter Emunah Yaron and published in a single volume in 1973 as *'Ir umelo'ah*. What was new about the project was obviously *not* the fact that its subject was Buczacz. Agnon had been writing about his hometown—often dubbed Shibbush, an inversion of Buczacz— from many different perspectives throughout his career. But the murder of the Jews of Buczacz by the Nazis and their Ukrainian helpers in the spring of 1943 marked a fateful boundary. Agnon had already anatomized the physical decimation and spiritual decline of Buczacz in the aftermath of World War One in *Oreah natah lalun*; the finality and totality of what occurred during the next destruction required Agnon to undertake a fundamental rethinking of his relationship to the ancestral world represented by Buczacz. What of this complex, titanic, centuries-old civilization is it most important to remember? Given his age, Agnon must have understood that this was his last chance to answer this question. And given his self-identification as the only real link between the classical past and the renascent world of Israeli-Hebrew letters, he likely did not view himself as free to desist from taking up the challenge.

The choices Agnon made are implicit in the composition of *'Ir umelo'ah*. Fundamental was the decision to avoid the modern period and focus on the two centuries following the Khmel'nitsky Massacres of 1648. This was the period when, as the book's narrator tells us repeatedly, "Buczacz was Buczacz," that is to say, when the town was truly a *qehilah qedoshah* living under the sway of Jewish law and learning. The removal of the focus from the present made another fundamental point: On Agnon's watch the memory of East European Jewry would not become fused with catastrophe and atrocity as had become the case with the emerging "Holocaust literature." Within this more remote timeframe, Agnon made further choices to delimit his subject matter. From among the many aspects of a complex society, Agnon—not unexpectedly— chose to make worship and study the norms around which the larger world of Buczacz would be constellated. *'Ir umelo'ah* begins with a description of the synagogues and study houses of the town and their functionaries and then

proceeds to an accounting of the great rabbis and scholars who served the community. The stories contain a wealth of attention to political, economic and even criminal events and forces, but these matters are always presented in their relationship to the privileged norms of worship and study.

The pronounced specificity of the information presented in *'Ir umelo'ah* is the sign of another critical choice: The world of Galician Jewry can be adequately rendered only by a radical allegiance to one place. It is the delimited anatomization of Buczacz that enables the town to stand for a whole civilization. As Dublin was to Joyce, Bucacz was to Agnon. Another key decision was to insist on fiction as the medium for engaging the lost ancestral past as opposed to a spectrum of other, more documentary, modalities such as yizker bikher, anthologies of historical sources, ethnographic or folklore studies, and memoirs. *'Ir umelo'ah*, to be sure, contains a certain amount of concrete information about the customs and institutions of Buczacz. But the core of the book is a series of stunning short stories that we as modern readers unhesitatingly identify as fiction, even if the book's narrator presents them as truthful chronicles. Camouflage is in fact central to the book's enterprise, and the traditionalist conventions of the narrator's discourse have kept many readers from seeing the way in which Agnon refused to put away his modernist toolkit when he undertook this project. And finally back to the critical role of the narrator. In the enterprise of reimagining the lost ancestral world, the narrator is Agnon's gatekeeper. It is he who mediates the relationship between us, the modern readers, and Galician Jewry centuries ago and shapes the attitudes we adopt toward this remote world.

It is my hope that this general introduction to the ambitions and poetics of *'Ir umelo'ah* will help to explain why "Haḥazanim" is such a fascinating story. The placement of the story, to begin with, is important. The story comes early in Book One of *'Ir umelo'ah*; after the synagogues and study houses of Buczacz have been described, the account of the various *qelei qodesh* begins: first the hazanim and then the gabbaim, and later on the rabbanim. When it comes to the hazanim, the narrator emphasizes the dynastic continuity of the incumbents of that office. It is the many generations of the Wernick family, descendents of R.

Yitzhak Wernick, who have led the congregation in prayer, delighted bridegrooms at their weddings, and enlivened circumcision ceremonies. The narrator similarly emphasizes the deep continuity in the sacred music of Buczacz, whose traditions loyally hark back to the customs of the town's founders, who came from the Rhineland Valley of Germany. Each *hazan* in this chain of tradition may have introduced some new melodic setting of his own and by which he is known; but the innovation remains an ornament in a fabric of tradition that has been carefully preserved. In chronicling these continuities, the narrator is documenting and manifesting the normative thrust of *'Ir umelo'ah*. Here is a world he is happy to show that is at one with the norms of worship and study.

Here is a world, however, that *also* contains instances of rupture and deviance, and the narrator, the responsible chronicler that he is, is not free to disregard them. Yekutiel, the eldest son of R. Yitzhak Wernick, loses his voice and cedes his office to his younger brother Eliah. Eliah's wife, Miriam Devorah, is herself a gifted composer of liturgical music and folk songs; but because she is a woman her talents are largely demeaned and disregarded, and she dies an early death from melancholy. Her children are raised by a good woman who insists that the boys become businessmen rather than professional *hazanim* so they will not be dependent on the community. Thus by the end of the story, most of the norms cherished by the narrator—continuity, succession, individual fulfillment within the tradition—have been subverted or come to naught, along with, at the center, a kind of gruesome, prolonged suicide. It is precisely here, in the disheartening and dispirited gap between norm and deviation, that the fictive tissue of *'Ir umelo'ah* is generated. Agnon's narrator is duty bound to relate these deviations and to explain them as best he can, and from this duty comes the need to imagine the characters' motives and their inner thoughts, that is, to tell a story that is more than a chronicle.

Before turning toward the story itself, there is one remaining general question to be asked: Who is the implied audience/reader for this and the other stories of *'Ir umelo'ah*? Although this is a perplexing issue in Agnon's work as a whole, and one not sufficiently investigated, it has special poignancy because of

the avowed purpose of the book, stated in large letters in a special declaration following the title page, to make known “to our children who will come after us that our city was a city full of Torah, wisdom, love” before its destruction. But this explicitly stated audience is not necessarily the same as the audience that is implied—projected and created, really—by the discourse of the narrator. That narrator, as we have seen, does not speak in the language of the generations to come but rather in the language of “Buczacz when it was Buczacz,” that is, within the world of the tradition, even if he stands a little above and a little to the side. So although he knows about the Holocaust, he does not have accessible to him—or he does not avail himself of—modern explanatory frameworks for understanding human experience. Take the example of Miriam Devorah’s *marah sheḥorah* in our story. Whereas we might call her illness clinical depression resulting from social and gender marginalization, the story’s narrator, operating within the norms of the society he is writing about, relies on a premodern repertoire of explanations, including the evil eye, demons, and the doctrine of *gilgul nefashot*. We can now better understand the ironic manipulation Agnon has contrived for us. He provokes us into savoring the gap between the behaviors described by the narrator and the limitations of the traditional explanations the narrator adduces for them.

Before understanding Miriam Devorah’s problem, it’s important to understand her gift. The daughter of a ḥazan and the wife of a ḥazan, she outshines them on several scores. She not only has a voice that matches her father’s in quality but she possesses a capacity for original musical composition that goes beyond anything attested in the region. Other ḥazanim may at best become known for the musical setting of one particular prayer, whereas others, like her brother-in-law Yekutiel, have “never altered a single received melody, not to mention coming up with one on their own” (p. 70). Miriam Devorah, on the other hand, produces original compositions in several genres of sacred music (היא חיברה ניגונים חדשים לתפילות ולפיוטים, ובייחוד לפרשת החודש) as well as composing original folk songs in Yiddish, one of which the narrator produces from memory on pages 72-73. The provocation she presents, then, is twofold. Not only is she

a woman who makes her voice heard within the male precincts of liturgy, but she presumes, abundantly, to compose original material in a way that implicitly challenges the allegiance Buczacz prides itself in to the ancient traditions brought by the founders from Ashkenaz. Her liturgical melodies, in any case, are not performed because they are perceived to have about them the whiff of a woman's voice (ניכר בהם קול אשה). As a halakhic concept, *qol eshah*, of course refers only to the performance of music by a woman and not to its composition by a woman. But in their zeal—and, we would say, their misogyny—the men of Buczacz take the injunction to an unmandated further step.

Miriam Devorah's gift is disruptive in two additional ways. Because of her early death, her sons are raised by a step mother who steers them away from depending on the community for their livelihood as professional *ḥazanim*; and so the generations-long hold of the Wernick family on the office of *hazan* is broken. On the level of the narrator's mission within *'Ir umeloah* as a whole, Miriam Devorah's case impedes the business of chronicling the succession of the town's religious professionals, an account in which women would seem to play no part, until, of course, they do. Her story is thus a necessary diversion from the main road, or put it in the terms used above, a deviation from the norm.

I count five different explanations offered to account for Miriam Devorah's affliction.¹ Their order of occurrence in the story is significant, as is the matter of who presents them. The first is offered by her own father R. Nissan, who travels from a neighboring village where he serves as *hazan* in order to dispel her melancholy. To amuse her and lift her out of her funk, he uses his uncanny vocal skills to imitate the voices of familiar village characters. But when he sees that his efforts provide only a fleeting distraction, he changes his tone entirely and speaks to her with the utmost gravity. He surmises that the root of her sadness is a harsh disappointment with the world.

¹ The story is replete with references to how the catastrophic effects of 1648 have imprinted themselves on the souls of all the characters, including Miriam Devorah and her songs. The massacres are not a direct reason for her melancholy, but they seem to be a contributory factor.

וכי סבורה היית שנברא העולם לשמוח בו? ועכשיו שראית שאין שמחה
בעולם מצטערת את על הטעות?

After unexpectedly throwing this glass of existential cold water in her face, he boasts that he himself had never made the same error, or if he had, he would never let anyone catch him at it. Behind this rebuke would seem to be the assumption that his daughter's malaise is due to her failure to adjust her expectations to the realities of adulthood. (We find out later that she is the only surviving child of her parents' many children, and, married at a young age, she had found it difficult to attach herself to her husband; but this is information we do not have at this point.) R. Nissin does not endeavor to investigate the sources of her unhappiness, and he curtly tells her, as we would say today, "Get over it!" or "Snap out of it!"

The second diagnosis is teased out by the narrator from an enigmatic statement made by R. Mikhl, the buffoonish wonder-working *ba'al hashem* summoned to cure Miriam Devorah. The story of R. Mikhl and his extravagant beard, a comic gem in itself, is the longest narrative subunit in the story, and it comes complete with the narrator's over-wrought apologies for the digression and the order in which it is told (p. 74 / אפסיק מן הענין.). The story is set in the decades before one *ba'al shem* would come down from the hills and found a revivalist movement that would conquer this part of the known Jewish world. In the meantime, we are shown the farcical self-importance of one such specimen through the normative rabbinic eyes of the narrator. This is a perspective shared by Miriam Devorah herself, who has no compunctions about ridiculing him to his face and predicts that R. Mikhl's beard will be burned off in a mock-epic battle with bed bugs. Her cheeky disrespect would seem to express a sense of hurt and outrage at the idea that her affliction, in all its tangled pain, could be comprehended, much less treated, by an imbecile like R. Mikhl. Nonetheless, the narrator takes pains to decipher the diagnosis that is encoded in R. Mikhl's riposte to her taunt, and he shows himself surprisingly adept in parsing the nuances of the demonology that *ba'al shem* traffics in. The upshot is this:

Because Miriam Devorah inverted the proper order of gender relations (שהרי דרכו (של איש לחזר על אשה ואין דרכה של אשה לחזר על איש), she has been set upon by female evils spirits, which are known to be crueler and more unrelenting than male spirits.

R. Manele, the next healer consulted, is another story entirely. He lives in a workers quarter across the Strypa River in Buczacz itself, and the narrator has a good time ventriloquizing the hectoring voice of Miriam Devorah's mother Pua as she berates her husband and son-in-law for not taking advantage of a resource to be found right under their noses. As vain and silly as is R. Mikhl, R. Manele is ascetic and humble. The narrator treats us to an extended description of R. Manele's daily spiritual exercises, which begin with a complex sequence of early-morning immersions in the river, summer and winter, configured differently each day according to esoteric kabbalistic principles. (The way in which the narrator imitates the discourse of each of the distinct religious circles in the story deserves more attention. In a truly Bakhtinian sense, the narrator orchestrates and circulates these different discourses while maintaining control of the story as a whole.) R. Manele is a *sofer stam* who purposefully produces only a small number tefilin and mezuzot because he will sell them only to Jews of true piety and because he, who is comfortable with material privation, does not want to adversely affect the livelihood of the other scribes of the town, who do not so easily embrace the ascetic life.

R. Manele also writes amulets for the afflicted, but not until after investigating the cause of the affliction and matching it to the proper esoteric formulas. When approached by Miriam Devorah's parents, the holy man tells them that rather than writing an amulet he will give them advice. Based on his clairvoyant understanding of Miriam Devorah's situation, he identifies the source of her melancholy.

מחמת עין הרע שנתנה בה, שבועוונותינו שרבו יש נשים שעניהן צרות
 בחברתן ומטילות בהן עין הרע, כך האשה שבאתם בשבילה עין הרע נתנו בה
 בשביל קולה בשביל מתנת אלקים שנתן לה.

The sure remedy for her malady, R. Manele confidently advises, lies not in writing an amulet but in taking a piece of a fish fin and hanging it around her neck. Why? Because the numerical value of both סנפיר and עין הרע is 400, and this will allow the former to neutralize the latter. For the reader, the revelation that fish fin therapy is the best R. Manele has to offer bursts the balloon that has been inflated by the narrator with his careful and admiring description of the holy man's self-abnegating piety and his solicitude toward those who appeal to him for help. In the final analysis, this austere kabbalist has no more to offer than the foolish *ba'al shem*, and, diagnostically, there is more common ground between them than we might have expected. R. Mikhl too locates the origins of her trouble in female-to-female hostility. He at least acknowledges her voice as a divine gift and views her as a victim rather than a party responsible for provoking others. Given the norms of the period, it would not be surprising for men to assign the blame for female hysteria or melancholy to the catty and envious essence of women's nature if it were not for the abundant evidence provided earlier in the story. Miriam Devorah is in fact described as being much beloved and sought after by the women of Buczacz. And if her musical compositions for the synagogue service are rejected by the male religious leaders, her Yiddish folk songs gladden the hearts of women when they gather together to do their chores.

(אבל נשים בעבודתן כשהיו יושבות כאחת ומורטות נוצות או תופרות או אורגות וטוות היו מנעימות להן מלאכתן בניגוניה.)

The fourth interpreter of Miriam Devorah's condition is Miriam Devorah herself. The narrator has it on the authority of the tsadeket Leah Rahel, who was confided in by Miriam Devorah at an early point in her illness that her depression was the result of a dream she had one Yom Kippur evening. She dreamt that she was dressed in a kittel and talit and leading a large congregation in prayer. The sequence of her responses to the dream is significant. At first she was suffused with joy; but then she began to interpret the dream in one direction and then in another. Finally she concludes that the dream was a means of informing her that in a previous *gilgul* she was a man and not a woman. Thus began a

project of self-examination in which she reviewed all the actions she had taken in her life with a view to identifying the sin or shortcoming that had been responsible for her being returned to the world as woman. Once begun, the process of self-scrutiny could not be arrested: עגמה עליה נפשה והיתה מתעגמת והולכת עד שהגיע לשערי מות. Note that there was nothing predetermined about the meaning of the dream. Miriam Devorah felt joyful in its aftermath and could have easily taken it as a heavenly confirmation of her gift rather as evidence of hidden sin. But in the end she is as much a creature of the spiritual universe she lives in as are the men of her generation, and that universe had had imprinted upon it the theological doctrines of Lurianic Kabbalah that had begun to be transmitted to Polish Jewry in the seventeenth century. (Miriam Devorah's husband becomes dangerously immersed in *Sefer Hemdat Yamim*, one of the links in that transmission.) Transmigration of souls, *gilgul*, is one of those new doctrines, and, to the tragic detriment to her mental health, she adopts it as the interpretive template to explain her dream.

The last perspective on the origins of Miriam Devorah's illness is offered by the narrator himself, but only by implication. In the voice of the responsible chronicler who is tying up loose ends, the narrator reports on the basis of the epitaph on her tombstone that Miriam Devorah left behind six children who had been born in quick succession. We further learn that some of the children were quite young when she died and that her husband was so overwhelmed by taking care of them that he had to take a year's leave from his cantorate. In describing the long span of R. Elia's career, the narrator mentions, almost in passing, that he and Miriam Devorah were married for a number of years before they had children. By way of explanation, the narrator informs us that Miriam Devorah was still a *qetannah* at the time of her marriage, a minor below the age of 12 or 13, and that for a number of years she was so attached to her parents that she would leap on any carriage that was traveling from Buczacz to return her village. Eventually she reconciled herself to her fate and to her role as a wife and a mother and returned to her husband.

(יצאו כמה שנים ונתיישבה דעתה והכירה וידעה שאין אשה אלא לאיש. חזרה אצל בעלה על מנת לא לעזוב אותו.)

Although the narrator draws no interpretive conclusions from these observations, after placing them before us modern readers, the facts speak for themselves and produce a commonsense psychological explanation of Miriam Devorah's depression. The lone surviving child among many, she was forcibly separated from her parents as a girl and expected to become a wife and a mother before she was developmentally ready to assume those sexual and reproductive roles. (It remains unexplained why, under the customary *kest* system, the young couple did not board with her parents in her village rather than her being installed in the town of her in-laws.) The fact that after a number of years she found it possible to do her duty does not mean that the earlier trauma did not leave a lasting impact.

Taking all of these interpretations together, it is crucial to note that the order in which they are presented in the narrative, which I have preserved in my listing above, is not identical to order in which they occur in the events of the story. This is the famous gap between *fabula* and *sujet*, I prefer to use the terms proposed by Shlomit Rimon-Kenan: *story*, which denotes the "raw" chronological sequence of events within the work's fictional world, and *text*, the order in which these events are narrated or released into the knowledge of the reader. In our story, the two orders are almost entirely opposed to one another. Leaving aside R. Nisan's visit to his daughter, the interventions on the part of R. Mikhl and R. Manele come at the end of Miriam Devorah's illness. (A delay of several days in putting R. Manele's fish fin therapy into practice is purportedly the cause of her death.) Miriam Devorah's dream, as the initiating event of her three-year illness, long preceded the consultations with the healers. Earliest of all (yet the last to be presented) is the trauma of parental separation and premature marriage.

This deliberately inverted structure, to begin with, should disabuse us of any notions about the telling of this story, or of any of the stories in *'Ir umeloah* for that matter, as being merely a chronicling of events. The executive control of the narrator is demonstrated again and again. But in the particular story at hand

what is the strategic purpose behind the calculated, delayed release of information to the reader? The argument I wish to make to account for this structure is based on assumptions presented earlier concerning the composite nature both of the story's narrator and of its implied audience. The narrator is at one and the same time—or perhaps he actualizes different aspects of his identity at different times—a man of Buczacz who shares the normative views of its townspeople in its heyday as well as being a man who has a foot in the modern world. Correspondingly, the implied audience is made up of listeners or readers who are similarly allied to the values of the traditional world—ranging, perhaps, over several centuries—as well as readers who inhabit the post-Enlightenment world of modernity, contemporaneous to the mid-twentieth century when the story was written and published. In the text of *Haḥazanim*—as opposed to its story—the order of presentation moves from the traditional to the modern. The reality of demons and the malevolent effects of the evil eye belong to the inventory of medical wisdom of early modern Polish Jewry, though they seem most distant from post-Enlightenment readers. This is the case as well for the misogynist attitudes toward the incursion of women into the realm of liturgy and public worship. The implied traditional audience would find credible the etiologies based on esoteric lore offered by R. Mikhl and R. Manele, while the implied modern audience would understand how these very attitudes toward female spirituality contributed materially to Miriam Devorah's fatal melancholy. The buffoonery of one figure and the fish-fin remedy of the other are an obvious satirical treat for latter-day readers.

As the text moves toward the belated disclosure of Miriam Devora's dream, her situation comes into clearer and more sympathetic focus for the modern reader. We are allowed access to her own thoughts through the mediation of a female confidant (the tsadeket Leah Rahel). She is thereby extricated from the perceptual grid of male society and becomes a subject unto herself. The tragedy of her situation is that she cannot own that subjectivity and, simply, as it were, endure as woman with a gift for religious creativity in a culture that forecloses that possibility. New currents of kabbalistic piety, engaging men

and women alike, prompt her to explain her anomalous nature as the result of a much darker transaction, which, in turn, makes her gender a punishment for an indeterminate sin. Miriam Devorah is what we today we would call a transgender figure. Agnon's contemporary readers might not have been likely to embrace the cultural assumptions that accompany this term, but they surely would have been aware of the mix-match of sex and gender as a widely-discussed phenomenon in modern psychology as well as far-ranging debates about the role of women in positions of leadership in modern Jewish life. When this enlightened sensibility is added to the account of Miriam Devorah's ordeal as a child bride, the sum total of her situation paints the portrait of a martyr to her gift if not to her gender.

Yet despite the fact that her ordeal has been humanized, Miriam Devorah remains a problem for the narrator. If her existence is not a scandal, it is certainly an irritant, and it is an obstacle to the narrator's original mission to chronicle the history of the ḥazanim of Buczacz. Out of a debt to truth, the anomalousness of her divine gift has required him to pause and embark on a long digression. And now, after Miriam Devorah's death, the narrator seeks to repair the rupture and bring the world of Buczacz back into alignment under the banner of authority and transmission. The result is the story of Rivka Henya, which completes and recoups the tragic tale of the ḥazan's daughter. Rivka Henya is burdened with no special gift aside, that is, from a resourceful capacity to be the kind of mother Miriam Devorah could not be. She takes charge of the household and raises the many children of her melded family with loving impartiality; and she does all of this with little apparent help from her husband, who is absorbed in the otherworldly mysteries of *Sefer Hemdat Hayamim*.

Even though *Haḥazanim* is a short story, its last two pages inform us of the destinies of the next generation in a way that resembles the epilogue to a great novel like *Middlemarch*. The fates of Miriam Devorah's children, as shaped by Rivka Henya's strong hand, contain elements of both comedy and tragedy. Order and happiness have been restored, but at the price of costly renunciations. On the one hand, all of the children either themselves become great merchants or are married to them. (The narrator does not know how many were girls and

how many boys.) They were so distinguished and trustworthy that they were relied upon in business matters by the gentile authorities, a position that allowed them to intercede on behalf of their brethren. On the other hand, Rivka Henya does not allow them to succeed their father and uncle in the professional cantorate; she does not want them to be beholden to or dependent on the whims of the community. Thus the hazanic dynasty of the Wernick family in Buczacz comes to an end. And even though the narrator has much more information to share with us about the children and their descendents, he is constrained by his own taxonomic principles to bring his story to a halt. (מאחר שאיני מתכוון אלא לספר על .) (החזנים שהיו בעירנו מניח אני את כולם ואיני מספר אלא מעשה החזנים) Family history and institutional history must go their separate ways; and the narrator's ultimate allegiance is to recouping Buczacz under the banner of Torah and worship.

But the story does not leave us without offering some mediation between the terms of this inexorable either/or: a sacred musical vocation dependent on the community *or* the life of a pious and civic-minded ba'al habayit. Miriam Devorah's gift survives her in a minor yet significant way. The Torah *trop* she taught her sons is in turn disseminated by them to the next generations of boys in the town, and thus her style of cantillation becomes the general norm in Buczacz, although ironically its female origin is forgotten. And then there is her youngest son Elchanan, who has about him the touch of a poet. It is he who inherits his mother's gift for composition. A dreamy artist who becomes lost in creative meditation—at times, to the consternation of others—he languishes in his assigned job as a shopkeeper who relies on the indulgence of customers who forgive his abstractedness when he does not respond to their requests. Perhaps in the figure of Elchanan we glimpse a foreshadowing of a later Buczacz shopkeeper named Hirschl or even of another dreamy type named Shmuel Yosef, who managed to escape the shopkeeper's life altogether.