

## 2014: The Centennial of the Demise of Gerson Rosenzweig

**Conniving with the Learned: Gerson Rosenzweig's Humour on New York Communal Life, in his Talmudic Parody *Tractate America*****Ephraim Nissan**

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**Abstract.** The main reason Gerson Rosenzweig's humorous masterpiece, *Tractate America*, a satire of immigrant life in New York around 1890, is greatly overlooked is that his originally intended audience, immigrants from Eastern Europe in New York's Lower East End, were usually so schooled that they would be able to read and decode the intertextuality in his prose, a Hebrew/Aramaic pastiche emulating pages from the Babylonian Talmud. Already in Rosenzweig's own days, youth, the children of immigrants, on their way to Americanisation and hopefully integration in American society, were receiving an education that neglected the traditional curriculum (and Rosenzweig himself was acutely aware of such educational realities, and this is one of the things he decried in *Tractate America*). Rosenzweig was providing a humorous social commentary about the early steps of Americanisation — a process that eventually made his literary output inaccessible to the great majority of the ethnic community he was addressing.

**Keywords:** Satire; America (perception); America (discovery); Jewish studies; New York City (c. 1890); Social conditions (immigrants); Pastiche; Intertextuality; Accessibility to readers.

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## 1. When Somebody Says "a kind of *American Talmud*"

Morris Dickstein, in an intelligent review of a history of *Commentary* magazine published in *The Times Literary Supplement* in London,<sup>1</sup> writes (Dickstein 2010, p. 8, our emphasis):

Balint concentrates on the sixty-five years of the magazine itself, treating it as 'a single, multivolume work, a kind of *American Talmud*' that sheds light on a 'larger story about how Jews over the last half-century embraced America and how they were changed by that embrace'. But the magazine, especially in its latter days, represents *too narrow a sliver of Jews or intellectuals* to provide a vehicle for the larger story.

Mark this: "American Talmud", and also this: "too narrow a sliver". It rings a bell, but alas, only with far too narrow a sliver of people who are aware of (let alone have read) Gerson Rosenzweig's *Tractate America* (*Masseikhes Amerike*), the Hebrew-language pseudo-talmudic pastiche that satirised an early and painful stage of the embrace of America — upon arrival of the migrants wave from East Europe, when many among them still had the rudimentary ability to read the *Mishnah*, if not the *Babylonian Talmud*, and thoroughly appreciate how aptly Rosenzweig was pointing out the patterns and ills of Jewish New York life.

Sometimes references to Gerson Rosenzweig (portrayed here in Fig. 1) have been remarkably imprecise. For example: "Gerson Rosenschweig, a wit, who has collected the epigrams of the Hebrew literature, added many of his own, and written in Hebrew a

<sup>1</sup> The title of Dickstein's review (2010), 'Unmaking It', is patterned (apparently by polemical reference to magazine as eventually painting itself, in his own, his reviewee's, and others' perception, into a staunchly hawkish corner) after Norman Podhoretz's controversial memoir from 1967, *Making It*.

humorous treatise on America — a very up-to-date Jew, who, like Schwartzberg, tried to run a Hebrew weekly, but when he failed, was not discouraged, and turned to business and politics instead." (Hapgood 1901 [1966], p. 59, quoted in Börner-Klein 1998, fn. 9).



Fig. 1. Photograph of Gerson Rosenzweig (Karachin, Poland, 1860/1 – New York, 1914). Courtesy of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio (item number pc3771.01).

## 2. On the Way to Greening Out, and Its Reflection in Gerson Rosenzweig's Satire

The year 2011 was the sesquicentennial (150 years), and 2014 will be the centennial of respectively the birth and death of the New York Hebrew and Yiddish journalist and writer Gerson Rosenzweig,<sup>2</sup> the unsurpassed master in the genre of the talmudic parody, in which he expressed his social critique about what it was like to be an immigrant Jew, either a greenhorn or one to some (meager) extent "greened-out", Americanised, in the communal context in New York in the 1890s.

Donald Weber's (2005) *Haunted in the New World* is a smart, attentive study of the cultural consequences of *oysgrinung* — the 'greening-out' process that required of [both 'greenhorns' and the native-born progeny of immigrants] an incessant vigilance and 'self-monitoring'" (Whitfield 2007, p. 314). Americanisation was, of course, a form of acculturation. Immigrants' native cultures were being effaced, in order to make it easier for the next generation to assimilate into the "melting pot", a simile that is actually ascribed to a British author, Israel Zangwill, who wrote for a Jewish audience but who in his own private life strove to assimilate himself within the general populace.

Acculturation into the homogenised culture of a new nation absorbing immigrants was proposed as an ideal not only in the United States of America. One may also think of Israel in the 1950s and 1960s, or of Brasil in the early 20th centuries. In Brasil in the 1920s, absorption of foreign cultural influences was theorised in terms of a cultural "anthropophagy" model (Andrade 1928, 1990) by a group of modernist intellectuals. The most prominent were Oswald de Andrade, Tarsila do Amaral, and Mario de Andrade. Oswald de Andrade in particular published in 1928 his "Manifesto Antropófago" in the inaugural issue of the *Revista de Antropofagia*. Americanisation in the U.S. required renouncing Old Country heritage other than from the British Isles, and one reflection of this is that you are not likely to come across the Hebrew-language Rosenzweig in surveys of *Literary Humor of the Urban Northeast: 1830–1890*, to say it with the title of a paper collection, Sloane (1983).

Again concerning cultural anthropophagy: there is a sense in which such truculent (though, in Brasil, intended to be benign and "cordial") description of absorption is also a good account of why *Tractate America* by Gerson Rosenzweig, a literary work quite relevant to the immigrant experience, has become invisible to the descendants of his original audience. This is because their educational curriculum is mutually exclusive. Reading Rosenzweig's "talmudic parody", a pastiche<sup>3</sup> emulating pages of the *Babylonian Talmud*, is only possible in the original for ones who are able to read and make sense of a page (among the easiest) of the *Babylonian Talmud*.

Intertextuality, which is the phenomenon by which you are able to more fully appreciate the text you are reading to the extent that you are able to detect and decode referees it contains to other texts, is really the name of the game in *Tractate America*. From intertextuality stem both the main hurdles and the main source of pleasure for readers of that literary text. The language, style, narrational conventions — and even the typographical format of *Tractate America*, as originally published in the early 1890s — are an emulation of a talmudic treatise, and of related homiletic (midrashic) texts from that same body of literature. As the style of that body of literature is adopted by ludic, i.e., playful (arguably rather than satirical or serious) imitation of the original model,<sup>4</sup> but the content is different (i.e., immigrant life in America, which is satirised), then if we are to adopt Genette's (1979)

<sup>2</sup> *Gerson* is the Lithuanian Hebrew pronunciation of the name *Gershon*.

<sup>3</sup> Pastiche as a genre is the subject of an encyclopaedic entry by Baldick (2001).

<sup>4</sup> Rosenzweig's "talmudic parody" may chide pages of Talmud, but the Talmud is not the subject of the satire, nor is it the main butt of the humour. The subject and the butt are in the society surrounding Rosenzweig.

approach to intertextuality, Rosenzweig's *Tractate America* is a pastiche, *vis-à-vis* its hypotext, i.e., the talmudic literature. Nevertheless, Rosenzweig's text considered is usually referred to in literary studies as parody. To Genette, in parody it is the content that is the same as in the hypotext, but the style is different, when the kind of imitation is ludic. See Fig. 2.

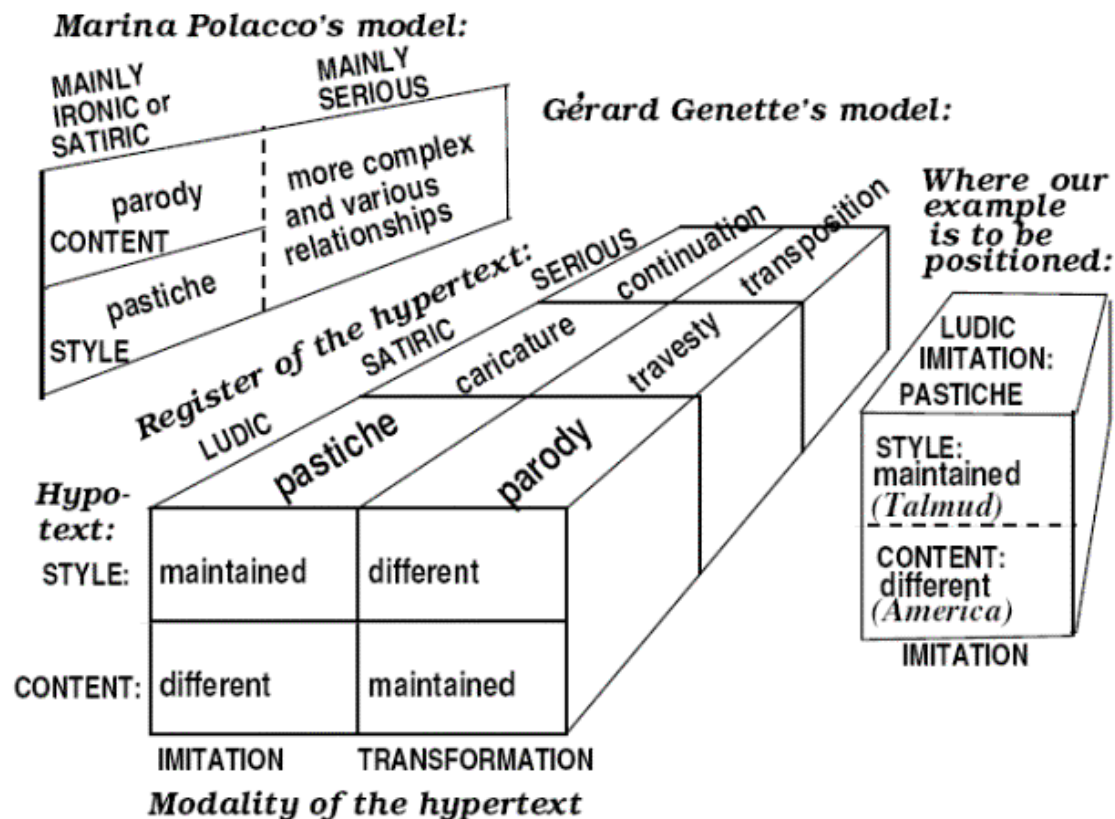


Fig. 2. The kind of intertextuality in *Tractate America*, as per Genette (1979) and Polacco (1998). Whereas G rard Genette's works are well-known internationally (his *The Architext* appeared in English translation in 1992), Marina Polacco's book (1998) is visible to specialists within Italy.<sup>5</sup>

In the present study, we focus on Gerson Rosenzweig's masterpiece, *Tractate America*, for part of which we provide a *pr cis* and commentary, and which we exemplify through selective translation.

### 3. Rosenzweig' Expressive Choices as Hurdles — his Audience's Boundaries

In this essay, we turn our attention to this "sadly neglected hybrid work of immigrant literature".<sup>6</sup> Our main argument in this essay is that it was Rosenzweig's basic expressive choices, which caused his work to be accessible to relatively few in his immigrant Jewish community, and to considerably less numerous American Jews in all subsequent generations. And yet, he was the sparkling, unsurpassed master in a centuries-old minor genre,<sup>7</sup> which he

<sup>5</sup> We don't develop here a theoretical discussion in terms of current theories of intertextuality, for which see, e.g., a compendary discussion in Orr (2003).

<sup>6</sup> For the particular wording in double quotes, as well as for the indented quotation block that follows, I am indebted to a North American scholar who in February 2009 evaluated an early draft of papers of mine on Rosenzweig, and who prefers not to disclose his identity.

<sup>7</sup> Talmudic parodies, especially for Purim, had been known as early as the Middle Ages, but arguably no such work achieved as high an artistic level as *Tractate America*, which moreover was dealing with quite a serious subject — the social conditions of immigrants — with perspicuity.

harnessed to the needs of his critique of immigrant lifestyles, and of the social problems his community was facing.

Gerson Rosenzweig's *Tractate America* is a rich and rewarding text that demands fluency in a number of languages, a command of Jewish tradition, and a high degree of technical proficiency to examine thoroughly. *Tractate America* is in many ways a profound comment not only on Jewish intellectual life in America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but also on what Amos Funkenstein has termed "the dialectics of assimilation" within Jewish communities generally. Rosenzweig was a skilled and knowledgeable writer who deftly wove history, contemporary life, and the conflict between tradition and modernity into a complex satire. Though his work is historically and culturally significant, it not been treated by scholars with anywhere near the frequency or seriousness it deserves. The difficulty in finding readers today with the command of the linguistic and religious sources to adequately cope with Rosenzweig's work has left it mostly forgotten.<sup>8</sup>

Rosenzweig, in Ernest Schwarcz's (1972) words, "had a genuine flair for satire and was known to his contemporaries as the 'sweet satirist of Israel' and as a parodist he earned a honorable place in Hebrew literature". What matters most is that he was doing this in America, as opposed to Eastern Europe. The language and genre in which Gerson Rosenzweig chose to express himself meant that this was, and is, an author for just a bunch of *cognoscenti*. Yet, Rosenzweig is a major humorist, excelling especially in how he seamlessly managed to juxtapose epigrammatic humour, heavily relying on intertextuality, casting references to ancient literature within a satirical description of the life of immigrants' New York in the 1890s. Refer to Fig. 3 for housing conditions.

Within the compass of this essay, we cannot provide an ample exemplification in translation, because each and every example requires its dense intertextuality to be explained, and whereas I already have such an analysis in Nissan (2012) for Chapter 3 of *Tractate America* (the one specifically concerned with working conditions and the attitudes of the trade unions towards immigrants), we must per force be lean and mean here. Our aim is to make the basic gist of Gerson Rosenzweig's talmudic parody *Tractate America* accessible.

Talmudic text consists of a sequence in which each Hebrew paragraph from the *Mishnah* is followed with *Gemara*, i.e., text in Hebrew or Aramaic which either elucidates and discusses it, or digresses (which often happens). This is also the structure of text in *Tractate America*. It must be said that it is nevertheless mostly Hebrew, and that the knowledge of Aramaic as required for understanding it is limited.

There were artistic reasons, as well as cultural preferences, for Rosenzweig's choice of writing in a densely intertextual Mishnaic Hebrew. Basically, Rosenzweig's humour works by defamiliarising the social phenomena he satirises, and he achieves that defamiliarisation by mapping the details from the American scene on which he is focusing, onto sacred texts that used to be familiar to his audience, because they are accessible in the canon, and actually, even though access to his text for present-day readers is tough, he tries not to make it too hard for his readers from his own generation, as he selects such intertextual references that they were likely to recognise, within the schooling they were likely to have had.

Arguably important evidence to that effect is that whereas he is ostensibly emulating (in one early edition, even typographically) pages from the *Babylonian Talmud*, he does not encumber the text with Talmudic Aramaic, and only uses early rabbinic Hebrew along with the stylemes associated with the Mishnaic portions of the text that are embedded in a Talmud page, and even in the *Gemara* portions that follow each *Mishnah*, he abides by Hebrew and usually refrains from Aramaic, only resorting to a few technical expressions among the easiest, in order to signal that his own text is posturing as though it was *Gemara*.

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<sup>8</sup> See fn. 6 above, the first note of this section.



Fig. 3. Photograph taken by Jacob Riis (1849–1914) for *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), a book — contemporary of Gerson Rosenzweig's *Tractate America* — that examined the poor tenement districts of the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and was an instant best seller. Hypertext version: [www.yale.edu/amstud/inforev/riis/title.html](http://www.yale.edu/amstud/inforev/riis/title.html)

#### 4. A Public of Yiddish-Speakers, Hebrew-Readers

Jacob Kabakoff's Hebrew-language book (1966) *Pioneers of American Hebrew Literature* was concerned, as the title states, with pioneering authors of Hebrew literature in America (a peripheral area of modern Hebrew literary studies), and comprises both studies and documents. Those Hebraists include Zeev Wolf Schorr / William Schur (1839–1910), and Gerson Rosenzweig (Karachin, Poland, 1860/1 – New York, 1914), as well as Henry Gersoni (1844–1897), Isaac Rabinowitz (1846–1900), and Jacob Zevi Sobel. Kabakoff dealt with Rosenzweig in over fifty pages of that book (Kabakoff 1966, pp. 211–266). Cf. Silberschlag (1972). To this day, that part of Kabakoff's book remains the main one among the far too few studies of Gerson Rosenzweig. In Shelomo Nash's (1988) *Kabakoff Festschrift*, Zvi Malachi's paper dealt with parodies, including Rosenzweig's. Parodies in Jewish literature in general had been investigated in the U.S. by Israel Davidson: see his *Parody in Jewish Literature*, published in 1907 in New York by Columbia University Press, thus as part of high culture (of which the journalist Gerson Rosenzweig was not part).

Dagmar Börner-Klein (1998) discussed Rosenzweig's *Tractate America*, focusing on a few examples, especially Rosenzweig's contrasting Orthodox and Reform rabbis. Independently, between 1996 and 2002, I analysed the opening page of that text, in terms of

graphically representing the goal-and-plan hierarchy of the narrative and the narration (i.e., how the story is delivered), thus adopting an approach known from computational models of narrative (automated story-understanding and story-generation, an area of computational linguistics): that analysis was provided in Nissan (2002); see in Appendix A below.

Rosenzweig deserves a series of studies in English, such as the one you are reading, so that his place among ethnic writers in America could be reclaimed. The critique of Jewish life in New York in the early 1890s deserves as much attention, as the formal devices that Rosenzweig was able to apply in a magisterial manner. His public was defined by how competent they would have been to make sense of the text: those reasonably schooled in the basics of studying *Gemara* (the *Babylonian Talmud*). And yet, knowledge of Hebrew, along with mastery of a list of Aramaic technical terms that organise the syntax in a *Gemara* (talmudic) page, would have sufficed, whereas appreciating in full his breathtakingly subversive intertextual references would have required deeper knowledge of both the Bible, and early rabbinic literature.

The practice, by some authors, of quoting Scripture in Hebrew by subverting the sense of the wording with humorous intent, is known especially from the Middle Ages, e.g., in Immanuel Romano, a humorous poet in both Hebrew and Italian.<sup>9</sup> See on him, e.g., Adler

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<sup>9</sup> In Italian, Immanuel Romano (who used to be known as Manoello Giudeo) was one of the *poeti giocosi*, humorist poets of the Middle Ages; he was the author of three extant playful sonnets, as well as a longer poem, the vivacious and interesting *Bisbidis*, in praise of Cangrande della Scala, and describing his court. Immanuel Romano stands taller within Hebrew literature. He introduced the sonnet into Hebrew poetry (Genot-Bismuth 1991; Bregman 1995). It has been suggested that as a comedian, now thought by some to have been young, at Cangrande's court, his sight may have concretely inspired Dante's warning: "Uomini siate, non pecore matte / si che di voi, tra voi, 'l giudeo non rida!" ("Be men, not mad sheep, / So that the Jew shall not laugh of you, in your midst!"). Guy Shaked (2002) assumes for Manoello as a birth date c. 1292, rejecting a previous dating by Yarden of c. 1265 – c. 1330.

Long gone is the myth of Immanuel's friendship with Dante: This matter was clarified, and the myth of a friendship between Dante and Manoello discarded, in Umberto Cassuto's *Dante e Manoello* (1921), a work discussed by Fortis (1996). The myth about the friendship between Immanuel and Dante was inspired by verse by Cino da Pistoia about Manoello in hell, and Dante, too, immersed in excrement in hell. Cino of Pistoia and Bosone of Gubbio had an exchange in verse (a *tenzone*, a *tenson*) concerning Manoello.

Fabian Alfie remarked (1998, p. 326, n. 16): "In his sonnet, Cino da Pistoia states that since Immanuel is dead, he now resides in hell. He is not found among his fellow co-religionists, but both he and Dante are with Alessio Interminelli in the circle of the flatterers. Bosone responds that they are not in hell, but in purgatory awaiting the end of their suffering. Thus, Immanuel's status as a non-Christian takes a center position here as well." It is quite possible that Immanuel was imagined, in a romantic vision by newly emancipated Italian Jews, to have known Dante in person, because Immanuel's main literary work in Hebrew is a much simplified imitation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Alfie wrote (1998, p. 323):

Immanuel's fourth and final vernacular sonnet does not display the subtlety of the previous three. It constitutes a response *per le rime* in a *tenzone* with Bosone da Gubbio regarding the death of Dante. Nevertheless, it is of historical interest and worthy of some discussion. This *tenzone* has constituted part of the evidence in arguing that the twenty-eighth section of the *Mahberot* represents a Hebrew redaction of the *Divine Comedy*. Moreover, it formed the basis for the assumption that Immanuel and Dante were friends. Bosone writes that two great lights which possessed both beauty and virtue have passed from the world. He then says that Immanuel should cry for his own loss, and for the world's evil, since there has never been a worse year. The only comfort he finds is the thought that Dante now resides in heaven. One aspect of this sonnet has inspired some debate, as Immanuel's personal sorrow, aside from Alighieri's death, is not entirely clear.

In my own view, it is likely that Bosone, while stating that Manoello should cry for his own loss, is mentioning to him the fact he is Jewish and unbaptised, thus excluded from salvation. I don't exclude that there may also be some reference to a loss in Manoello's family, but in a sense, we primarily have a formula here: as death was mentioned, personal salvation was relevant.

Immanuel Romano "the poet was the inheritor and negotiator of several different literatures, acting as both an insider and innovator in each" (Alfie 1998, p. 309). Italianists aware of his place among the Italian medieval



(2002), Alfie (1998), Marti (1956). Immanuel Romano and Gerson Rosenzweig share the feature of having been overlooked or at the very least underestimated, because knowing them well requires familiarity with different disciplines.

The following is quoted from an encyclopedia entry by Tony Michels (2008, p. 263):

Apart from their limited education, the peculiar language of Yiddish newspapers confronted readers with a major problem. In the 1870s, most journalists wrote in a highly Germanized Yiddish that came to be known as *daytshmerish* [...] Yiddish newspapers employed *daytshmerish* for at least four reasons. [...] A second factor had to do with negative perceptions of Yiddish. Many pioneer Yiddish journalists were, ironically, frustrated Hebraists who had taken up Yiddish because the Hebrew-reading public was too small. Many of them regarded Yiddish as a corrupted version of German and incorporated as much German as possible with the goal of "purifying" and "elevating" the Jewish vernacular. [...] In the absence of a standardized, literary Yiddish (this would not come into existence until the twentieth century), early Yiddish journalists relied on German American newspapers for vocabulary and as a source of articles. [...]

It is significant that Rosenzweig, who had a rather dismissive opinion of Yiddish (unlike to those who wanted to cultivate that language), was not only the editor of the Hebrew weekly, *Haibri* (1891–1998), a Hebrew monthly, *Kadimah* (1891–1902), and *Ha-Devorah* (1911–1912), but also (a concession to the reality of his language community primarily communicating in Yiddish) a columnist for the Yiddish newspapers *Yiddishes Tageblatt*, *Yiddische Gazetten* and *Yiddische Velt*. Rosenzweig's Section 8 in *Tractate America* begins making considerations about "the Babylonian/Babelic periodicals" (see Appendix A); he meant periodicals in Yiddish (a language often despised as supposedly being a "mixed jargon"). These tended to Germanise their lexicon. And he, who had translated the U.S. anthem, 'The Star-Spangled Banner', into Hebrew, "of late edited a humorous and personal column in *The Jewish Daily News*".<sup>10</sup> *Tractate America* appeared in 1892 in New York, then in Vilna in 1994, and it is remarkable that Rosenzweig had been such a recent arrival: born in Bialistok, where he taught Hebrew, and educated in Berlin, Rosenzweig came to America in 1888. He was caustic about the fate of journalists and, still worse, writers catering to the Jewish public, and his own fate wasn't easy: he left his wife and seven children, dying "aged 53 years, at the New York Skin and Cancer Hospital", where he had been four months.

## 5. Mythological Grandeur at the Beginning of *Tractate America*

*Tractate America* begins in mythological grandeur, with cosmogony: the three continents of the Old World (cf. Fig. 4), personified or at any rate in their capacity as characters, ask the Creator for a continent of refuge to be made to come into being (with reference to the institution of the cities of refuge in Moses' and Joshua's times, so unintentional killers would

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humorists in verse (the *poeti giocosi*) seem unaware of his importance for Hebrew literary studies. Alfie (1998) reached a conclusion about Immanuel Romano (I had also reached it independently). Alfie wrote: "[I]n spite of its richness, it appears that since Immanuel's opus does not fit into one discipline, it has been overlooked. One problem inherent to the study of Italian Jewish writers of past centuries is that two specializations are required: Hebrew and Italian. This has meant that a number of fascinating figures like Immanuel have not been studied adequately regarding their dual identities as both Jews and Italians. And since, often, their major works have been composed in Hebrew, Italianists have not had the opportunity to examine fully many of these interesting authors. It is clear that many of these works participate in the Hebrew literary tradition, and should be studied as such. Nevertheless, given the unique social position of these authors, much work remains to be done on them by scholars of Italian literature. Moreover, it will be an exciting day when more of these authors are studied by Italianists and their works considered part of the Italian literary canon as well. Italian literature, broadly defined, admits works of a number of languages, not only Standard. As but a few examples: medieval and Renaissance Latin, French, Spanish, Greek, not to mention a myriad of Italian dialects. Perhaps it is time to more fully acknowledge the Hebrew literature produced in Italy as part of this rich literary tradition as well."

<sup>10</sup> In Rosenzweig's obituary ('*Hebrew Mark Twain*' Dead) in *The New York Times* of February 15, 1914.

be confined there). Next, the text relates about Columbus, the discoverer of America, who, being prescient about what America will be like (in Rosenzweig's times and neighbourhoods), prays so he would be spared the new land being named after him.

The fact that America wasn't named after Columbus, the discoverer, is taken to require an explanation, because it contradicts the usual prescription that discoveries ought to be named after their respective discoverer (this is what can be called "the eponymy rule").<sup>11</sup> The mock-explanation proposed at the beginning of *Tractate America* claims that it was Columbus who preferred not to have America named after himself, because he was prescient (by astrological means) of unseemly social problems that Rosenzweig observed in his own immigrant neighbourhoods in New York. (No mention is made, by Rosenzweig, of Amerigo Vespucci, the "explorer" — actually a scholar accompanying expeditions: see Luzzana Caraci (2007) — after whom, in April 1507, America was named, which actually was after all by applying what I have called the eponymy rule earlier in this paragraph: Vespucci was perceived to have been one of the discoverers.)

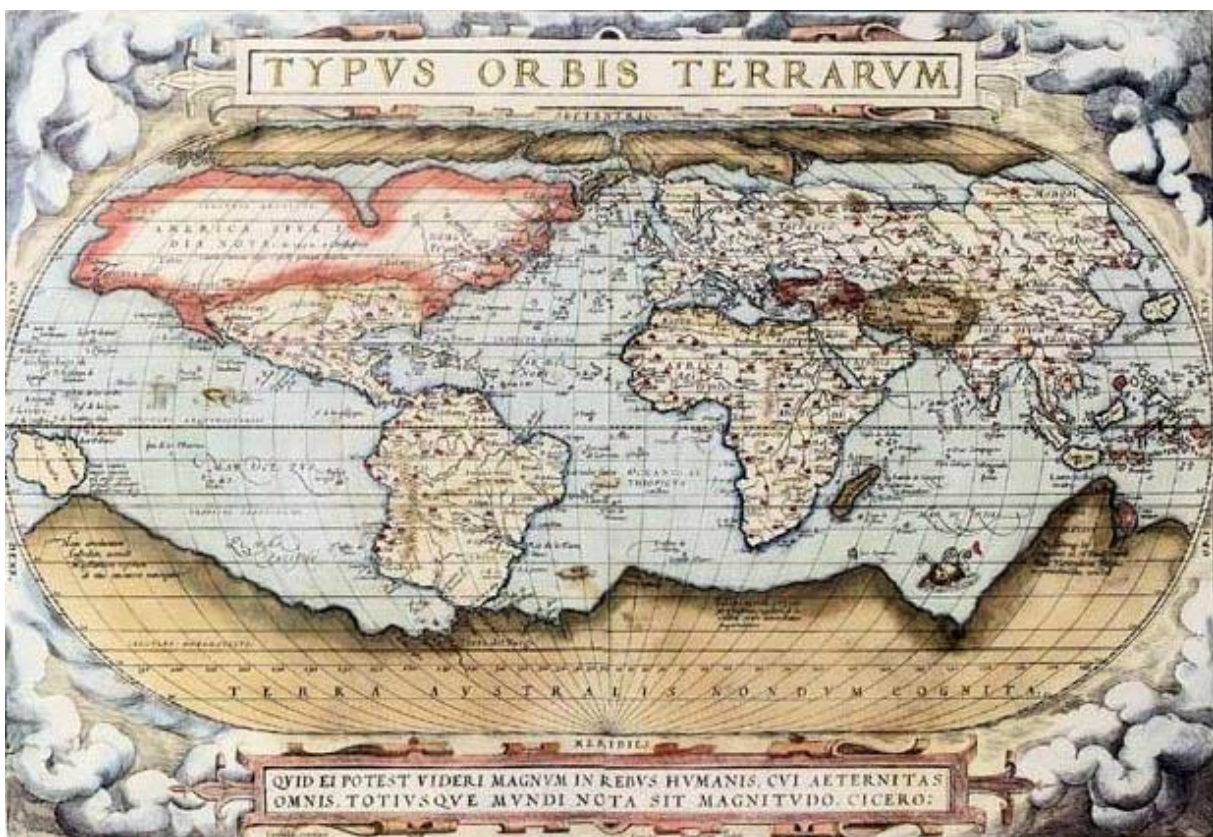


Fig. 4. The world map by the sixteenth-century Flemish cartographer Abraham Ortelius.


The plot in *Tractate America* up to this point is on the opening page of the Vilna edition of *Tractate America* — the regular edition, whose layout was emulating that of a page from the *Babylonian Talmud* as being also printed in Vilna by the Romm publishing house. Rosenzweig had it published there, because that was where the standard edition of the

<sup>11</sup> In the Letters section in some issues of *New Scientist* magazine from the end of 2013, there was a debate about who is to bestow names on geographical features on places such as the Moon or Mars. A former astronaut from the Apollo missions to the Moon related how haughty bureaucrats from anybody that bestows such names completely disregarded the names that the astronauts of the mission has given various places on the Moon they had been observing while in orbit, and that on top of that, they never returned to him a mission's map that was in his possession and that he had sent to them for it to be returned to him. This illustrates a conflict, by which the Bureaucrat asserts himself (usually him- rather than herself) as being the haughty superior of the Explorer, who is to be just a menial worker with no claim on such perks as deciding which names to bestow.

*Babylonian Talmud* used to be printed, and the same typographical conventions were adopted. In fact, the typographical layout of that edition of *Tractate America* was such that it would emulate the Vilna editions of traditional talmudic and midrashic literature.

אין בין מסכת עמיריקא פרק ראשון ה

מתני' אין בין עמיריקא למעלותא ארעה: עלו בראשונה. לאטקי קמיירי: וחכמים אומרים. העולין עכשו דלא יוחסין הן: עוברי חרם. עוברי חרם דרבינו נחמן: שהיא כמרכת עונותיהן. שששה אותן לעשרים וממלא עטמיהן מתמרקין:



מתני'

אין בין עמיריקא לשאר ארצות אלא שעבוד לתקפין בלבד דברי רבי ירמא. וחכמים אומרים עמיריקא כשאר ארצות לכל דבר: גמ' תגיא. לא נבראה עמיריקא אלא לארץ מקלם. שבשעה שגלה קלומבוס את עמיריקא באו שלשת חלקי הישוב לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא ואמרו לפניו רבונו של עולם כתבת בתורתך (דברים י"ט) ושלשת את גבול ארצך. ענה להם הקדוש ברוך הוא והיה לנום שמה כל רוצח. אמר רב ספרא צפה קלומבוס באצמגנינות שלו שעתידה עמיריקא שתיעשה ארץ מקלם לרקין ופוחיון של כל העולם כלו ובקש רחמים שלא תקרא על שמו. וקראוה עמא ריקה. איני והא תנן כל הארצות עיסה לעמיריקא שעמיריקא בחזקת יוחסין עומדת. אמר רב מבינא מאי יוחסין פסולין של שאר ארצות כדתגיא עשרה יוחסין עלו בראשונה לעמיריקא. ואלו הן: רוצחים, נגבים, מוסרים, מדליקי בתים, מזויפי שמרות, מוכרי נפשות, עדים זוממין, פושמי רגל, עוברי חרם, ובנים סוררים ומורים, ויש אומרים אף נערות שנתפתו, ולמה נקראין יוחסין לפי שכל הפסולין של שאר ארצות כיון שבאין לעמיריקא נעשין בה יוחסין. במתניתא תגא מפני מה היא נקראת עמיריקא. משום שהיא ממרכת עונותיהן של בני אדם, ממאין נעשין בה סהורין, ופסולין נעשין בה יוחסין, ובמה היא

Fig. 4. The opening page of the Vilna edition of *Tractate America*, in the original regular edition, as opposed to the chapbook. What in the chapbook are footnotes, in the regular edition (whose layout is like that of a page of the *Babylonian Talmud* in the latter's usual printed editions) appears as marginal notes (here, on the sides of the top of the page), like what in a page of the *Babylonian Talmud* would be Rashi's glosses on internal side (the gutter side, the side of the binding), and the Tosaphists' glosses on the external side.

Therefore, in the regular edition (as opposed to the chapbook edition), there are glosses of a commentary on the margins of the text in the centre (see Fig. 5), in the particular edition whose typesetting emulated the layout of a page from the Vilna edition of the *Babylonian Talmud*. A chapbook edition also appeared, a plainer printing of the same text of *Tractate America*; it resorted to footnotes (see Fig. 6) instead of the Vilna edition of 1994.

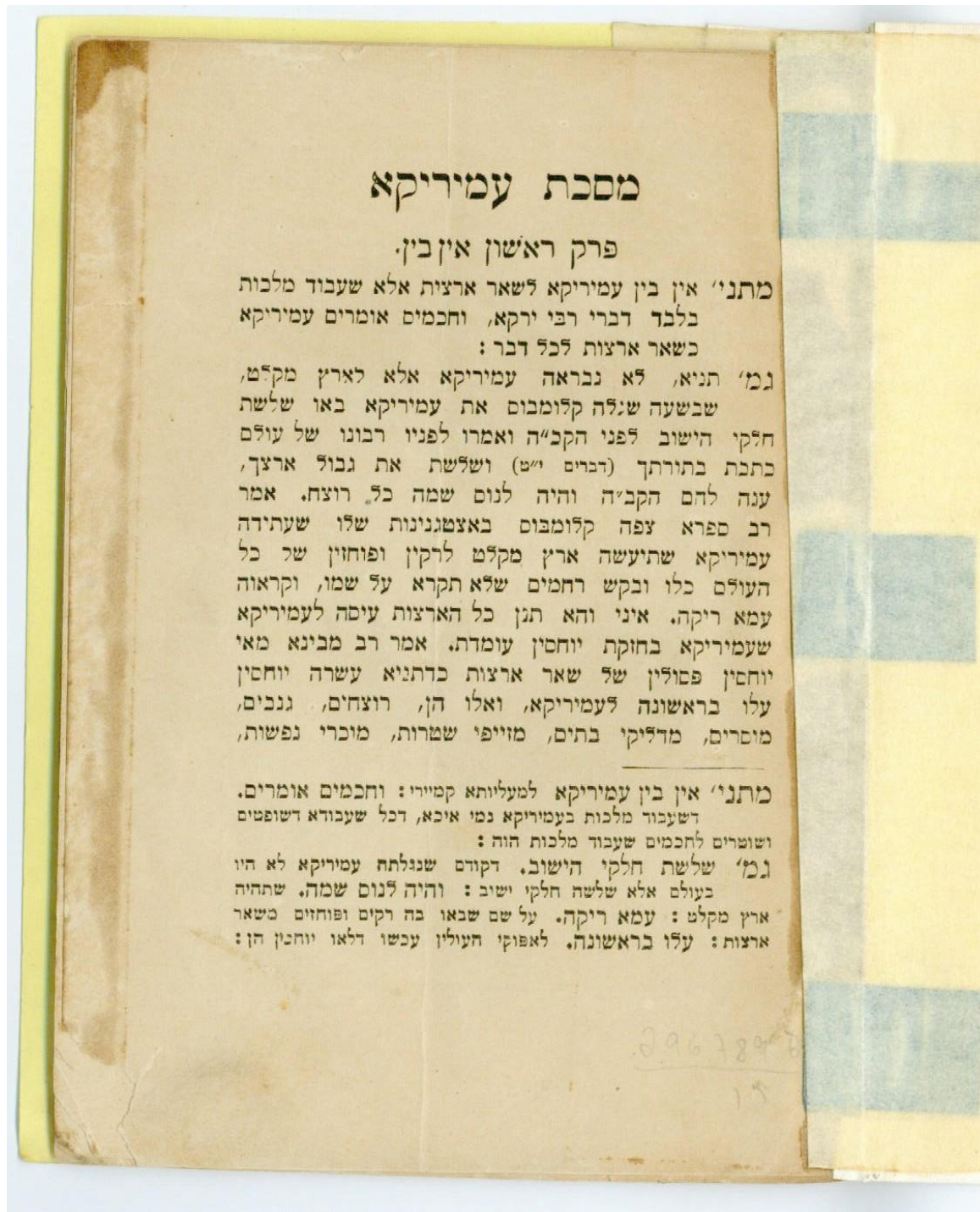


Fig. 5. The opening page of an incomplete copy of a chapbook edition of *Tractate America*, on hold of the Haberman Institute for Literary Research in Lod, Israel. Courtesy of its director, Dr. Zvi Malachi.

## 6. An English Translation of the Opening Page

In a page of *Talmud*, a statement from the *Mishnah* is quoted, and is then elaborated about in text called *Gemara*. Rosenzweig's *Tractate America* begins with a pseudo-mishnaic sentence ("There is no difference between America and other lands, except enslavement to the kingdoms, and there are Sages who state: America is like the other lands in everything", with a note stating about the former: "*There is no difference between America*: This refers to excellence", and a note stating about the latter opinion: "*And there are Sage who state...: As enslavement to the state is found in America as well, as any submission to judges and policemen was, to the Sages, enslavement to the state*"), followed with pseudo-Gemara text.

Let us consider the text in translation.

It is stated: America was only created as a land of refuge, as when Columbus discovered America, the three parts of the Ecumene [i.e., Asia, Africa, and Europe] {note: As before America was discovered, in the world there only were three parts of the Ecumene} came before the Saintly One, Blessèd be He, and told him: "O Lord of the Universe, Thou hast written [hast not Thou?] in Thy Torah (*Deuteronomy* 19): 'Thou shalt partition in three the borders of your land'. The Saintly One, Blessèd be He, replied to them [by continuing quoting that verse]: "So that any [unintentional] killer will flee thereto". Said Rav Safrò [i.e., a fictional rabbi whose personal name is *Teacher*]:<sup>12</sup> "Columbus foresaw, by means of his astrology, that America would become a land of refuge for the worthless and heedless of the entire world, so he implored pity, so that she would not be named after him. And they call her '*Amme Reiko* (Worthless People)".<sup>13</sup> {note: Because worthless and heedless ones came there from other countries} Is it so? As it is taught: "All countries are dough [suspected of containing an alien admixture], *vis-à-vis* America [instead of Babylonia, as in the Talmud], as America is assumed to stand as having [pure and high] lineage. Said rav Meivino: "What 'lineage' is? The disqualified ones of other countries. As it is stated [a modification of a talmudic statement about Ezra's Returnees]: Ten [categories of] lineage immigrated initially {note: Except those one who immigrate now, who have no lineage} to America, and these are the following: murderers, thieves, informers, arsonists, counterfeiters, ones who sell people, false witnesses, bankrupt ones, transgressors upon *cherem*, {note: Transgressors on the *cherem* of Rabbi Gershom [i.e., bigamists]} and rebellious sons, and some say: also seduced maidens. Why are they called [good] lineage? As all disqualified ones of other countries, once they have come to America, become there [good] lineage. In the Mathnitha [*lectiones extra vagantes*, from collections of Mishnah outside the Mishnah of Rabbi Judah] it is stated: Why is she called America? Because she cleanses (*memarekes*) the sins of people, {note: As she enriches them, and their sins are cleansed *ipso facto*} the defiled become in her clean, and the disqualified ones become in her [good] lineage. And by what does she cleanse and promote them? By silver and gold, as it is stated (*Job* 28): "As silver has [a place: mines] where it comes forth, and gold, a place [where] they refine [it]". What does this "where it comes forth" (*motzo*) mean? It means 'lineage', as it is written (*Micah* 5): "And his *motzo* 'otov (origins) are ancient, as old as the world". [...]

Back to the plot: following Columbus' anguish lest his discovery be given his name, in *Tractate America* Rosenzweig mock-aetiologises the names *America* and *New York*. Towards the end of this paper, we are going to come back to this kind of punning explanations of place-names, in order to elucidate its literary role in *Tractate America* by contrasting it to a much more recent Hebrew literary work that is heavily indebted to Rosenzweig. Their differences show in relief what is peculiar of either.

<sup>12</sup> Aramaic *sifra* (Ashkenazic pronunciation: *sifro*) means 'book', but *safra* (Ashkenazic pronunciation: *safro*) means 'teacher'.

<sup>13</sup> '*Amma reka* in the now standard pronunciation of Hebrew, but when discussing Rosenzweig, I adopt Ashkenazi pronunciation instead.

In the opening page of *Tractate America*, having explained the names *America* and *New York* in relation to episodes involving Columbus, Rosenzweig then turns to enumerating unflattering categories which according to him feature in immigrant sociology. According to him? Or should be rather say: according to the well-thinking Anglo-Saxon elite in New York, and to its reflection in the doxa published in the New York press.

### 7. An Immigrant about his Own Ilk: Rosenzweig's Mock-Enumeration of Unflattering Categories of Immigrants

Rosenzweig's caustic deprecation is actually collective, communal self-deprecation. He then proceeds to describe satirically aspects of life inside his own immigrant community, as well as to contrast such situations as the peddler faced with a hostile policemen, to what American institutions ensure in theory.

Bear in mind that some settlers' societies take pride in having originated from Old World offenders. This is the case of Australia, because of the shipping of inmates when the Australian colonies were established. Yet, even for Virginia, whose early European settlers were not shipped inmates, there is a popular myth that gave rise to the American slangish collocation 'first family of Virginia', to denote the lexical concept 'convicted criminal'. A crucial difference is that unlike such pride on the part of the dominant part of society, Rosenzweig was describing, and catering to, a mainly poor public of immigrants from a dyspreferred ethnos and denomination. White Anglo-Saxon Protestant New Yorkers were all to ready to enumerate categories of undesirables in the flow of immigrants, who were despised anyway.

Donald Dewey's splendid history of the American political cartoons (Dewey 2007, discussed at length in this journal by Nissan 2013) testifies to that much. An eloquent example (Dewey 2007, p. 175) is Frank Beard's *Columbia's unwelcome guests* (1885). It was discussed detail by detail in Nissan (2013); also see in Appendix A below. In Beard's unfortunate cartoon, one can see lines of immigrants leaving the gutters of Europe (the other bank of a river), wading in the water, then climbing onto the American side, showing their ugly faces. They are stopped by a barefoot woman, Columbia (they wear shoes, she is barefoot because she is a goddess). She holds two aggressive dogs: Law and Order.

It is symbolic that right above Rosenzweig's obituary in the same column in *The New York Times*, there was a report<sup>14</sup> forcefully defending immigrants against their perception as a factor worsening illiteracy in the New Country, and its political consequences:

Cyrus L. Sulzberger, President of the United Hebrew Charities, in a recent address before the People's Institute at Cooper Union, denied that illiteracy in this country was increased by the admission of large numbers of illiterate immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. The new immigration bill aims to exclude illiterate aliens. Mr. Sulzberger said that statistics showed a far greater percentage of illiteracy among the native population in various parts of the Union than among immigrants, and that the children of immigrants were far ahead of those of the native population in the percentage of literacy. He asserted also that recent investigations had shown more American than immigrant names among those accused of social and political nefariousness in graft inquiries throughout the country. [...]

Rosenzweig's own *Tractate America*, for all of his bemoaning the low standards of Jewish culture in America, testifies to the presence of an immigrant public with deference, if not direct knowledge of, a rich textual culture from the Old Country. His grandly cosmological

<sup>14</sup> SEES FLAWS IN PLAN / FOR LITERACY TEST / Fewer Illiterate Children of the / Immigrants Than of Natives, / Says Sulzberger. / NEWCOMERS HAVE IDEALS / Foreign Names, He Asserts, Do Not / Figure in the Great Inqui- / ries of the Day. Report in *The New York Times* of February 15, 1914.

opening about America, created to be a receptacle for all kinds of malefactors he proceeds to enumerate in a fashion reminding of the Jewish homiletic literature as well as of the stylemes of legal texts, is more than communal self-deprecation.

For sure, in the period 1881–1914, districts such as New York's Lowest East Side<sup>15</sup> "proved to be breeding grounds for Jewish gangs" (Rockaway 2008, p. 349), and others that were not Jewish while also of immigrant stock. But at closer scrutiny, *Tractate America* declares, it is not only the latest comers who are corrupt; locals, after all, trace their ancestry elsewhere; and locals, including the police and the judiciary, are no less corrupt, and their deeds fly in the face of the promises enshrined in the American Constitution.

Unwittingly, points made by Sulzberger's resonate with those ambivalent or paradoxical ideal tropes from Rosenzweig: he both loves and excruciates his immigrant Jews, his underwhelming New York, and the young New Country whose manifest destiny, to him in his other writings, was to be bright, and was contrasted to the Jews' old age as a people.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The Jewish East Side of New York in the period 1881–1924 is the subject of Hindus (1996).

<sup>16</sup> Also early Zionist rhetoric conceived of the Jewish people as an old man (thus internalising the medieval and early modern image of the Jew as the old-aged Saturn, himself identified with Father Time). The *locus classicus* for such Zionist imagery is in a postcard by the artist Ephraim Moshe Lilien for the Fifth Zionist Congress, held in Basel in 1901. See Fig. 6.



Fig. 6. Ephraim Moshe Lilien's postcard for the Fifth Zionist Congress, 1901.

In that postcard, the Jewish people is represented as an elderly unfit man, who thinks of himself as unsuitable for physical exertion, but an angel foretells and prescribes otherwise. The angel, looking at this sitting old man (Fig. 7), fingers an image on the horizon, of the same man standing upright, still with a white beard, but ploughing towards the huge semicircle of the sun (Fig. 8). The new Jew is still the same man, but one who is physically fit, and can look towards the future confidently (he walks towards the sun). See Schmidt (2003, whose Ch.6 is entitled "Ephraim Moshe Lilien: Cultural Priest and Social Advocate"), as well as Berkowitz (1993). In the American context instead, the solution usually adopted by Jews was integration by Americanisation: the new (Jewish) man was the Americanised man.



Fig. 7. Detail from Lilien's postcard of 1901.



Fig. 8. Another detail from Lilien's postcard of 1901: the vision for the future.



Of course, this acquiescence in a stereotype about the Jews calls for discussion; there is a large body of research into this kind of stereotypes, a body of research to which the present author has contributed (Nissan and Shemesh 2010, cf. 2013a, 2013b). Suffice it to mention, e.g., Presner (2007) on the social psychology of Jewish response to the negative stereotype in the form of regeneration by muscular Judaism. Such concern, in current research, with the Jew's body, owes much to Sander Gilman's (1991) seminal role. As for non-Jewish American humour literature, Gilman (1993 [1995, 1996]) has discussed stereotypes of Jewish morbidity in Mark Twain.

## 8. On Policemen and Others, in *Tractate America*

### 8.1. Like Father and Son? On Policemen and Judges in *Tractate America*

Having enumerated the despicable categories of immigrants, next (see Fig. 9) Rosenzweig invokes ironically the rhetorical flourishes which consider the people who received the Revelation to have been made into princes by this (actually there is a context for the ritualists, by which a given action, during a fast, is deemed to be permissible for princes, whereas other retort that all members of the faith community are to be considered princes, i.e., what was permitted to princes as an exception should be considered permissible in general).

The limitation of that princehood is in that there is servitude to the kingdoms (*shi'bid malkhiyes*), i.e., to foreign nations. Rosenzweig turns *shi'bud malkhiyes* into the singular: *shi'bid malkhis*, 'subjection to (or: oppression by) the kingdom', i.e., being subjected to the state. Rosenzweig makes his rabbinic characters debate and conclude that whereas it is controversial that there is subjection to (or: oppression by) the state, it is uncontroversial instead that there is oppression by members of the judiciary and the police:

But the Sages say etc.: "What is the reason?" Rav Mevino said: "The Sages are of the opinion that 'leaders of the people' are included among kings, as it is written (*Deuteronomy* [33:5]): 'And there was in Yeshurun [i.e., the Hebrews] a king, when there leaders of the people were angry (*behit'annef* בְּהִתְאַפְּ)'" [but the word in the biblical verse is *behit'assef*, i.e., when they were gathered together]. And Rav Yarqo [Green] told you: "Read this 'in Israel' [i.e., the people of Israel], it is saying that they are princes [literally: sons of kings]". Rav Yedoyo said: "There is a controversy concerning subjection to the kingdom, but when it comes to being subjected to judges and policemen, even Rabbi Yarqo acknowledges that it exists. As we have learnt: The Sages told Rabbi Yarqo [Green]: 'Qarno Yarqo [Green Horn], what is the difference between a lash [a whip] and a rod?' He told them: 'This is not subjection to the kingdom, but is rather subjection to judges and policemen'".

Rosenzweig's corresponding notes include one which elaborates about "What is the reason?", and explains: "As they say that subjection to the kingdom is found in America, too. It is taught that there is no king there at all, and in a place where there is no king, how can there be servitude to the kingdom?" The next note explains "'leaders of the people' are included among kings", as follows: "and subjection to them is like subjection to a kingdom". This is followed by a note about "This is talking about [the people of] Israel (etc.)", the explanation for this being: "and with Israel it is different, as they are princes, and not necessarily leaders of the people, but even any other person of Israel, the way it continues [in Scripture], read: 'together, the tribes of Israel'".

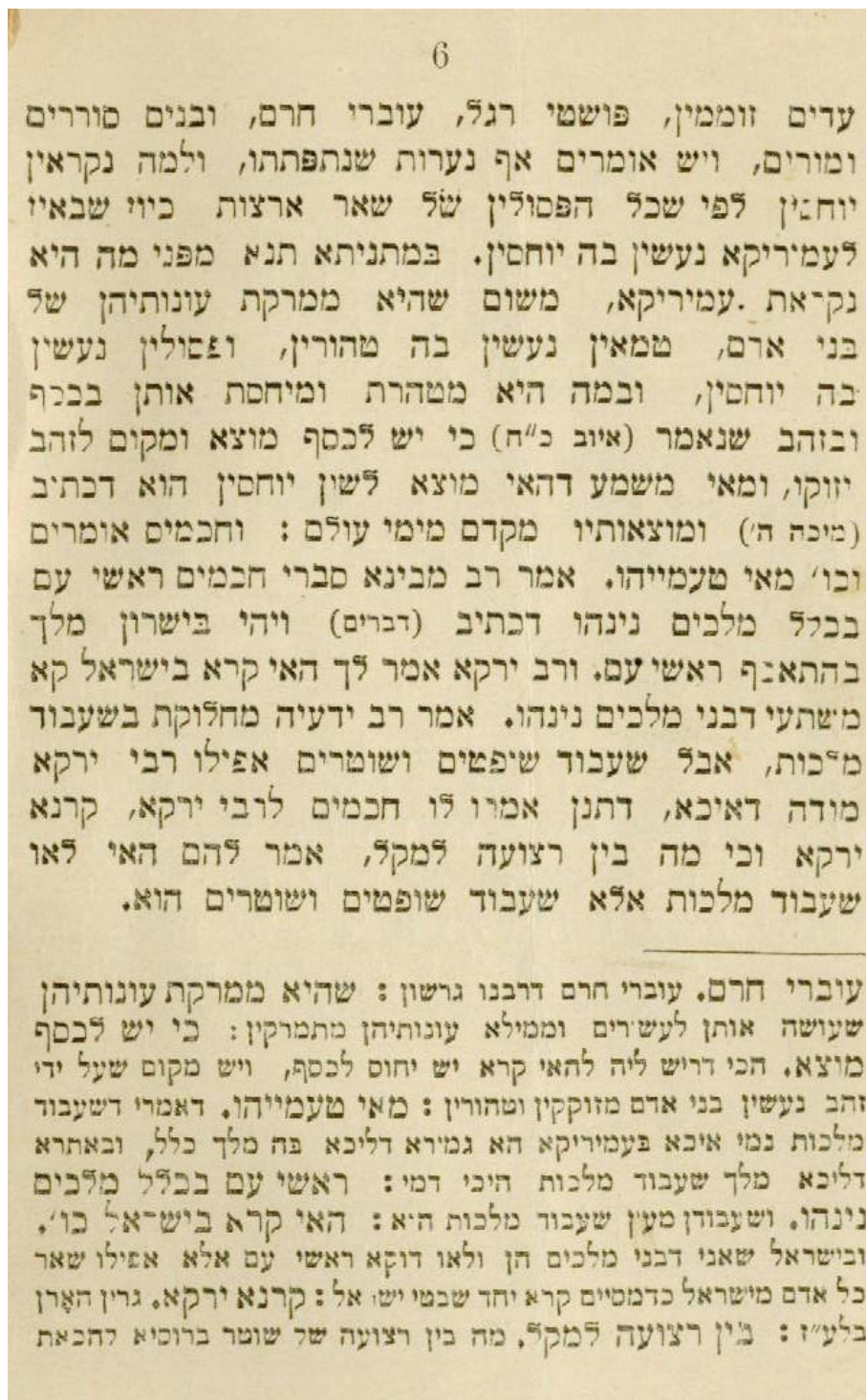


Fig. 9. The second page from the chapbook.

The next note is short: "Qarno Yarqo — *green horn* in the vernacular". This is followed with: "what is the difference between a lash and a rod? — What is the difference between the lash of a policeman in Russia for beating [i.e., whipping], and the rod [i.e., blackjack] of a policeman in America? It is the Angel of Death. What is the difference between there and here?"

The subject of pseudo-talmudic discussion shifts to the authority of judges and policemen in America. Peddlers must have a licence. Even just walking close to a policeman is dangerous. "If this wicked one hits him, let him walk in reverse, if he hits him with his

truncheon [night-stick] on the top of his head for nothing, let him submit his case to Heaven, and let him not submit it to a judge, as a policeman is the leg of the judge" (just as according to the *Babylonian Talmud* in tractate *Eruvin* 70b, the similarity of father and son is expressed by saying that a son is the leg of his father). Just in case readers miss the intertextual reference by "Wicked One" (the Evil Inclination or the Angel of Death), a note mentions the Angel of Death indeed. See Fig. 10.

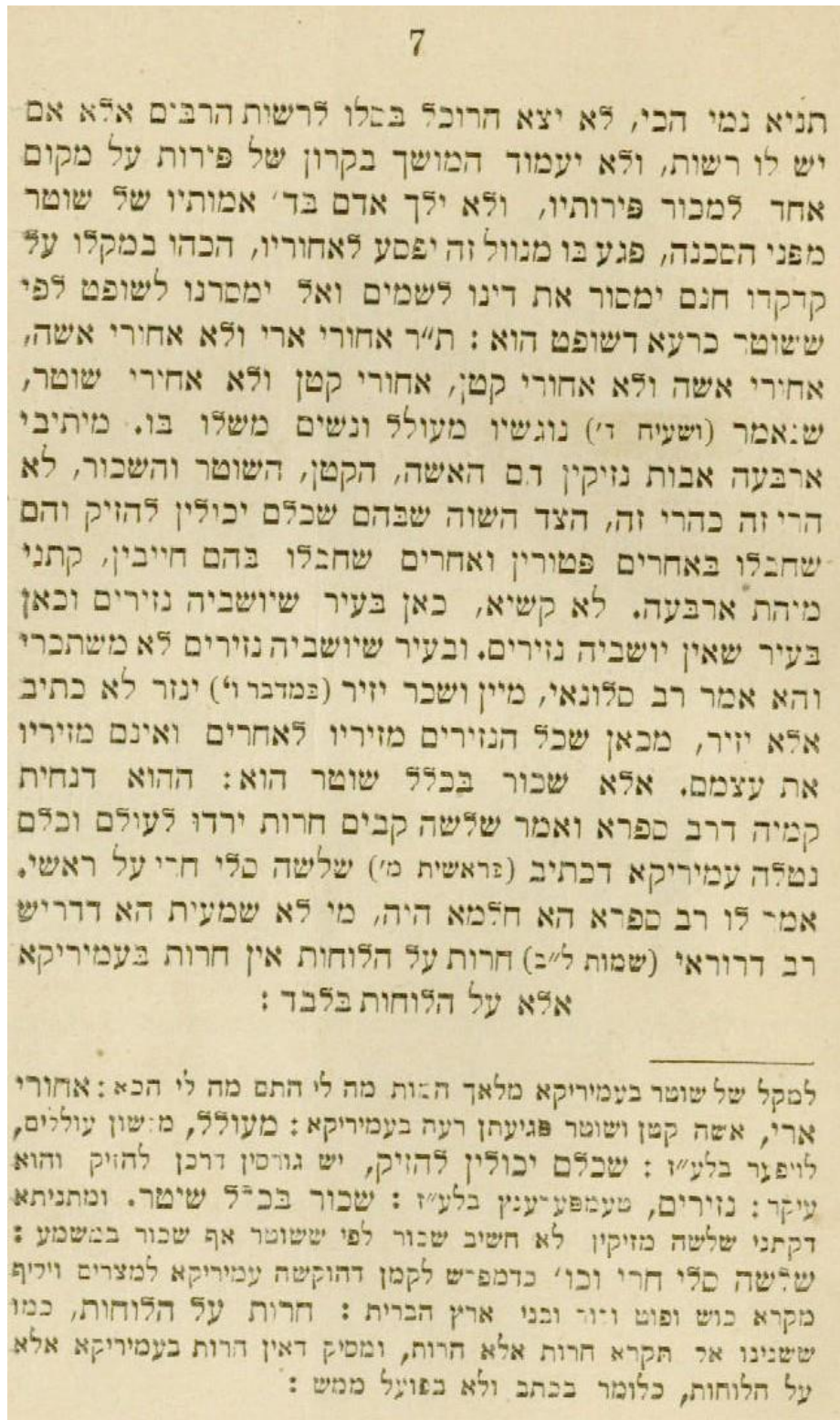


Fig. 10. The second page from the chapbook.

"Judges and policemen" is the *incipit* (beginning) of the *parashah* (pentateuchal weekly portion) *Shoftim*, which is read in late summer. The verse is *Deuteronomy* 16:18. The policeman holding a stick is mentioned in Rashi's gloss to that verse. Therefore, these two associations (of judges with policemen, and of a policeman with a truncheon) are anchored in highly accessible traditional Jewish texts. Rashi's gloss concerning the weapons used by policemen, in turn, is based on the *Babylonian Talmud* at *Sanhedrin*, folio 16.

## 8.2. Adapting a Famous Sorites

Having debated whether one is subjected to the "kingdom" (state) in America, other than the uncontroversial fact that one is subjected there to the police and the judiciary, Rosenzweig states (Fig. 11):

It is taught: here, too, the peddler must not go out with his basket into a public place, other than if he has a licence; and one who pulls a cart of fruits must not stand in one place to sell his fruits; and a person must not walk within the four cubits where a policeman is [i.e., one must keep away from policemen] because of there being danger; were this despicable one to hit him, one must retrocede; were he to have hit him with his blackjack on the top of his head for no valid reason, let him submit his case to Heaven, and let him not submit it to a judge, because a policeman is the leg of a judge [i.e., they are similar to each other, they are kin, like father and son].

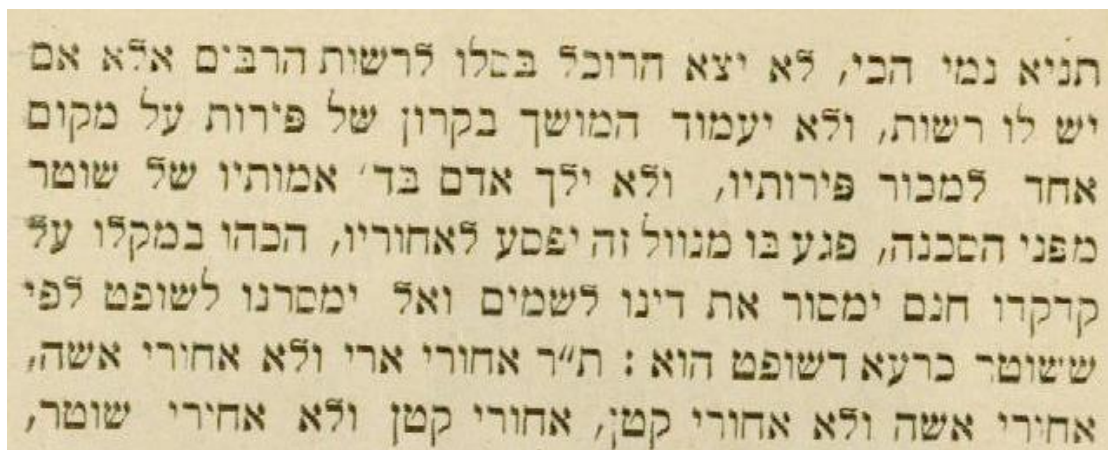


Fig. 11. The passage being translated in this subsection.

Rosenzweig then contextualises the policeman amid other categories "The Sages stated: [walk] behind a lion and not behind a woman, behind a woman and not behind a minor, behind a minor and not behind a policeman, as it is said (*Isaiah* 4): 'A child lords it upon him, and women rule him'" (A note to "lion" anchors this in the United States: "A woman, a minor, and a policeman can do grievous harm in America".)

In his discussion of the uses of a rhetorical device, the *sorites* (*climax*, *gradatio*: a set of chained statements proceeding to a climactic conclusion), the way it appears in the earliest stratum (Tannaitic) of early rabbinic literature, Henry Fischel (1973, p. 141) thought "that at least one tannaitic<sup>17</sup> *sorites* [in *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* 33] was originally formulated as an anti-Epicurean polemic which later generations could no longer understand" (Hezser 2000,

<sup>17</sup> The *Tanna'im* were the rabbinic sages of the several generations leading to the codification in the Mishnah around the year 200 C.E. In contrast, *Amora'im* are the rabbinic sages of the several subsequent generations that led to the Jerusalem Talmud and Babylonian Talmud.

p. 169). In her paper, Catherine Hezser points out similarities and differences between the pagan philosophers of the Cynic, Stoic, or Epicurean schools, and the Jewish sages of Palestine, the rabbis of the Roman era.

As an aside, note that we are not talking about the sorites paradox here: "The *sorites paradox* (from Ancient Greek: σωρείτης *sōreitēs*, meaning 'heaped up') is a paradox that arises from vague predicates. The *paradox of the heap* is an example of this paradox which arises when one considers a heap of sand, from which grains are individually removed. Is it still a heap when only one grain remains? If not, when did it change from a heap to a non-heap?" This quotation is from the beginning of the Wikipedia entry.<sup>18</sup> The *sorites paradox* is also known by the name *little-by-little arguments*. Also see Dominic Hyde's entry (2011) in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

### 8.3. Devious Intertextuality: from *shote* 'idiot', to *shoter* 'policeman'

In "[walk] behind a lion and not behind a woman, behind a woman and not behind a minor, behind a minor and not behind a policeman", the Hebrew word, *shoter*, for 'policeman', is a pun on the word, *shote*, i.e., 'idiot' (more precisely: an adult who is cognitively incompetent, because of retardation, or insanity, or brain-damage), in the Mishnaic passage that Rosenzweig's pseudo-quotation emulates: "A deaf-mute (*cheresh*), an idiot (*shote*) and a minor (*katan*) do grievous harm", i.e., they are awkward to deal with. The full passage from the Mishnah states as follows (in the *Babylonian Talmud*, this *mishnah* is found in tractate *Bava Kamma*, 87a; this is from pages in the Soncino edition — i.e., Epstein (1935–1948) — that were translated by E.W. Kirzner; the brackets are in the Soncino English translation I am quoting from; my own replacements are in curly brackets):

A deaf-mute, an idiot and a minor are awkward to deal with, as he who injures them is liable [to pay], whereas if they injure others they are exempt. [So also] a slave and a [married] woman are awkward to deal with, as he who injures them is liable [to pay], whereas if they injure others they are exempt,<sup>\*1</sup> though they may have to pay at a later date; for if the woman was divorced<sup>\*2</sup> or the slave manumitted,<sup>\*3</sup> they would be liable to pay.

\*1. Irrespective of the equality of all before the law{...} no payment could be made here as the possessions of slaves form a part of the estates of their masters as in {*Kiddushin*} 23b, and the property of a married woman is usually in the usufruct of the husband, cf. {*Ketubbot*} IV, 4,

\*2. When her estate will return to her.

\*3. And property was subsequently acquired by him.

The sentence "A deaf-mute (*cheresh*), an idiot (*shote*) and a minor (*katan*) do grievous harm", i.e., they are awkward to deal with, is then repeated again in tractate *Bava Kamma*, 88a, before the *gemara* which elaborates upon it, with anecdotes being legal casenotes illustrating the *dictum*.

### 8.4. Whom Is It more Dangerous to Stalk?

The model for Rosenzweig's wording "behind a lion and not behind a woman, behind a woman and not behind" and so forth, is famous wording occurring in tractate *Berakhot* (Blessings), the first talmudic tractate a pupil usually learns. *Berakhot* 61a has a discussion

<sup>18</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sorites\\_paradox](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sorites_paradox)

about the creation of Eve. (In the following, we are going to modify the translation of the Soncino English edition.) Among the other things, it is said:

"And the rib which the Lord G-d had taken from man, made he a woman" [(Genesis 2:22)]. Rab and Samuel explained this differently. One said that [this 'rib'] was a face, the other that it was a tail. No objection can be raised against the one who says it was a face, since so it is written, "Behind and before hast Thou formed me" [(Psalms 139:5)].

After some discussion, there is this other passage:

According to the one who says it was a face, which of the two faces went in front? — R. Nahman b. Isaac answered: It is reasonable to suppose that the man's face went in front, since it has been taught: A man should not walk behind a woman on the road, and even if his wife happens to be in front of him on a bridge he should let her pass on one side, and whoever crosses a river behind a woman will have no portion in the future world.

The footnotes in the Soncino English edition explain "A man should not walk behind a woman on the road" with "To avoid unchaste thoughts", and explain "whoever crosses a river behind a woman will have no portion in the future world" with "Because the woman in crossing will naturally lift up her dress." Of course, the clearly reproachful situation is that of a man stalking a woman, but even when lust or romantic interest is not the motive, walking after a woman is deemed unseemly because the situation of stalking is evoked, and moreover, following a woman without unchaste thoughts may give rise to unchaste thoughts.

### 8.5. The Precedent of Samson's Parents

Further down, there is a passage about Manoah, Samson's father, who follows his wife as soon as she runs to him to inform him that the angel has appeared to her again in the field, this time in order to brief the husband (at the latter's request) about how the couple have to behave with regard to the child she is going to conceive. The Sages came up with the idea that Manoah was less intelligent than his wife, because after the angel departs, he tells his wife they are going to die, but his wife retorts that if that was the case, the angel would not have announced what he did, nor would the offering they burnt been accepted.

The text continues, further elaborating about the undesirability of walking after a woman (note that Manoah was not stalking a woman other than his own: Manoah was following his wife, and he was following her because she was showing the way). Then the Sages state that even following a woman is not as reproachful as following an idol (which typically is when there is a religious procession). Then the text changes direction: the next situation of walking behind is that of a man who, instead of entering a synagogue in order to pray, or at least walking in front of the façade, walks behind that worship place.

R. Nahman said: Manoah was an ignoramus, since it is written, *And Manoah went after his wife*. R. Nahman b. Isaac demurred to this. According to this, [he said,] in the case of Elkanah when it says, "And Elkanah went after his wife", and in the case of Elisha when it says, *And he rose and went after her*, are we to suppose that this means literally after her? No; it means, after her words and her advice.

Note that in Scripture, the wording about Elkanah walking after his wife is not found. The best known Elkanah is Samuel's father; there are other four characters bearing that name in the Hebrew Bible. The talmudic text continues as follows:

So here [in the case of Manoah] it means, after her words and her advice! Said R. Ashi: On the view of R. Nahman that Manoah was an ignoramus, he cannot even have known as much of

Scripture as a schoolboy [literally: He did not read Scripture in a schoolhouse]; for it says, "And Rebekah arose and her damsels, and they rode upon the camels and followed the man" [(Genesis 24:61)], [after the man] and not in front of the man.

### 8.6. A Crescendo of Dangers: Going Behind a Lion, a Woman, an Idol, or a Synagogue

Actually, it is something noted elsewhere, by the Sages, that a camel-driver walks in front of the camel, whereas an ass-driver walks behind the animal. There even exists the technical idiom "an ass-driver [and at once] a camel-driver", for one who is highly constrained. At any rate, in the given talmudic passage, the situation of Abraham's servant leading a bride to Abraham's place for Isaac, with the bride on camel back, is used as support for the norm that a man should not follow a woman. Then the talmudic text continues with the wording that clearly inspired Rosenzweig:

R. Johanan said: **Better go behind a lion than behind a woman; better go behind a woman than behind** an idol; better go behind an idol than behind [thus, avoiding entering!] the synagogue when the congregation are praying. This, however, is the case only when he is not carrying a load; if he is carrying a load, there is no objection. And also this is the case only when there is no other entrance; but if there is another entrance there is no objection. And again this is the case only when he is not riding on an ass, but if he is riding on an ass, there is no objection. And again this is the case only when he is not wearing *tefillin* [i.e., phylacteries]; but if he is wearing *tefillin* there is no objection.

The norm about not walking behind a synagogue is also found in tractate *Berakhot* 8b. This is related to the recommendation heard at present among Jews, not to attend a synagogue far away, if there is a closer one on one's way.

### 8.7. Chief Injurers: The Woman, the Minor, the Policeman, and the Drunk Man

The text in *Tractate America* goes on to explain that the Chief Injurers, *Avos Nezikin* (i.e., *Avot Nezikin*, which in the Talmud are the chief actionable injuries or damages, from which the *toladot*, i.e., the subordinate kinds, are deduced), "are the woman, the minor, the policeman, and the drunk. This one is not like that one. What is the same in all of them is that any of them may injure, whereas if they themselves injure others, they are not liable, but others who have injured them are liable". Further down, we get the explanation that "a drunkard is comprised in 'policeman'". Chapter 5 in *Tractate America* is about associations. One of the notes to Ch. 5 turns again to the police: "The Angel of Death: A policeman, and the truncheon ('stick for hitting', literally: 'stick of injurers') in his hand".

We can see, then, Rosenzweig lampooning the American police and judiciary. The theme of the drunken policeman was not unfamiliar to the Jewish literati of Tsarist Russia. In the Hebrew *belles lettres* in particular, Bialik authored a poem about such a character.<sup>19</sup> In the

<sup>19</sup> This was mentioned by Dov Sadan (1989, pp. 360–361), in Ch. 24, concerned with a poem written in 1894 in Russia by the then still young poet Chaim Nachman Bialik, who would eventually rise to fame as the foremost Hebrew-language modern poet, unless this was Tschernichowski, as some instead maintain. Bialik had described a drunken policeman shouting at Jewish greengrocers at a market, and kicking baskets full of apples and greenery. The name Bialik gave for the policeman was the obviously Russian *Vanya*, which occurs in rhyme towards the end, but in a note, the poet referred to the quite minor character from Ezra 10:36, as though he had drawn the name from there.

This overtly suggested that the name was literary, whereas instead it was pinpointing the locale, which was that of most expected readers of the literary magazine where the poem appeared. This sarcastic poem was entitled 'In the Jews' Street'. To deflect the Tsarist censor, apart from the footnote he also gave the poem this subheading: 'A Scene from the Life of the Jews in Morocco'. A Tsarist censor could be expected to be nervous about criticism of events in his own empire, especially as in those years the conditions of Jews there were very

Old Country, Bialik's caricature in verse of a drunken policeman was only feasible because he disguised the locale as Morocco, and the name Vanya as biblical. Aberbach (1993) claims that Mendele, the great Jewish Maskilic satirist in Odessa, selected as his exclusive butt the Jews, because conditioned by the political unfeasibility of blaming the Tsarist authorities.

### 8.8. Temperance in the United States of America

Having dealt with Chief Injurers, Rosenzweig notes that "as it is taught: at any rate, they are four". He then states in addition (see Fig. 12):

There is no difficulty [with this enumeration]. Here [it deals] with a city whose inhabitants are Nazarites [i.e., the biblical men who made a vow to abstain from wine and beer], and there [it deals] with a city whose inhabitants are not Nazarites. {A note defines this: **נוזרים, טעמפּע-ענין בלע"ז** "Nazarites — *Temperanz* [temperance] in the vernacular.} And in a city whose inhabitants are Nazarites, they do not get drunk. Concerning this, Rav Salunay [Saloon-keeper, Publican] said: "From wine and beer he shall abstain (*yazzir*)' (Numbers 6), it is not written *yinnozer* [as a passive verbal form], but rather *yazzir* [an active verbal form], hence all Nazarites make others abstain (*mazzirin* [plural participle, considered transitive here]), and are not making themselves abstain. But 'drunk' is comprised in 'policeman'.

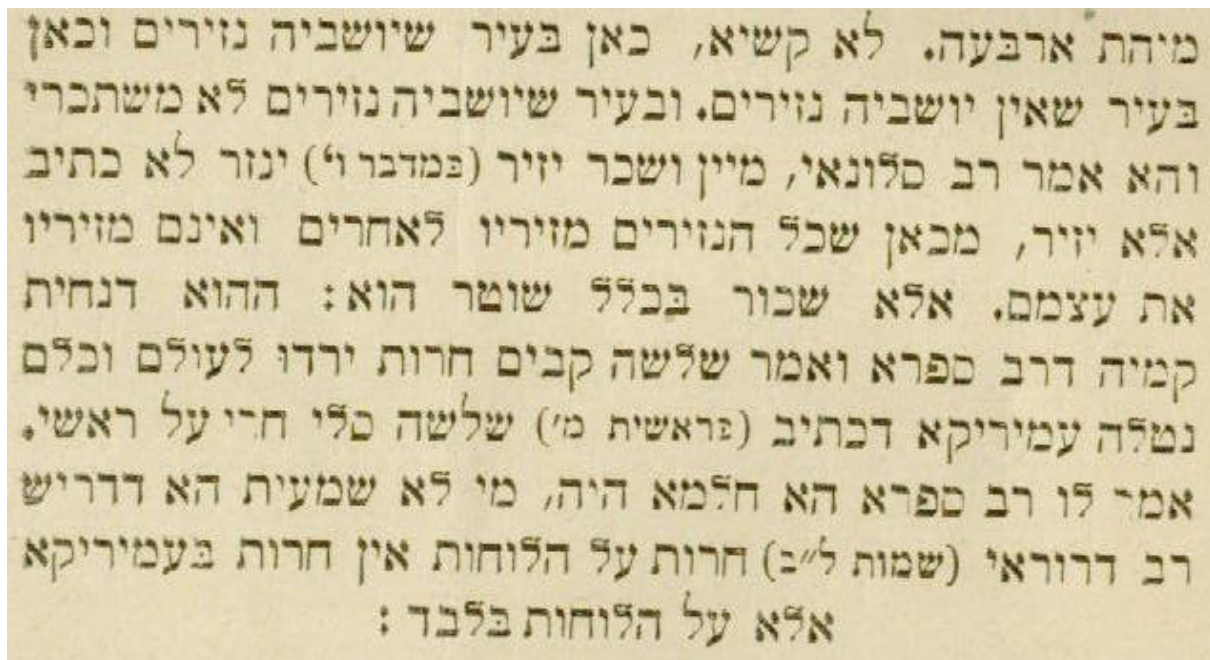


Fig. 12. The passage being translated in this subsection and in the next.

### 8.9. "Inscribed on the Tablets"

*Tractate America* contrasts the grim realities of law enforcement to America's constitutional guarantees. A traditional homiletical interpretation of "inscribed on the Tablets" carried by

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much under criticism abroad, while he would be unconcerned by sad reports from Morocco (not infrequently published at the time).

The Russian personal name *Vanya* is an endearing form of *Ivan*, itself from the Biblical Hebrew *Jochanan*. Yet, an unrelated name *Vanya* as borne by a man is mentioned in Ezra 10:36. It has been suggested that its etymology may be Indo-European.



Moses is that *haruth* (Ashkenazi *choris*) 'inscribed' should be read *heruth* (Ashkenazi *cheiris*) 'freedom'. These are homographs in Hebrew (חֲרֻט). Rosenzweig relates (see Fig. 12):

Somebody came before Rav Safro and said: "Three measures of freedom descended into the world, and all of them, it was America that took them, as it is written (*Genesis* 40): "Three baskets of *chori* [a kind of bread] on his head" [of the chief baker in his dream while in prison with Joseph]. Rav Safro told him: "This was [but] a dream. Did thou not hear the homily of Rav Droray [He of Freedom] (*Exodus* 32): "*choris* on the Tablets"? There is no *cheiris* in America other than on the Tablets".

Also bear in mind this possibly being evocative of Hebrew *heres* (Ashkenazi *cheires*) 'clay', 'fragment of pottery'. Idiomatically in Hebrew, getting *heres* in one's hand stands for being unsuccessful.

I would tentatively exclude that Rosenzweig in the passage quoted here was also thinking of New York's Jewish bagels (but then cf. the Italians' *ciambella*, which is the same!), when mentioning the *chori* bread (bread with holes in it? punctured bread? if this is derived from Hebrew *chor*, Ashkenazic *cheir*, 'hole'). *Chori* also means 'freeman'. This is what mattered to Rosenzweig in the given context.

Incidentally, bear in mind that first-generation immigrants may have had some affective connection to the *beigale* (bagel), but the (New York) bagel clearly was not connotated in the same manner than it became one century later, as being a signal of ethnicity but also of New York as being a source for globalisation.

## 9. Bribery and the Institutions, Vote-Rigging, and the Centrality of Money in American Politics at All Levels: *Tractate America's* Panoramic View of the Federal Executive, Through the Mayorship, down to Post Holders at Neighbourhood Faith Communities

Within each chapter of *Tractate America*, the sequence of a pseudo-mishnah and the respective pseudo-*Gemara*, while replicating the structure of the exposition in the *Babylonian Talmud*, is quite handy in that it enabled Rosenzweig in practice to divide the chapter into sections, with the option of persisting in the same theme, or shifting to another theme, possibly related to the previous one.

After making the distinction between what is enshrined in the Constitution (and more generally, in legislation) and what happens in practice with law enforcement (and abuse of power on the part of the enforcers), the continuation of Chapter 1 of *Tractate America* (See Fig. 13) begins with a *mishnah*, or rather a pseudo-mishnaic statement:

Silver [double sense, also: money]<sup>20</sup> buys the president (*nosi*) and the judge (*shoyfeyt*), and Rabbi Yanko [Child/Yankee] says: also the *noyges* [i.e., the taskmaster].

A note by Rosenzweig clarifies: "Also the *noyges*: 'either one or the other'. The same money does not go to all of them at once. If the president or a judge gets it, then it is not the *noyges* who gets it, and viceversa.

The term /nogeś/ is associated with overseeing the workers within the slave-holding system of Pharaonic Egypt, according to *Exodus*. In Sec. 1 of the late antique homiletic work *Exodus Rabbah*, one reads: "One *noges* [was] appointed over ten *shotrim*", and whereas *shotrim* in Modern Hebrew means 'policemen' (so also according to usage in *Tractate America*), Jastrow's dictionary (1903, p. 876) translates: "one (Egyptian) taskmaster was appointed over ten (Israelitish) officers".

<sup>20</sup> Hebrew *késef*, like French *argent*, denotes both 'silver' and 'money'.

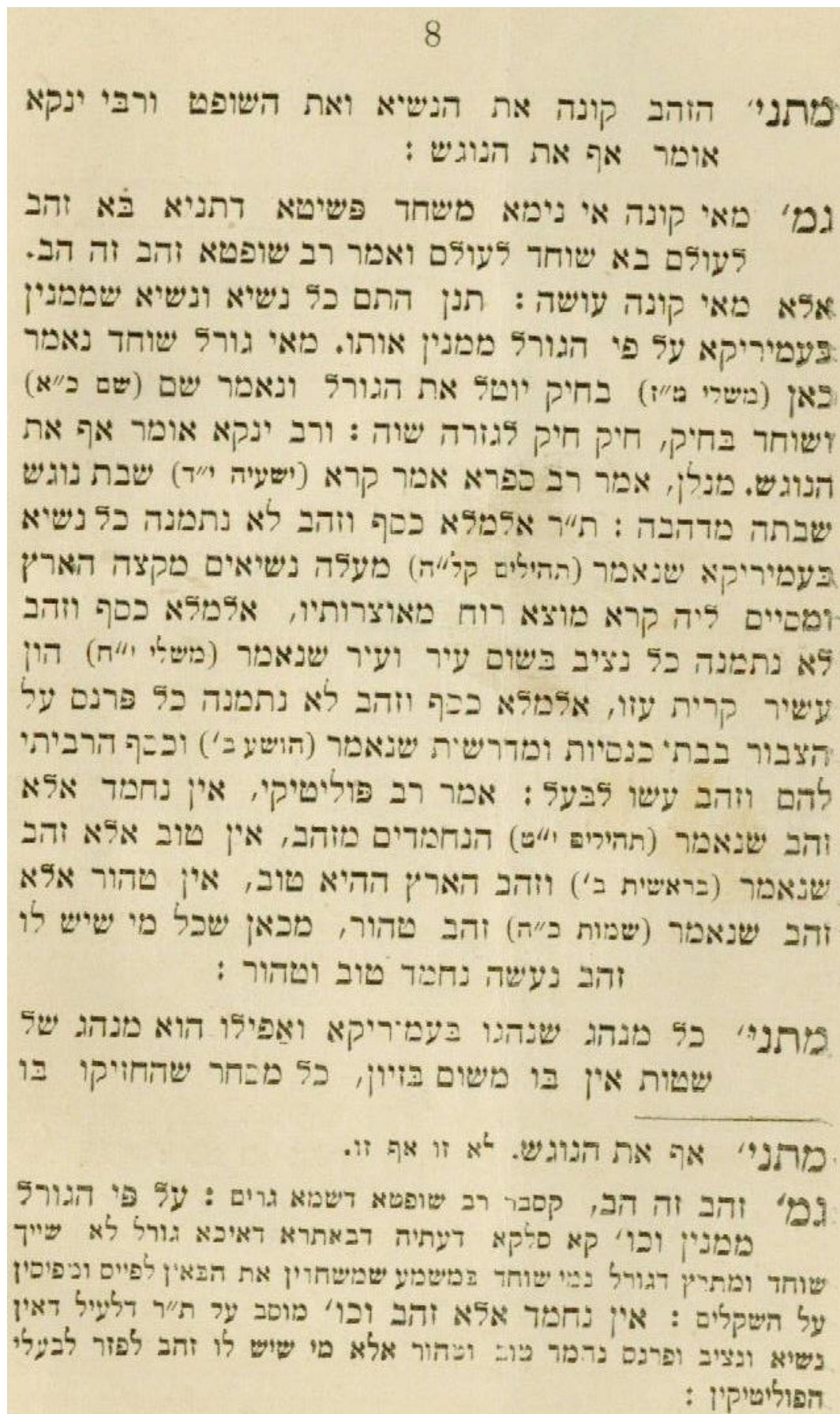


Fig. 13. The page about the centrality of money in politics, from the chapbook edition.

Because of the connotation of oppression, that was already introduced in the discussion of policemen earlier on in *Tractate America*, it is possible to interpret the role of *noyges* here as 'enforcer', rather than as 'taskmaster'. Then the pseudo-mishnaic statement could be translated: "Gold buys the president and the judge, and Rabbi Yanko says: Even the enforcer". A note explains it is either, not both. From this, readers can promptly infer the advantage of parsimony: once the policeman was paid, never mind the judge, as one is not going to end up in court.

The intertextual reference is to the very first *mishnah* of Chapter 4 of tractate *Bava Metsi'a*, thus, a textual locus likely to be promptly recognised by Rosenzweig's intended audience. It starts thus: "Gold buys silver", i.e., in the words of Jastrow (1903, s.v. *zahav*, p. 381): "the delivery of gold coin effects the purchase of silver &c., i. e. in an exchange of coined gold for silver &c., the superior metal is the merchandise and the inferior the money". Actually, the parallel in the *Jerusalem Talmud* reads "Silver buys gold", with that same technical sense.

For one studying the *Babylonian Talmud* rather than just the *Mishnah*, the layout on the page makes those initial words of the chapter, "Gold buys silver", even more conspicuous, and this is in fact also used as the name for that chapter. Incidentally, that was also the case of the layout on manuscript pages of the *Babylonian Talmud* — see Fig. 14 — even though by Rosenzweig's times, his readership was likely to know the *Babylonian Talmud* in its Vilna edition (published by the Romm publishing house), which is also the case at present (the matrix having been destroyed during the Holocaust, the Vilna edition is reproduced photostatically).

The pseudo-mishnaic statement of a line and a half is followed by a pseudo-*Gemara* discussion:

*Gemara*: What is "buy"? Or does it mean "bribes"? The explanation is that it is taught: "Gold has come into the world, bribery has come into the World", and Rav Shofta [Judge] says [offering a punning interpretation]: "*zhb* ['gold', read: *zohov*] — *zh hb* ['this [is] «Give!»', read: *ze hov*"]". {Rosenzweig's note: As Rav Shofta was of the opinion that the name was the cause.} But what is "buys" there for? We have studies: There, each and every president that they appoint in America, it is by drawing lots [*/goral/ goyrol*] that they appoint him. [Rosenzweig "misunderstands" casting ballots as though it was the same as drawing lots.] {Rosenzweig's note: It occurred to him that in such a place where there are lots, there is no bribery, and he retorts that lots, too, are bribery, in the sense that they bribe those who come to the lottery [for: voting station], and they draw lots about the shekels.} What is "lots"? "Bribery". Here (*Proverbs* 15) it says: "In the armpit the lots are thrown", and there (*ibid.* 21) it says: "and bribery in the armpit", [hence] analogise<sup>21</sup> from "armpit" to "armpit".

<sup>21</sup> The technical term employed is (I render it in Ashkenazic pronunciation) *gzeira shovo* (in Israeli Hebrew: *gzerá shavá*, literally, 'equal derivation', 'equal cut'). It is an eminently elusive exegetic criterion. Michael Chernick (1994) has discussed it thoroughly. This device is included among the canonical thirteen criteria of exegesis. *Gezerah shavah* is, somewhat simplifying, a word-comparison device — which is about seeking the "equal side" of topics according to the occurrence of the same wording items in different textual contexts from the *Pentateuch*. While fertile ground in the homiletic domain, *Gezerah shavah* is quite problematic in the legal domain; so much so, indeed, that it was "neutralised" fairly early on by the Sages. It would allow, indeed, sweeping analogies where unwarranted, backfiring if not left just an ornamental role for *de jure condendo* (i.e., in the Western legal jargon, the law the way you would like it to be, what ideally you would like it to develop into). The delimitation of applicability of the device evolved, to the effect that *Gezerah shavah* could only be invoked in support of an extant, different justification for a norm. Already in the *Jerusalem Talmud*, which was concluded earlier than the *Babylonian Talmud*, the device was relegated to the role of mere embellishment in discussions. The gradual restrictiveness of the application of the criterion as instantiated in the growing body of the legal corpus of the talmudic literature is meticulously, neatly analyzed in Chernick's book. First of all, he had to delimit the range of his data, and "considered only those midrashic expositions explicitly called *Gezerah*



Fig. 14. The layout of Chapter “Gold buys silver” of tractate *Bava Metsi'a*, of the *Babylonian Talmud*, in a manuscript from Città di Castello, in Italy. The arrow points to the word for “The gold” (*ha-zahav*).

Next, the final part of the pseudo-mishnaic statement is discussed in the pseudo-*Gemara*, to further drive in the point that fund-raising (not necessarily bribery) is the name of the game in American national as well as local politics:

“And Rav Yanqo [Child/Yankee] says: ‘also the *noyges* [i.e., the taskmaster]’”. How do we know this? Rav Safro [Teacher] said: “Read (*Isaiah* 14): ‘the /nogets/ (oppressor) has ceased’, ceased because of gold”. Our Sages have taught: “Were it not for silver and gold, no president would have been appointed in America, as it says (*Psalms* 135): ‘He who raises *nsi'im* [i.e., ‘clouds’, but here the other sense, ‘presidents’, is intended] from the other end of the land/earth’. And in the following, read: ‘He who lets the wind go out from his treasuries (*oytsroytov*)’ [but the sense in *Psalms* is: ‘the place where the winds are stored when they are not blowing’]. Were it not for silver and gold, no *notsiv* (mayor [the context clarifies which authority the *notsiv* is]) would be appointed in any city, as it

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*shavah* in the tannaitic midrashim [i.e., exegesis ascribed to the Sages of the *Mishnah*] as *bona fide* examples”. *Gezerah shavah* is “not the result of whim [...] they are governed by formal rules that prevent comparing every similar word from the Torah for legal or aggadic [i.e., non-legal] purposes [...] The basic formal rule for ‘plain’ *gezerah shavah* is that its source is a word or phrase repeated only twice in the Pentateuch. The ‘*mufneh*’ *gezerah shavah*’s formal requirements are less rigid, but generally require the appearance of comparable words in a single pentateuchal pericope or in single pentateuchal legal framework. The word must also be syntactically or logically extraneous [...] There are word-comparison expositions that the *tannaim* [i.e., the Sages of the *Mishnah*] did not call *gezerah shavah* [...]”. I reviewed Chernick (1994) and other literature in Nissan (2003).


says (*Proverbs* 18): 'The wealth of the rich man is the citadel/city of his strength'. Were it not for silver and gold, no *parnos* [i.e., synagogue administrator] would be appointed over the community at synagogues and schools, as it says (*Hosea* 2): 'I [the L-rd Almighty] gave them silver abundantly, and they dedicated gold to the [idol] Baal'".

Rosenzweig is being honest: he progressed from the national level (the president) to the city level, and from the city level, to the level of the local Jewish communities. He is not lashing out just at the collective Other. He is quite interested in criticising his own ethno-religious community as well. The pseudo-*Gemara* continues, by ascribing what Rosenzweig is going to say, to an invented character, Rabbi Politiki. In the modern context, the sense is 'Politician', whereas as in the Roman-era *Mishnah*, in tractate *Terumot* [i.e., *Tithes*] 2:5, the word *politikin* means 'urbanites', 'city-dwellers' (from Greek πολιτικοί). It occurs in a passage contrasting how refined two kinds of onions are: there is one kind that is worth more (and this is of interest in context for tithes purposes), and it is the kind city-dwellers (*politikin*) would eat.

Rav Politiki said: "Nothing is desirable [or: to be cherished, but here: is coveted] other than gold, as it says (*Genesis* 2): 'And the gold of that country [Havilah] is good'; nothing is pure other than gold, as it says (*Exodus* 25): 'pure gold'; hence anybody who has gold becomes cherished, good, and pure".

A note elaborates:

"Nothing is desirable other than gold (etc.)" — This refers to the aforementioned T"R [i.e., the passage starting by *tannu rabbonon*, 'Our Sages have taught'], as no *nosi* (president), *notsiv* (mayor), and *parnos* (synagogue administrator) is cherished, good, and pure other than one who has gold to spend liberally on the *ba'alei hapolitikin* (ones who have a say in politics [literally: 'the masters of the politicians', arguably in the sense 'kingmakers'])

The acronym T"R here refers to the earlier wording  "Our Sages have taught (*tannu rabbonon*): Were it not for silver and gold", and so forth.

## 10. Business Unethical Practices

### 10.1. No Social Practice is Shameful, Only Self-Deception is Not Permitted: Anything Goes in Business Behaviour, in This Free-Wheeling Society

The next pseudo-*mishnah* in Chapter 1 of *Tractate America* is as follows (its Hebrew text starts at the bottom of Fig. 13 and end on top of Fig. 15):

Any custom in effect in America, even if it is a silly custom, does not entail shame. Every commerce practised by the Yankees, even if there is in it stealth and misappropriation, there is no deception in it. A great principle was stated by the Sages: In trade, any deception is permitted, except self-deception.

A note explains "the Yankees" as "those citizens who *yonku* (sucked [as though it was maternal milk]) the *torah* (law) of America in their infancy.

After this pseudo-*mishnah*, the respective pseudo-*Gemara* (see Figs. 15–17) begins by making considerations about custom and about commerce, by emulating a complex talmudic reasoning about the ontology of concept, warranted by quotations from Scripture.

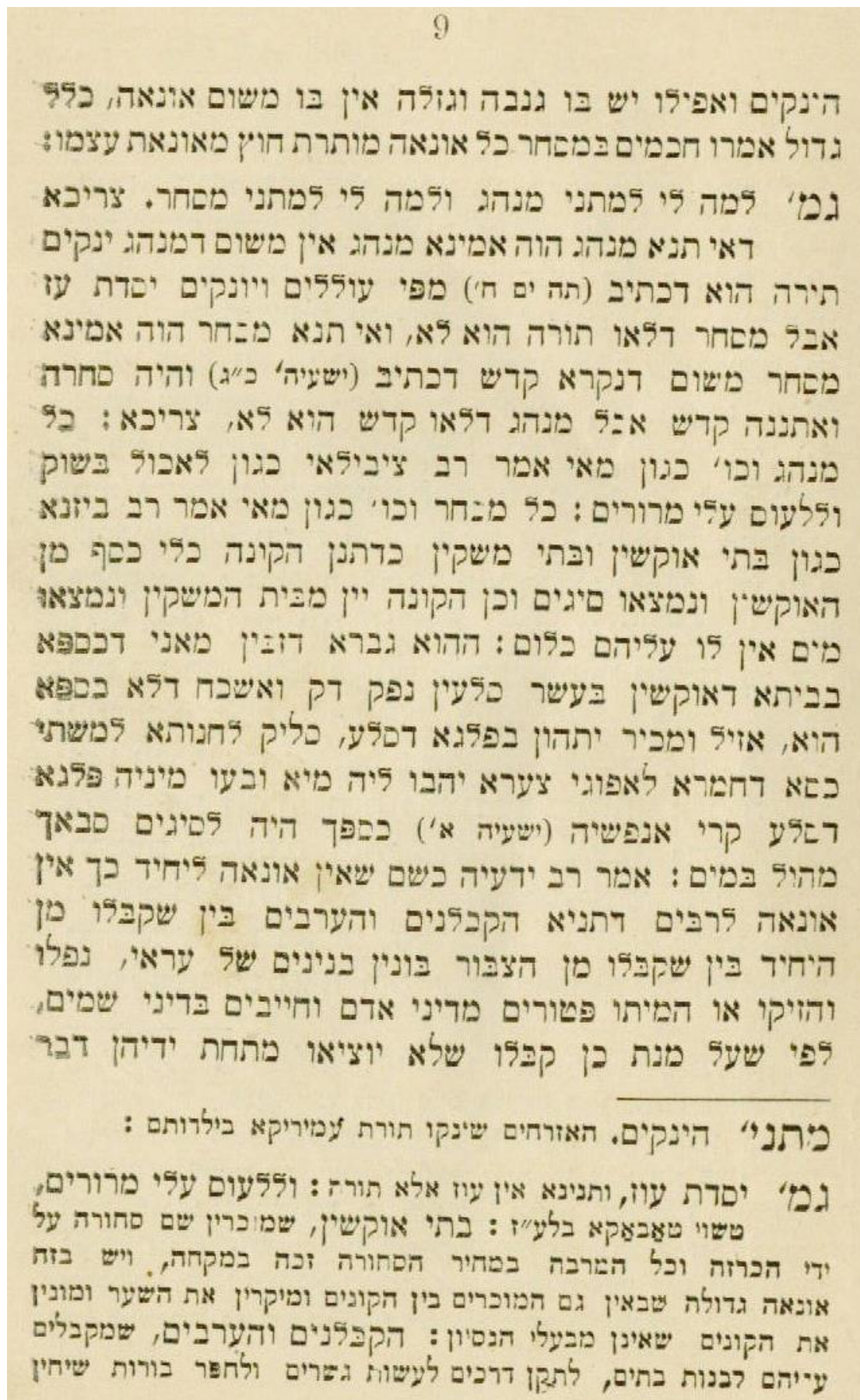


Fig. 15. The page about unscrupulous behaviour being tolerated, from the chapbook edition.

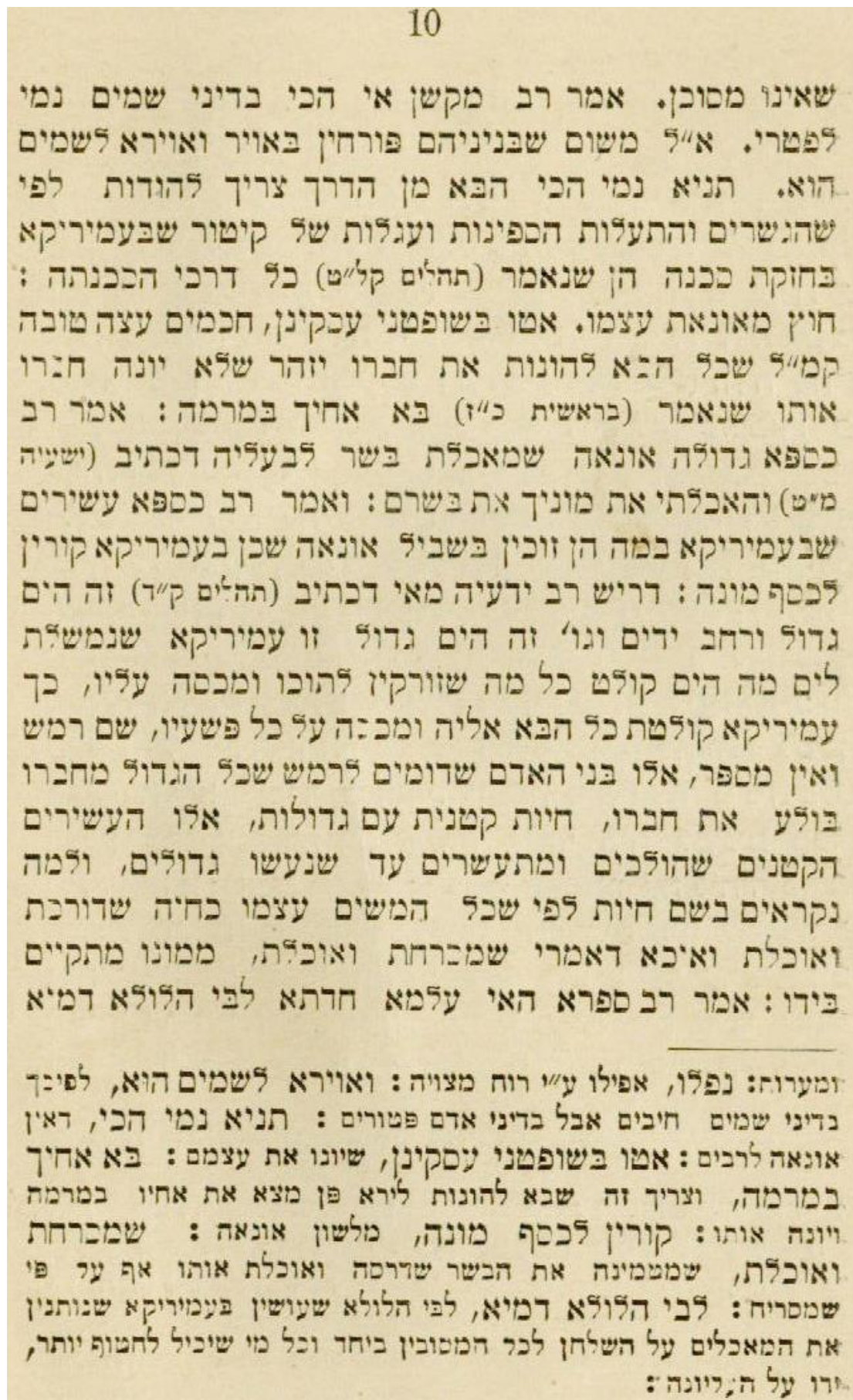


Fig. 16. The page about ubiquitous danger and on constant partying, as though, from the chapbook edition.

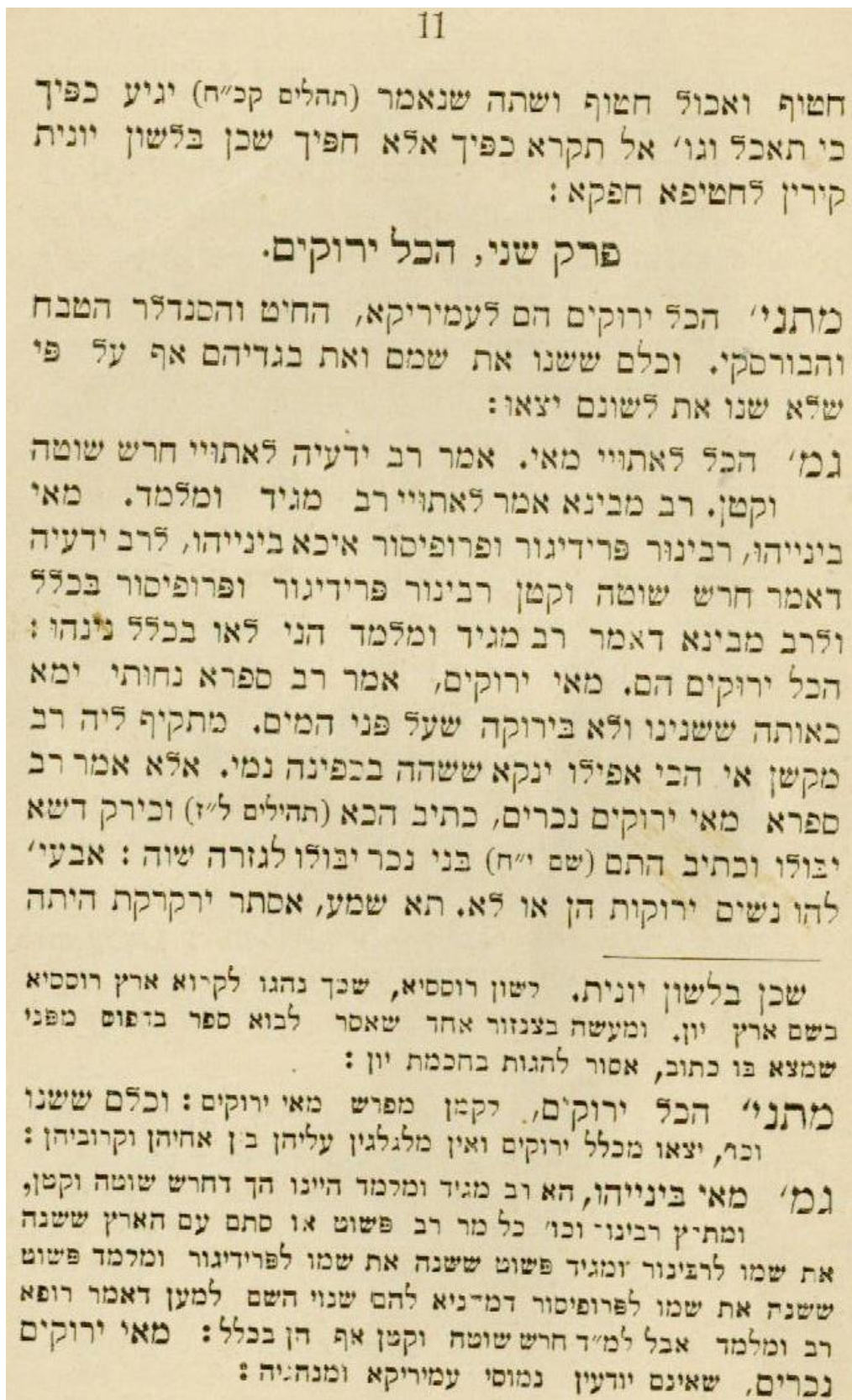


Fig. 17. The end of Chapter 1 and the beginning of Chapter 2 of *Tractate America*, from the chapbook edition.

This enables Rosenzweig to drive in the point that in the U.S.A, custom is *the* rule (he does so by contrasting *minhag*, i.e. custom as meant in Jewish law, to Pentateuchal prescriptions); and the point that in the U.S., commerce enjoys a quasi-consecrated status:



What is the use for me, teaching about "custom", and what is the use for me, teaching about "commerce"? It is necessary. Because had "custom" been taught, "custom" ought to be trusted, [but that is not the case, as] there is no custom, as the custom of the Yankees is *Torah* [i.e., it has the higher authority of Pentateuchal prescriptions, it is not just the lesser authority of custom], as it is written (*Psalms* 8): "From the mouth of babes and *yonkim* ['ones who suck', 'babies', but here playfully misinterpreted as though it meant 'Yankees'] Thou hast established strength". But commerce, which is not *Torah*, is not so, as had "commerce" been taught, "commerce" ought to be trusted, as it is called [in Scripture] *koydesh* ("holiness"), as it is written (*Isaiah* 23[:18]):

[In vv. 15–16, the prophet is announcing seventy years of crisis to the city-kingdom of Tyre, and invites her to go around playing and singing, like a forgotten harlot, so she would be remembered; v.17 announces that after seventy years, Tyre would be restored to her previous high status as a commercial power, would revert to her earnings from harlotry, and would be "whoring" with all kingdoms on earth; v. 18 states that ultimately Tyre's earnings would benefit the Sanctuary or at any rate, the L-rd's worshippers.]

"And her commerce and her earnings [*esnannoh*: income from harlotry!] be *qoydeysh* (consecrated)".<sup>22</sup> But custom, which is not *qoydesh*, is not so.<sup>23</sup> So it was necessary.

## 10.2. Lack of Good Manners, and Fraudulent Behaviour at Auctions

Next, the pseudo-*Gemara* turns to elaborating about particular portions of the latest pseudo-mishnaic statement:

"Any custom (etc.)", such as what Rav Tsvilay [Promoter of Civility] said: "such as eating in a public place [literally: at the market],<sup>24</sup> and chewing leaves of bitter herbs" [an allusion to the bitter herbs of Egyptian slavery:<sup>25</sup> a note to *lileis alei mreirim* "to chew bitter herbs" explains: "chew tobacco" (in Hebrew transliteration from

<sup>22</sup> In *Isaiah* 23:18, the irony is that Tyre's future earnings, being metaphorised as though they were income from harlotry, will nevertheless be a welcome benefit to the ones "sitting before the L-rd": thus, in stark contrast to the Pentateuchal prescription (*Deuteronomy* 23:19) that neither earnings from harlotry, nor the price of a dog are permitted contributions for a sacred cause.

It is unnecessary to assume that Rosenzweig was alluding here, with this quotation, to the prominent status that the United States of America had already achieved in industry and commerce, having already surpassed Britain — a status in world trade that may remind of the Phoenicians' trade, even though the Phoenicians were just intermediaries, and in the main not manufacturers, and not an agricultural power in their own right, unlike the huge agricultural and industrial produce of the United States around 1890.

Rosenzweig's main point, when using this quotation from *Isaiah*, is that trade is even holy or something approaching that, in American society. It may be that in addition, the quotation can also be legitimately read as colouring the broader context of Rosenzweig's satire in *Tractate America*: Rosenzweig can be assumed to have expected that at least a significant segment of his readership would have been reminded of how *Isaiah* had characterised Tyre's income as being akin to income from harlotry. Rosenzweig actually selected from Scripture such wording that pairs trade (of the kind he decries) and harlotry.

<sup>23</sup> A parallel: "But commerce, which is not *Torah*, is not so", "But custom, which is not *qoydesh*, is not so".

<sup>24</sup> Eating was deemed to require privacy already in the *Mishnah* (ca. 200 C.E.), and for example in a shop, if one was to eat, one would have been expected to at the very least turn his back, so as to afford some privacy. Also modern good manners looked askance at people eating in the street. "If they were sitting at the gate or in a shop, and [one passing by that public place, carrying figs] tells them: 'Take figs for yourselves', then let them [who do not own the gate or the shop] take [figs] and they are exempt [from tithes on those figs], and the owner of the gate or the owner of the shop are liable [to tithes]. Rabbi Judah exempts [these, too], unless he turns his face [to eat without shame], or changes the place where he is sitting" (*Mishnah, Ma'aserot*, 2:2). "Rabbi Nehemiah says: 'Any [courtyard] such that a person is not ashamed to eat inside eat, is exempt [from tithes on fruits kept inside it]'" (*ibid.*, 3:5).

<sup>25</sup> The allusion is to the bitter herbs, commemorating slavery in Egypt, and eaten during the Seder, i.e., the Passover evening banquet

English)]. "Every commerce (etc.)", such as what Rav Bizno [distorted from Business] said: "Such as auction houses, and wineries, as it we are taught: 'He who buys silverware from the auction and then it was found to be base metal, as well as he who buys wine from the winery and it was found to be water, there is no liability [for the vendors]'". A man bought *money* [Aramaic for 'vessels'] at an auction house for ten *sela'im* [ancient coins, here for 'dollars', 'quids']; he left, and then found out it was not silver; he went and sold them for half a *sela'*; he walked into a shop to drink a cup of wine in order to find consolation [i.e., to drown his sorrows], they gave him water, and asked him for half a *sela'*. He applied to himself [the verse] (*Isaiah* 1): "Thy was silver turned into base metal, thy wine is mixed with water".

There is a note to "auction houses" (the English word *auction* appears in Hebrew transcription as אוקשין), and that note is unusual for *Tractate America* in that here Rosenzweig is talking plainly and providing a direct definition and direct social commentary: "such that they sell there merchandise by a declaration (*hakhrozo*), and whoever offers a higher price for that merchandise obtains its acquisition, and this involves a big deception [fraud], because among the buyers, also the sellers come, and they cause the price to rise, and cheat inexperienced buyers".

### 10.3. Construction Firms Being Fraudulent with Impunity Results in Ubiquitous Danger for Members of the Public

The pseudo-*Gemara* continues by shifting from fraud against individuals, to corporate fraud perpetrated against the public, such as fraud on the part of construction firms that build for private or public customers:

Rav Yedoyo:<sup>26</sup> "Just as there is no [transgression in] deception [fraud] against the individual, there is no deception [fraud] against the many. As it is taught: 'The contractors and the guarantors, whether they contracted from an individual, or contracted from the public, build provisional buildings: if they crumble {Note: Even because of ordinary wind} and injure and kill, they are not liable by human laws, and are liable to the laws of Heaven, because they accepted the contract on condition that they would not release from under their hand anything that is not dangerous[!!!]'".<sup>27</sup>

Here, too, Rosenzweig's note to "The contractors and the guarantors" speaks plainly: "who take it upon themselves to build houses, repair roads, make bridges, excavate pits and caverns", apparently: tunnels for the sewage system or for underground transportation (the subway).

The pseudo-*Gemara* continues with an objection by a character, Rav Makshon, who, as his Hebrew name says, asks a question and raises difficulties:

Rav Makshon said: "If so, also according to the laws of Heaven they should not be liable". They told him [i.e., Sages answering Rav Makshon retorted]: "Because their buildings fly in the air [i.e., they are unsound], and air belongs to Heaven". [Therefore, Heaven, rather than American courts of justice, is the competent jurisdiction for adjudicating such cases.] It was taught: "Also here (*Tanyo: nomei hokhei*) {Note: As there is no [transgression in] fraud against the public}, one who comes from the road

<sup>26</sup> *Yeda'yah* (*Yedoyo* in Ashkenazic pronunciation) is a Biblical Hebrew first name that literally means 'the L-rd knows', but also 'he who knows the ways of the L-rd'. He is befits one who knows the ways of the world.

<sup>27</sup> In the talmudic literature, this is applied to reprehensible behaviour for which no legal punishment is envisaged, but for which one is warned that there would be retribution from Heaven.

[after travelling] must say grace,<sup>28</sup> because the bridges and the channels, the ships and the steam carts [i.e., train wagons] are deemed a danger (*sakkono* [spelt *sknh*]), as it says (*Psalms* 139): 'All my ways [or: roads] Thou understand (*hiskanto* [spelt *hsknth*])' [playfully misunderstood as though the verb meant 'Though hast made dangerous']".

Upon arrival, one travelling in America owes a prayer of gratitude: bridges, channels, boats, and steam carriages (trains) in America must be assumed to be dangerous (*be-chezkas sakono*), with evidence from *Psalms* 139: "All my ways Thou hast understood" (*hiskanto*), mock-interpreted as though it meant 'endangered'.

#### 10.4. "Great is Fraud, as it Feed Meat to him who Practiseth it"

The next portion of pseudo-*Gemara* elaborates about the final part of the pseudo-*mishnah*, namely, about "except self-deception" (*chitz me-eina 'as atsmei*):

"Except self-deception" — Are we dealing with idiots? {Note: So that they would deceive themselves?} [So why is that stated? It is necessary even concerning persons who are cognitively competent:] Wise ones. It is good advice it is giving us.<sup>29</sup> As anybody who is about to cheat his fellow, let him be careful lest his fellow man would cheat him. As it is said (*Genesis* 27 [Isaac is telling Esau]): "Thy brother came fraudulently". {Note: And the one who is about to cheat must be afraid lest he would find his brother being fraudulent, and he [the latter] would cheat him [the former].}

Next, the talmudic maxim "Great is labour, as it nourishes him who practiseth it" is distorted:

Rav Kaspo [Silver] says: "Great is fraud, as it feed meat to him who practiseth it", as it is written (*Isaiah* 49): 'I shall let thy *meinayikh* [מויך 'deceivers', but in the verse the original sense is 'wrongers'] eat their own flesh/meat". And Rav Kaspo said: "The rich ones in America, by what do they merit? By *eino 'o* (אונאה), as indeed in America *keseif* (money) is called *money* (מונה)". {Note [by mock-etymology]: Which is from the word אונאה} Rav Yedayo interpreted homiletically: "Why is it written (*Psalms* 104): 'This sea, large and wide', and so forth? 'This sea, large' is America, which is likened to the sea: just as the sea receives everything that is thrown inside it and covers it, likewise America receives everyone who comes to her, and covers his sins. 'There, the *remes* (creeping things) innumerable': these are humans, who resemble *remes* (creepy-crawlies), as everyone who is larger than his fellow, swallows his fellow. 'Beasts small with large': these are the small rich ones, who become richer and richer, until they become large. Why are they called 'beasts'? Because everybody who makes himself like a beast that preys and eats, and some say: that stinks [i.e., also: commits iniquities] and eats, {Note: That conserves the meat obtained by preying, and eats it even though it stinks} his assets persist in his possession." Rav Safro [teacher] said: "This world resembles a wedding house (*bei hillulo* [a hall where festive celebrations are held]) {Note [about the social practice of the buffet]: A wedding house as they do it in America, as they place the food on the table for all those invited together, and whoever can snatch more is the winner}. Snatch and eat, snatch and drink, as it says (*Psalms* 128): 'Whenever you eat the [fruit of the] labour of thy hands [*kappeikhu* 'handpalms' spelt *kpyk*] (etc.)'. Do not read<sup>30</sup> *kpyk* but *hpyk* [*khappeikhu*], as in the Greek language [here: Russian, as *Yovn* 'Greece' was

<sup>28</sup> Jews who have been travelling and run some danger, or have recovered from illness, and were released from prison, have the obligation to say in front of at least a small quorum of adult male coreligionists a blessing to Heaven for having been saved.

<sup>29</sup> "It is giving us" is expressed by the Talmudic Aramaic acronym QM"L for *qo mashmo lon*, i.e. literally: "it is making us hear".

<sup>30</sup> "Do not read [...] but rather [...]" is a widespread device of rabbinic homiletic exegesis.

applied in the Tsarist Empire to 'Russia' (which is also Orthodox Christian)] they call snatching *khapka* / *khafka* [Actually, the Russian verb *khvatat* means 'to snatch'.]

Consulted, Alex Bykat, a professor from Savannah, Georgia, kindly suggested to me: "A speculation: In Yiddish (in which I am very limited) the word for 'grab' is *khap* (כַּחַפ). The act of grabbing (in Polish Yiddish) could be *khapka*." Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, who teaches Jewish studies at Northwestern University, suggested on that same day, in reply to my query: "This is interesting. The word he means is actually *khaVka*, but it can sometimes be pronounced *khaFka* because of the "deaf" K that follows. It is a rare jargon/argotic word that I used in my student years only. It comes from the Russian *khavat* or *skhavat* -- to eat, to swallow, German *fressen* would be the best equivalent." Both explanations make sense.<sup>31</sup>

### 10.5. A Talmudic Source on Grecian Wisdom and Roman Forelocks

The last note in Chapter 1 of *Tractate America* explains that by "in the Greek language", Russian is meant, not Greek. Rosenzweig seizes this opportunity to relate an anecdote:

"As in the Greek language": the language of Russia, as there is the usage of calling Russia, the country, by the name for Greece. It once happened that a censor forbade the publication of a book because he had found in it written: "It is forbidden to study [literally: 'meditate in' for 'mull over'] the wisdom of Greece".

This is a reference to a Hellenistic-era and then Roman-age rabbinic provision against the study of some discipline (perhaps sophistry) characterised as being Greek, and whose identity is at present ill understood. I quote from the Soncino English translation of the *Babylonian Talmud* (Epstein 1935–1948) tractate *Bava Kamma* 82b–83a (their brackets, my braces):

IT IS NOT RIGHT TO BREED PIGS IN ANY PLACE WHATEVER. Our Rabbis taught: When the members of the Hasmonean house were contending with one another, Hyrcanus was within and Aristobulus without [the city wall]. [Those who were within] used to let down to the other party every day a basket of *denarii*, and [in return] cattle were sent up for the regular sacrifices. {Cf. *Numbers* 28:2–4} There was, however, an old man [among the besiegers] who had some knowledge in Grecian Wisdom {Graetz interpreted it as 'sophistry'} and who said to them: 'So long as the other party [are allowed to] continue to perform the service of the sacrifices they will not be delivered into your hands'. On the next day when the basket of *denarii* was let down, a swine was sent up. When the swine reached the centre of the wall it stuck its claws into the wall, and Eretz Yisrael {i.e., the Land of Israel} quaked over a distance of four hundred parasangs<sup>32</sup> by four hundred parasangs. It was proclaimed on that occasion: Cursed be the man who would breed swine and cursed be the man who would teach his son Grecian Wisdom. It was concerning this time that we have learnt that the 'Omer {Note from the Soncino translation: Lit., 'a sheaf', denoting the public sacrifice of the first-fruits of the harvest described in Lev. XXIII, 10–14.} was

<sup>31</sup> A confluence of etyma and senses? I mean: both the word *khap* from Yiddish, and *khavat* from Russian are Slavonic. Rosenzweig may have been thinking of Russian *khavka*, but his perception was coloured by Yiddish *khap* (כַּחַפ). Also note that the Israeli Hebrew slangish transitive verb *sakháv* 'to steal' is outwardly a new acceptation of the Biblical Hebrew verb /*saḥab*/ 'to drag' (2 *Samuel* 17:13; *Jeremiah* 22:19), but I think the neologisation was perhaps by lexical interference from Russian *skhavat*, the perception of whose semantics was itself coloured by Yiddish *khap* (כַּחַפ). Ghil'ad Zuckermann (2000, 2003) called this phenomenon *camouflaged borrowing*. He exemplified its occurrence in Israeli Hebrew and various other modern languages.

<sup>32</sup> In early rabbinic Hebrew, *parsah* as being a measure of length denotes a Persian parasang. A parasang was equal to nearly 6,300 metres, according to what is understood to have been meant by Herodotus, or to 5,940 metres according to Xenophon. In the Ottoman Empire, a *fersah* was a measure of length equal to 5,685 metres. In Modern Hebrew, *parsah* used to stand for a verst (Russian *versta*), a Russian measure of length equal to 3,500 feet (1,067 metres). The native Hebrew noun *parsah* is a different lexeme. It denotes 'hoof'. This is apt, as transport depended upon hoofed animals. By coincidence, in ancient Italic one finds the compound *petur-pursus* as being equivalent to Latin *quadrupedibus*, 'by means of quadrupeds' (where *petur* 'four' = Latin *quattuor*).

once brought from the gardens of Zarifin {Sarafand near Lod?} and the two loaves {*Leviticus* 23:17} from the Valley of En Soker. {Assakar near Nablus?}

But was Grecian Wisdom proscribed? Was it not taught that Rabbi stated: 'Why use the Syriac language in Eretz Yisrael {83a} [where] either the Holy Tongue or the Greek language [could be employed]?' And R. Jose said: 'Why use the Aramaic language in Babylon [where] the Holy Tongue or the Persian language [could be used]?' — It may, however, be said that the Greek language is one thing and Grecian Wisdom is another. But was Grecian Wisdom proscribed? Did not Rab Judah say that Samuel stated in the name of R. Simeon b. Gamaliel: '[The words] *Mine eye affected my soul because of all the daughters of my city* {*Lamentations* 3:51} [could very well be applied to the] thousand youths who were in my father's house; five hundred of them learned Torah and the other five hundred learned Grecian Wisdom, and out of all of them there remain only I here and the son of my father's brother in Asia?' {Either Asia Minor, or a town so called. Citing *Sotah* 49b and *Gittin* 58a, a note to the Soncino translation remarks: This proves that even Grecian Wisdom was not proscribed.] — It may, however, be said that the family of R. Gamaliel was an exception, as they had associations with the Government, as indeed taught: 'He who trims the front of his hair {with a fringe on the forehead: this was related to idolatry, as idolatrous men would offer the forelock, called *blorit* in Hebrew, as sacrifice once cut} in Roman fashion is acting in the ways of the Amorites.' {And therefore should not be imitated.} Abtolmus b. Reuben however was permitted to cut his hair in the Gentile fashion as he was in close contact with the Government. So also the members of the family of Rabban Gamaliel were permitted to discuss Grecian Wisdom on account of their having had associations with the Government.

At the beginning of a paper in sociolinguistics, entitled "*Blorit*: Pagans' Mohawk or Sabras' Forelock?: Ideological Secularization of Hebrew Terms in Socialist Zionist Israeli", Azzan Yadin and Ghil'ad Zuckermann (2010) pointed out:

This chapter explores the widespread phenomenon of semantic secularization, as in the politically-neutral process visible in English *cell* 'monk's living place' > 'autonomous self-replicating unit from which tissues of the body are formed'. The main focus, however, is on secularizations involving *ideological* 'lexical engineering', as often exemplified by — either conscious or subconscious, either top-down or bottom-up — manipulative, subversive processes of extreme semantic shifting, pejoration, amelioration, trivialization, allusion and echoing. An example of defying religion is בלוריית. Mishnaic Hebrew [bəlo'rit] is 'Mohawk, an upright strip of hair that runs across the crown of the head from the forehead to the nape of the neck', characteristic of the abominable pagan and not to be touched by the Jewish barber. But defying religious values, secular Socialist Zionists use *blorit* with the meaning 'forelock, hair above the forehead', which becomes one of the defining characteristics of the Sabra ('prickly pear', a nickname for native Israelis, allegedly thorny on the outside and sweet inside). Is the 'new Jew' ultimately a pagan? This negation of religion fascinatingly adds to the phenomenon of negation of the Diaspora (*shlilat hagolá*), exemplified in the *blorit* itself by Zionists expecting the Sabra to have dishevelled hair, as opposed to the orderly diasporic Jew, who was considered by Zionists to be weak and persecuted.

## 11. Freedoms Enshrined in the Constitution of the Land of the Free in *Tractate America*, vs. a Mock-Argument against Freedom in a Habsburgic Context in a Story by Agnon

We have seen in Sec. 8.9, that while discussing policemen not playing by the rules, Rosenzweig made considerations about the rule of law in theory being enshrined in the U.S. Constitution. Freedoms are enshrined in the Constitution indeed. A note clarifies this matter: "As we have learned: 'Do not read <hrwt> but <hrwt> — that is to say, in writing, and not in actual practice". What Rosenzweig has done here is to exploit homography and reverse the homily: "Do not read *choris* but *cheiris*" into "Do not read *cheiris* (freedom) but *choris* (inscribed)". Next, the pseudo-talmudic discussion turns to the pseudo-mishnaic statement: "Gold buys the president and the judge, and Rabbi Yanko says: Even the enforcer".

Nevertheless Rosenzweig acknowledges the Constitution of the Land of the Free. Contrast this to the argument against freedom the final few sections in Agnon's short story *She-darkam littol ve-'ein darkam litten* (*Those Who Take and Don't Give*), from *Takhrikh shel sippurim* (*A*

*Binding Together* [or: *Shroud*] of *Tales*). Shmuel Yosef Agnon (b. Buczacz, Galicia, 1888, d. Jerusalem, 1970) was Orthodox, not a Hasid, and wrote about Hasidim sometimes sympathetically and some other times critically.

In the story, a Sadigura Hasid, on the train to Hapsburgic Lemberg (Łwów), listens while smoking in silence, as his own rabbi is insulted *in absentia* by a group of Galician Hasidim, by one young man in particular. They ignore the protagonist: his beard is trimmed, his dress clean, so he must be a Sadigura Hasid. Now alone with the young man, he finds him gullible: he never saw any city before, and wonders whether it is true that water comes out of a tap.

The Sadigura Hasid persuades him that most policemen in Lemberg are rubber dolls, including one in front of them, and instigates him to check for himself, by pulling his moustache. The gullible victim of this vindictive prank pulls the moustache and is arrested. "Let your rabbi help you", the protagonist tells his victim, and hands to the policeman to carry for the arrested man the latter's prayer shawl and phylacteries that he, the protagonist, was holding so that the young man could pull the policeman's moustache.

What matters to us here is that at the end of Sec. 8 in Agnon's short story, the vindictive Sadigura Hasid displays an authoritarian mindset. He rebukes his victim who has conceded that there may exist rubber policemen but finds the policeman they see looks like any Gentile. Reb Ayzikl, the Sadiguran, claims that something that can be checked, should not be discussed, and that one should not expect the Emperor to take pains and write on the doll a warning that it is whole rubber with no flesh in it.

Reb Ayzikl shouted in anger: "What do you mean, 'Nevertheless'? Do you harbour any doubts about what the authorities do? That is the way of the skeptics. Today they doubt of the authorities of the Kingdom, tomorrow they doubt the Kingdom itself and finally the Emperor himself, and then they become anarchists, and then do as that anarchist who killed the Empress did. [...] If the authorities have placed rubber dolls, they are certainly of rubber, and we must not doubt them.

## 12. Characterisation, and Human Types

### 12.1. A Minor, a Policeman, and a Policeman Made of Rubber: a Sorite in Agnon

Agnon patterns the rest of the Ayzikl's argument using a talmudic styleme (a bit less formally than in Rosenzweig): "They said in the *Gemara*: 'Be wary of a Gentile who is a minor', and I say: if they said 'of a Gentile who is a minor', all the more so of a Gentile who is a policeman, and in the present time, as nature has changed, one must be wary as well of a policeman of rubber". Possibly, this is more discursive than in *Tractate America* because in Agnon, it is reported speech of a concrete individual, whereas Rosenzweig's is a sacred text-like, thus would-be authoritative text about human types.

The legal and ritual code of the *Mishnah* consists of prescriptions for a casuistry of given classes of situations. *Tractate America* describes, but as the posture is as if this was *Mishnah* with talmudic elaborations on each and every article from that code, the effect is one of suggesting that what can be observed is normative. Deontology, on the surface, doesn't matter. This pseudo-legal code can be a description at the same time, as it is the law of nature, the natural history, of the Jewish slums of New York.

### 12.2. Characters Other Than Columbus Are Representative Types, in *Tractate America*, vs. Characters Carved Out of Folk Types in Sholom Aleikhem

In *Tractate America*, Rosenzweig's self-imposed constraint that (apart from Columbus) there should only be representative types is extremely exacting, so to prove his skills the writer was

forced into a huge investment in the formal side. He gives no quarter to any leftover of character individuality. Irving Howe (in an introduction in which his own and Ruth Wisse's texts were interleaved) averred of Sholom Aleikhem's Tevye the dairyman that "he is far more than a representative type. Tevye is a particularized Jew with his own nuances and idiosyncracies, even as we also recognize in him a *shtetl* Everyman" (Howe and Wisse, p. xv). And yet, much in Sholom Aleikhem (as, we may add, in Agnon, as Werses 1981 has shown) is a reworking of folk material, making an individual out of a folk type (*ibid.*, p. xv) — such as in Sholom Aleikhem's short story *The Haunted Tailor*.

But *Tractate America* displays the opposite: Rosenzweig's social observations feed into a characterization that deindividualises the concrete *dramatis personae* into types, as a deliberate strategy (whereas the fictional rabbis in his pseudo-talmudic discussions are a legacy of the Purim parody genre, and are even less than types). Rosenzweig transforms social history into a natural history of New York, perversely like how Early America's naturalists cum ethnographers such as Bartram, Jefferson, and Crèvecoeur (as Regis 1992 has shown) removed the Native Americans from history into the immutable landscape. But while that is static, Rosenzweig's depicted world is nervous, feverish, and Jewish indeed in the sense of socio-economic haplessness breeding the meagre resourcefulness of newcomers to the slums.

### 12.3. Applying a Concept Proposed by Tzvetan Todorov for Characters from the *Arabian Nights*

Rosenzweig was known as "the Hebrew Mark Twain" (whereas Sholom Aleikhem was "the Jewish Mark Twain"). Actually both Twain and Sholom Aleikhem gave depth to their characters, whereas Rosenzweig made the character fully functional to the story: this is an extreme (and grotesquely distorted) case of what — in his discussion of the *Arabian Nights* — Tzvetan Todorov (1968; 1971 [1977, 2006]) called the *homme-récit* (a compound which was rendered in English as *narrative-men*, and in German as *Erzähl-Menschen*).

In the pseudo-talmudic text of *Tractate America*, we come across two kinds of characters:

- characters in tiny plots, such as
  - the fictionalised Columbus, or then
  - the fictional, nameless man cheated at both the auction house and the pub, who by his experience provides an illustration of a verse from Scripture, or then again
  - the type of the man who is hit by a blackjack-wielding policeman on the top of his head, and has better not file a complaint through the institutions;
- or then across fictional rabbis characterised by both their playfully transparent descriptive personal name, and what they say within the pseudo-talmudic discussion.

Todorov's *homme-récit* does not quite fit, because the characters in *Tractate America* are not first-person narrators. Whereas the latter is the case of *Arabian Nights* characters, as we are going to see that feature is not strictly necessary for Todorov's *hommes-récit*. To the extent that by being apodictic, characters in *Tractate America* express what could be taken to be an experiential pattern, they are in a sense a mockery of the *homme-récit* of the kind typified by *The Arabian Nights*, had Rosenzweig possessed that notion of Todorov's. The following is quoted from Marzolph and van Leeuwen (2004, Vol. 1, p. 388, my underlining):

For Tzvetan Todorov (1968; 1971), the Sindbâd story is an example of his concept of his concept of what he labels "l'homme-récit", or people telling who they are by telling what they have experienced. This implies that the narrative is not so much spurred on by the hero's reflections and decision, but rather consists of responses by the hero to circumstances beyond his control. The character is no more than a "vehicle" for the story and does not possess an individual personality.

The latter, underlined sentence is the one feature which perfectly captures characters from Gerson Rosenzweig's *Tractate America*. Todorov (1971) began with a quotation from Henry James's famous essays of 1884, *The Art of Fiction*, that extols characterisation ("What is incident but the illustration of character?" following the other rhetorical question: "What is character but the determination of incident?"). The following statement by Todorov (1971 [2006 edn.], p. 227) about the *Arabian Nights* is apt for *Tractate America* as well:

The first opposition between the narrative James extols and that of the *Arabian Nights* can be illustrated as follows: if there is a proposition "X sees Y", the important thing for James is X; for Scheherazade, Y. Psychological narrative regards each action as a means of access to the personality in question, as an expression if not a symptom. Action is not considered in itself, it is *transitive* with regard to its subject. A-psychological narrative, on the contrary, is characterized by intransitive actions: action is important in itself and not as an indication of this or that character trait. The *Arabian Nights* derive, we may say, from a *predicative* literature: the emphasis will always fall on the predicate and not on the subject of the proposition. The best-known example of this effacement of the grammatical subject is the story of Sinbad the Sailor. Even Odysseus emerges more clearly characterized from the adventures than Sinbad. We know that Odysseus is cunning, prudent, and so forth. Nothing of the kind can be said about Sinbad, whose narrative (though told in the first person) is impersonal; we should not say it is not as "X sees Y" but as "Y is seen". Only the coldest travel narrative can compete with Sinbad's tales in impersonality — though we have Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* to remind us that not all travel narratives are cold.

In that same essay, Todorov remarked that in the *Arabian Nights* (and also in *The Saragossa Manuscript*): "Every new character signifies a new plot. We are in the realm of narrative-men" (Todorov (1971 [2006 edn.], p. 229). The same can be said concerning *Tractate America*. In the *Arabian Nights*, "The implication tends to become an identity" (Todorov, *ibid.*, p. 228):

In a nineteenth-century novel, the proposition "X is jealous of Y" can lead to "X withdraws from society", "X commits suicide", "X courts Y", "X hurts Y". In the *Arabian Nights*, there is only one possibility: "X is jealous of Y → X hurts Y". The stability of the relationship between the two propositions deprives the first of any autonomy, of any intransitive meaning.

Something like that could be said of *Tractate America* as well, were it not the case that any plot found there concerning individual characters is tiny, and there is only the grand narrative of American society.

#### 12.4. Of Authors Amid Other Authors

If I claim (which I do) that Rosenzweig is *America's* foremost *Hebrew* humorist, I am not claiming he rivals Sholom Aleikhem (the Yiddishist), or that he is as versatile and seamless as Agnon, the devout Old World Hebraist who incidentally, only zoomed in (and out of) America when he, Agnon (a vegetarian) depicted the horrific effects of grim labour conditions at an American kosher poultry slaughterhouse in his long novella *Kissuy ha-Dam* (*The Covering of the Blood*, analysed by Weiss 1976 and by Shaked 1989). But Rosenzweig stands out in the nearly desert scene of American Jewish *belles lettres*, and moreover Rosenzweig does, and excels in, something altogether different.

Consider for comparison that first Alessandro Manzoni (1785–1873), and then Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863–1938), who were culture heroes of Italian literature, each had a deleterious effect on imitators. As Weinreich noted in 1941, here in Wisse's retelling (Howe and Wisse 1979, p. xxiii), "the folksiness of Sholom Aleichem received undue attention and a deleterious effect on its imitators", who retained neither its hard precision, nor its richness. It would be paradoxical to say the same of *Tractate America*, given its small and disappearing public of aficionados who could make sense of it in America until the English-speaking, often Hebrew-



fluent American Orthodox resurgence (that paid no attention to it thus far, not unlike the Yiddish-speaking ultra-Orthodox who, Wisse is known to bemoan, pay no attention to Yiddish literature).

But you can say something akin, provided you reverse the time axis. Namely, the Hebrew talmudic parody genre was decidedly a minor genre: one of artisan wordsmiths rather than artists, or otherwise a pastime, which was the case of its initiator, Kalonymos ben Kalonymos<sup>33</sup> (b. Arles, Provence, 1286). Nevertheless, Rosenzweig endowed his own practice of the genre with richness and depth that the genre lacked before. With *Tractate America*, it became reflective art, and a serious critique.

### 12.5. Parody Within the Genre of Modern Jewish Satire

Israel Davidson's (1966 [1907]) *Parody in Jewish Literature* is a classic.<sup>34</sup> In the medieval and early modern periods, talmudic parodies<sup>35</sup> tended to have something to do with the festivals, and this is something that in his own *Yankee Talmud* (of which *Tractate America* is part), Gerson Rosenzweig did for the festival of Hanukkah, in a text (Cook 2002 is a translation) true to type, namely, to the traditional genre of the festive talmudic parody.

There is a sense in which the sheer ambition of developing, in *Tractate America*, a grand narrative of the immigrant experience in American society gave Rosenzweig a potential he exploited masterfully: the glow of *Tractate America* derives from the theme he chose, and by how he developed an apt social commentary by applying the talmudic parody technique as a peerless virtuoso. Rosenzweig's companion tractate on Hanukkah is relatively underwhelming, but arguably there was no chance he could parallel his *Tractate America* literary success by discussing the trifles of what people do during Hanukkah.

In his entry for 'Parody' in the *YIVO Encyclopedia*<sup>36</sup> (Hundert 2008), Edward Portnoy pointed out (Portnoy 2008):

With the onset of the modern period, parody became a quantitatively significant component within the genre of Jewish satire. The genre of parody was used to comment on a wide variety of themes connected to Jewish life, including Hasidism, socialism, Zionism, and socioeconomic issues. The majority of Hebrew and Yiddish parodies<sup>37</sup> produced in Eastern Europe were imitative, in that they borrowed structures and language from well-known texts in order to comment on or mock unrelated topics, and did not attack the original, structural works.

Accordingly, such parody that emulated text from the *Talmud* did not attack by so doing the *Talmud* itself. It is more correct to say that satire (whatever its butt) was cast in the form

<sup>33</sup> Concerning Kalonymos ben Kalonymos, see Chapter 12 on pp. 514–541 in Jefim Schirrmann's posthumous book (1997) on Hebrew literature from Provence and Christian Spain.

<sup>34</sup> Current scholarly discussions of parody in literary studies give this genre a broader scope than would traditionally been the case. Cf. Dentith (2000), Freund (1981), Rose (1979, 1993), Stewudel (1992), and concerning Jewish texts, Diamond (2007) and Zellentin (2011).

<sup>35</sup> *The Alphabet of Ben Sira* (or *Pseudo-Sirach*) is a Hebrew humorous literary text which I have been researching (Nissan 2009, 2011, and a heavily annotated translation in progress, in which among the other things I managed to better clarify the botany), and which David Stern (2004) contextualises within the history of parody in Jewish literature. I remain unconvinced that *Pseudo-Sirach* fits squarely within what we would ordinarily call 'parody'.

<sup>36</sup> First published in print, now at <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Parody> Also see the entry for 'Humor', <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Humor> The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York is the leading institution for research into Yiddish.

<sup>37</sup> For example, Szeintuch (1990) is an edition of Yiddish parodies by Yoysef Tunkel (= Der Tunkeler). Portnoy (2008) explains: "Tunkel, the most important twentieth-century Yiddish satirist, published numerous journals and was the founder and editor of the Warsaw daily *Moment's* humor section, *Der krumer shpigl* (The Crooked Mirror). Tunkel also imitated the styles of many Yiddish writers, and published a number of anthologies of his satires and parodies."

of a talmudic *pastiche* (cf. Baldick 2001, an encyclopaedic entry about pastiche). Inside the talmudic literature itself, humour, farce and merriment occur here and there (Kovelman 2002; Karff 1991; Engelman 1990). Discussions within the *Babylonian Talmud*, and especially late antique homiletics, were especially adept at wordplay (Eilberg-Schwartz 2004).

### 13. Cosmic Deprecation

Cosmic deprecation of America (a hyperbole of disapproval of the state of Judaism in America), something we find at the very start of *Tractate America*, also occurs even in the present day, in some ultra-Orthodox circles. The headquarters of Lubavitcher Hasidim is in Brooklyn, since the early 1940s. That denomination was previously based in Russia. The glossary of Lubavitch Hasidism's terminology, at the end of Heilman and Friedman's (2010) biography of the Rebbe includes the following entries: "*chatzi kadur tachtan*: Lubavitcher hasidic conception of the other side of the globe, the spiritually lowest hemisphere, the exile of America" (*ibid.*, p. 279); "*khutse she'eyn khutse mimenu*: spiritually the lowest point on earth" (*ibid.*, p. 280); "*takhtn she'eyn takhtn mimenu*: lowest spiritual realm" (*ibid.*, p. 281). Cf. "*galut be'tokh galut*: living in the lowest level of exile, said of those who are nearly completely assimilated and secularized; living among the barely observant" (*ibid.*, p. 279).

The western hemisphere is conceived of as being "the lower hemisphere", apparently because of the Rabbinic traditional dictum *Eretz Yisra'el gvoha mikkol ha'aratzot*, "The Land of Israel is the highest of all countries", taken to be the explanation for why going there is "to go up" (*alah*), whereas leaving the country is "to go down" (*yarad*). Arguably most people who are aware of it, are so because it occurs in a pentateuchal gloss by Rashi (at *Exodus* 33:1), thus, in a highly accessed traditional Jewish source, read also by those with little schooling in rabbinic sources. Rashi's gloss reads as follows:

"*Lekh, 'aleh mizzeh*" [Go, go up from here]: The Land of Israel is higher than all countries; therefore it was said "Go up!". Another interpretation: as He told him [Moses] when in anger, "Go, go down!" [*Exodus*, 32:7], when of a good disposition He told him, "Go, go up!".

But its earliest source<sup>38</sup> is in *Sifrei Devarim* 37, s.v. *Harei hu*, and states:

And so it says (*Jeremiah* 5:1): "My Friend had a vineyard in Qeren Ben Shemen [i.e., Horn Son of Oil]". Just as this [i.e., a] bull, nothing in him is higher than his horns, likewise the Land of Israel is higher than all countries. Or [should we rather say]: just as this bull, there is nothing more a refuse than his horns, likewise the Land of Israel is the refuse of the other countries? We learn to say: "in Qeren ben Shemen", the Land of Israel is fat (*shmenah*), which teaches thee that whoever is higher than his fellow, is more excellent than his fellow. The Land of Israel, as it is higher than all, is more excellent than all, as it says: "We shall definitely go up and inherit it" (*Numbers*, 13:30), "They went up and explored the land" (*Numbers*, 13:21), "They went up in the Negev [i.e., the dry southern region]" (*Numbers*, 13:22), "They went up from Egypt" (*Genesis*, 45:25). The Temple, which is higher than all, is more excellent than all, as it says (*Deuteronomy*, 17:8): "And thou shalt rise and go up to the place", and it says (*Isaiah*, 2:3): "And many peoples will go and say: 'Let us go, and go up to the mountain of the House of the Lord'", and it says (*Isaiah*, 31:5): "As there is a day, when the watches shall call" and so forth.

After the four scriptural quotations (*Numbers* 13:30, 13:21, 13:21, and *Genesis* 45:21) in which going to the Land of Israel is expressed by means of the verb for 'to go up', the homiletic text continues with a discussion of the Temple being even higher.

On the evidence of his *Divine Comedy*, Dante Alighieri, too, held the belief that Jerusalem is on top of the earth (the globe!). To Dante, Hell is entered from a valley near Jerusalem; the

<sup>38</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Abraham Ofir (Avi) Shemesh, my co-investigator in other projects, for locating *Sifrei Devarim* 37 as being the earliest source for me.

bottom of Hell is at the centre of the globe, and from there a tunnel leads to the antipodes of Jerusalem, namely, to the mountain of Purgatory. Tattersall (1981) pointed out: "[T]he Venerable Bede was, by the eighth century, categorical in stating his view that the earth was a sphere. It is now generally accepted that this was the opinion of the majority of writers and thinkers during the Crusade period".

The idea that the Earth is shaped like a globe, of obvious Greek derivation, is mentioned (*she-ha-olám 'asúy ke-khaddúr*, "that the world is made like a ball"), in the Talmud Yerushalmi, tractate *'Avodah Zarah*, 42:2. Ibn Gabirol, a major medieval Hebrew poet from Málaga, stated the belief that the Earth is a globe in a cosmological hymn, *Keter Malkhut (The Crown of Kingship)*, traditionally read during the night of the Day of Atonement: *Mí yemallél gevurotéikha ba-'asotekhá kaddúr ha-árets necheláq li-shnýim, chetsyó yabbashá ve-chetsyó máyim?* "Who shall tell Thy feats, as thee didst the globe of the Earth divided in two, half of it dry land, and half of it water?" The compound *kaddúr ha-árets* is standard in Modern Hebrew for 'Earth', and literally means 'the globe of the Earth'.<sup>39</sup>

## 14. Allusions to English in the Hebrew of *Tractate America*

### 14.1. Greenhorns

On occasion, the Hebrew of *Tractate America* alludes to English. It refers to newcomers as "green ones" (⟨yrwqym⟩ *yeríkim*), or, by loan translation, an Aramaic compound is made up, *karno yarko*. There is a pseudo-talmudic discussion of the nickname for these people from overseas; for example:

What is green (*yerikim*, green ones)? Said Rav Safro [Teacher]: "The ones who go by sea, as we have learned: 'And not by the *yereiko* (⟨yrwqh⟩ — green grass) upon the water'".

(so such grass is disqualified for the purposes of lighting a candle for Shabbat). As the immigrants were floating on water, they, too, are green.

### 14.2. Yankees, and New York, and Those Not "Greening Out" Quickly Enough

In Sec. 2 above, we pointed out that by the Yiddish term *oysgrinung* one means "the 'greening-out' process that required of [both 'greenhorns' and the native-born progeny of immigrants] an incessant vigilance and 'self-monitoring'" (Whitfield 2007, p. 314).

A note to Chapter 1 in *Tractate America* defines the nickname for the immigrants by reference to the vernacular, and another note to Chapter 1 states: "The Yankees (⟨hynqym⟩ *hayankim*): Those citizens who suckled (⟨ynqwm⟩ *yanki*) the learning of America in their childhood". Thus also Jews acculturated since infancy are Yankees. It may take less:

Said Rav Safro: "A green one, during the first seven days, even his daughter is ashamed of him, as it says (*Numbers* 12): 'Had her father spat (⟨yrwq yrq⟩ *yorek yorak*) in her face, would not she be ashamed seven days?' Afterwards, once he has changed his name and

<sup>39</sup> Duane Roller (2006) is right to distinguish (*ibid.*, p. 51, fn. 47) between Greek ideas about mathematical symmetry applying to the world, and the antipodes as such in geography. Moreover, symmetry could be other than Antipodean: Roller points out that Cicero (*Republic* 6.20–22) referred to people directly opposite to Rome with respect to the Equator. And even though the idea of the Earth being shaped as a globe is found in Greek antiquity, note that medieval folklore could accept the existence of Antipodeans, yet apparently assume that Earth was flat, and that they lived, as though, on the reverse of a coin. Such an example from Jewish medieval folklore is found in Jellinek's (1853–1878) *Bet ha-Midrash*. It is the last one (*ibid.*, Vol. 4, pp. 533–534) among the 'Tales about King Solomon'.

clothes, he is ashamed of other green ones. If he changed also his language, he is a Yankee for all purposes".

A note to *yorek yorak* states: "Interpreted as coming from *yerakon* 'greenness'". This Hebrew name for a disease from a list of curses in Deuteronomy is Rosenzweig's etymology, or rather anagram of the Yiddish spelling, for *New York*. "It is stated: When Moses cursed Israel and said (*Deuteronomy* 28): 'The L-rd shall smite you with *yerakon* [green ailment]',<sup>40</sup> Columbus went down and stuck a reed into the sea, and it gathered a bank around it, on which the great city of America was built, and its name is *Yerakon*". This recycles the wording and plot of a legend from the *Babylonian Talmud*, tractate *Sanhedrin*, 21b: "When Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter, Gabriel went down and stuck a reed into the sea, and it gathered a bank around it, on which the great city of Rome was built" (as punishment for Israel, as eventually Rome would have destroyed the Sanctuary in Jerusalem).

Incidentally, consider that the Hebrew adjective *yarok* (phonemically /yaroqq/) has not always denotes the category 'green' as currently understood, and that historically it also encompassed 'yellow', or at any rate part of the range of 'yellow'. Moreover, *yerakon* is not the only ailment whose Hebrew name is a derivative of *yarok*.

In a text in rabbinic homiletics, comparisons are drawn between the biblical Queen Esther's physical and moral qualities, and qualities of the myrtle (as the literal sense of Hadassah, her Hebrew name, literally means 'myrtle'), e.g., "just as the scent of the myrtle is good, so her deeds were good". Amid such items, the notion is offered that Esther was "greenish" (chlorotic), and a standard commentary<sup>41</sup> to the given corpus makes it explicit that this, too, is a comparison drawn with the myrtle: "'Greenish': like the myrtle".

Helen King published a study of how green sickness was viewed through the ages in Western civilisation. See Helen King's book (2003) *The Disease of Virgins: Green Sickness, Chlorosis and the Problems of Puberty*. I quote from the publisher's blurb:

In sixteenth century Europe, the disease of virgins, or green sickness, was seen as a common disorder affecting young unmarried girls. Its symptoms included weakness, dietary disturbance, lack of menstruation and, most significantly, a change in skin colour. Understanding of the condition turned puberty and virginity into medical problems, and proposed to cure them by bloodletting, diet, exercise, and marriage. Helen King examines the origins and history of the disease, from its roots in the classical tradition to its extraordinary survival into the 1920s, [...].

Concerning "'Greenish': like the myrtle", actually this also belongs in the series of notions given in what follows in that passage, which have it that Esther had unattractive features, yet (which must be by miracle, even she went into hiding to avoid that outcome) she won the beauty contest which placed her in the critical position which eventually enabled her to tilt the balance the way she did, when thwarting Haman's plans. Namely, one authority is made to suggest that she was forty, another one corrects him: "Eighty", whereas the numerical value of the name *Hadassah* (adding the value of the letters of **הדסה**) pinpoints her exact age when

<sup>40</sup> A writer on the history of medicine in Jewish sources, Fred Rosner (1972), tried to identify the ailment called in the Pentateuch by the name *yerakon*. For him, the competing hypotheses were jaundice and anemia.

<sup>41</sup> The commentary is *Záyit Ra'anán* to *Yalkút Shim'oní*, at *Esther*, 1053. The commentary *Záyit Ra'anán* was authored by Abraham Abele Gombiner (b. 1635, d. ca. 1682, best known for his work *Magen Abraham*) and was first printed by Suessmans in Dessau in the year 5464 *Anno Mundi*, i.e., 1703. It was then printed again, by Isaac Foa at the Stamparia Bragadina, in Venice, in 5503 *Anno Mundi*, i.e., 1743.

Subsequently, it appeared in abridged form as footnotes to the *Yalkút Shim'oní*, as explained on p. 20 in Bezalel Landoi/Landau's introduction to *Yalkút Shim'oní* (Jerusalem: [s.n.] 5720 = 1959/60). It appeared that way in editions of the *Yalkút Shim'oní* including Warsaw (Y. Goldman, 1876–1877, 3 vols. in 2); Vilna (Rom, 1909); as well as in the facsimile (Jerusalem: [s.n.], introd. B. Landoi, *supra*). The matrices of the Romm publishing house, in Vilna, including those of the *Babylonian Talmud*, were destroyed during the Holocaust; facsimile publications circulate, based on the Vilna editions of various works). Cf. Hyman (1991).

she was taken into the King's harem: seventy-four. This way, not only Esther managed to accomplish what she did according to the biblical narrative, but she did so by overcoming handicaps: being of a greenish complexion though with "a thread of grace", and moreover being way past marriageable age, all the more so in as competitive conditions as the one set forth in Ahasuerus' competition among women of comely appearance.

### 14.3. Biblical Hebrew *yaspiku* vs. English *to speak*

In Chapter 6 of *Tractate America*, barbs against Reform rabbis<sup>42</sup> include: "It was taught: 'Before the festivals of the Christians, the rabbis of the Reform ask and discuss the conception and birth of That Man, to bring about what was said (*Isaiah* 3 [*quod corrige*: 2:6; the *lapsus* is Rosenzweig's]): 'And in children of strangers they *yaspiki* (⟨yšpyqw⟩ [standard *yaspiku*])' — which in a note, Rosenzweig derives from the English verb 'to speak', but which actually is a biblical *crux interpretum* (see below). Here Rosenzweig may have been doing worse than decrying the foreign acculturation of Reform discourse; "they speak about children of dubious parentage" is perhaps an echo of some medieval or earlier antibiographical tradition inspired by polemic *vis-à-vis* Christianity,<sup>43</sup> but this is not necessarily an intertextual reference to a textual genre (it may be a jibe reappearing *ad hoc*). What matters to us here is that Rosenzweig camouflaged English in Biblical Hebrew.

Traditional Jewish interpretations of *Isaiah* 2:6 include: "children of strangers they have plenty", or "children of their non-Jewish wives they keep hugging" (as Rashi and Rabbi Eliezer of Beaugency would have it), or "their children of they cause to be of dubious foreign parentage: as they have intercourse with foreign women, and foreign men have intercourse with the formers' wives, so their children are perhaps theirs, perhaps of the foreigners" (according to Rabbi Isaiah of Trani, a medieval exegete), or "go in the ways of the Nations" (as per the late antique Aramaic translation, *Targum Jonathan*), or "read books of magic" (as per the interpretation of Radak, i.e., Rabbi David Kimhi, another medieval exegete), or "it is enough for them what they gave birth to by means of their thoughts, i.e., in profane learning" (which agrees which how the medieval exegete Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra understands this). In the Middle Ages, Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* referred to that verse at 1:7, and Rabbi Joseph Kaspi referred to that interpretation.

## 15. Jewish Multilingualism and the Sociolinguistic Role of Hebrew

A significant body of criticism that has been built up about Jewish multilingualism and literature, most notably by Hana Wirth-Nesher (1990, 1998, 2001, 2006). Joshua Fishman (1979) discussed the sociolinguistic role of Hebrew among Yiddish speakers in traditional Ashkenaz, and what he called "The Sociolinguistic 'Normalization' of the Jewish People".

<sup>42</sup> *Tractate America* does not spare Orthodox rabbis some unflattering remarks, either, but it is his attack on the Reform that was apparently intended to be devastating. Reform Judaism was the religion of some American Jews, especially ones of German ancestry in New York (and some Sephardim elsewhere), and they tended to be considerably better off than the immigrants from Eastern Europe, to whom Reform was totally alien. The perceived impact of or affinity to Christianity on early Jewish Reform in Germany informs, e.g., an anti-Reform anecdote from Germany, related in Hebrew by Agnon, titled '*Al akhilat trefot* ("For Eating Unkosher Food"), on pp. 192–193 in the 2001 edition of his 1984 posthumous book *Takhrikh shel Sippurim*: A Turingian extremist Reform rabbi used to smoke his pipe and ride from town to town on Shabbat in order to preach at several communities on the same day, and used to stop and eat as a guest at the home of a former fellow student, or of a Protestant reverend, or of a Liberal Christian physician, and so forth. Agnon concludes quite bluntly that this Moses Hess fell ill and died because of his gluttony.

<sup>43</sup> This is a subject researched at the University of Princeton by Peter Schäfer (cf. Schäfer et al. 2011).

Fishman (1976) discussed the societal allocation of macro-function, in the way traditional Ashkenazic Jewry used Yiddish and Hebrew.

Alan Mintz (1992) discusses the state of Hebrew in America. Lewis Glinert's (1993) article entitled "Language as Quasilect: Hebrew in Contemporary Anglo-Jewry" is also potentially useful, for better understanding the Jewish sectorial and emotional factors in whether *Tractate America* stands a chance of finding again a pool of estimators in Anglo-Saxon countries. Quasilectal usage is of fixed utterances only, and it excludes by definition the ability of productive expression other than of these. Glinert (1993) discusses current levels of fluency as expected to occur in the British Jewish demographic sector.

Arguably — it being trendy, among many Jews, to be able to speak (Israeli) Hebrew fluently almost like Israelis — along with the quite distinct but partly overlapping proficiency of part of the Orthodox sector in the textual canon that was Rosenzweig's hypotext, suggests that the prospects for there being appeal for *Tractate America* in future, even inside America, are now something more than just the mythical *luz* bone: the *luz shel shidra*, "the nut of the spinal column", a bone at the bottom of the spinal column traditionally claimed to be the only body part that supposedly never wastes away, and from which the resurrection of the dead will unfold.<sup>44</sup> The interference of languages or language varieties by which a community functions matters also in the context of American literary studies. Judith Yaross Lee (2008, p. 44) states about American humour's<sup>45</sup> vernacular tradition:

But because of Rourke and Blair, scholars of American humor have long understood the vernacular tradition to run through not only through white writers like Whitman and Faulker, but also through the blues writing of Langston Hughes, the ethnographic work of Zora Neale Hurston, and the novels of Ralph Ellison and Ishmael Reed, as well as the line of Jewish-American writers who fooled around with dialect in works like *Nize Baby* (1926) by Milt Gross and *The Education of Hyman Kaplan* (1937) by Leo Rosten as well as *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), and most recently, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* (2002).

## 16. Punning Mock-Etymology

### 16.1. Research into Playful Etymologies

We have seen that one of the prominent features of *Tractate America* is punning mock-etymology. Unlike in ancient or otherwise premodern Jewish and Gentile folk etymologies intended to be taken seriously, as true or homiletic or somewhere between, Rosenzweig is clearly humorously conniving with the reader, in making the etymological claim and enjoying it precisely because their contract is not to believe it, and yet to evaluate its aptness according to how fitting it is for the contextual circumstances within the satire. Nissan recently devoted a book-length study to punning mock-aetiologies (i.e., mock-explanations) of place-names, mostly based on a pool of Italian riddles and a Hebrew literary corpus authored and annotated by Nissan himself, but with many examples drawn from across cultures. This is quite relevant for Rosenzweig's punning explications of, say, *New York* or *Yankee*.

<sup>44</sup> See Reichman and Rosner (1996), for that Jewish myth and for a few Christian responses it elicited.

<sup>45</sup> Whereas Rosenzweig, still a newcomer at the time he wrote *Tractate America*, was not formed in the American humour tradition, when he died he was sometimes referred to as America's "Jewish Mark Twain" (an epithet used in the Old Country and also in America for the famous Sholom Aleikhem). Neither I, nor Elliott Oring (1983) subscribe to the myth of there being an essentially "Jewish Humor". See on this myth, Oring (1983), Ben-Amos (1973), and Jason (1967).

Kabakoff (1966) mentions, on p. 238, fn. 65, Gerson Rosenzweig's "article *Der Idisher Vits* ["The Jewish Wit"], in *Tsukunft*, January 1902. In that article, G.R. discussed the essence of the Jewish joke and pointed out its appearance in the Hebrew Bible, in the Talmud, and in medieval poetry" (my translation from Hebrew).

The following is quoted from a long study of mine, now nearly completed:<sup>46</sup>

Mock-explanation is a challenge for models of humour. Mock-aetiological tales are a challenge for studies of narrative. This [study] provides an exemplification and discussion of a somewhat restricted category of such tales, concerning place-names being explained by a humorous story. Such toponomastic aetiological tales, or etymythology,<sup>47</sup> are not infrequent in international folklore. We try to enucleate from a historical corpus (the Aggadic Midrash, itself not necessarily made of aetiological tales) a pool of narrative devices (but the project is also concerned with stylemes, and constraints on the lexicon, morphology, and syntax), and constraints consisting of poetic conventions, and we further restrict the domain to onomastic aetiological tales. These constraints and devices were tested in extensive, annotated manual creative writing. Genre-bound narrative mock-explanation can often be successfully devised for an onomastic target, provided that the length of the trajectory is not overconstrained (whereas other constraints strictly apply). Further stages of this project (called GALLURA) would hopefully result in a taxonomy of formal narrative devices that can be at least in part automated. We also try to generalise to a stylistically quite different, Italian-language pool of mock-aetiological riddles (taxonomised in Part I). [...]

Playful etymologies and wordplay are a subject I have addressed in several publications. Nissan (2012a) is a book-length treatment of the problem, for etymology, of the odds being too high for not finding some striking lexical coincidences that it would be wrong to consider as though they were an etymological relation in the scientific sense. That study was in response to a paper about a song of some villagers from Japan, whose author had claimed could be interpreted in relation to Hebrew or Aramaic. Nissan (2012a) attempted a confutation by the slippery slope, and developed playful explanations for several items from Japanese toponomastics, or from the Japanese lexicon or folklore.

Publications thus far about the GALLURA project include Nissan and HaCohen-Kerner (2011; 2013 [2014]; and in press), as well as Nissan (2012b). A related project, already implemented as software, was described in a paper by Yaakov HaCohen-Kerner, Daniel Nisim Cohen, and Ephraim Nissan (HaCohen-Kerner et al. 2013b), and in another paper, by these and Ghil'ad Zuckermann (HaCohen-Kerner et al. 2013b). That project is about providing playful explanations about Hebrew first names, by resorting to tools from information retrieval within computing. A different perspective (one from within onomastics as a scholarly discipline) on personal names and playful explanation was adopted in Nissan (in press, a, b, c, d, e). In particular, Nissan (in press, d, e) discuss both a *nomen omen* tale from the Babylonian Talmud (it occurs in embryonic form in the Jerusalem Talmud), and what the actual etymology of the personal name *Kidor* of a character may be.

The papers "Anthoponomastic Puns in the Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Script, with Considerations on Onomastic Punning in Different Script Systems" (Nissan, in press, b), "Experiments in Producing Playful 'Explanations' for Given Names (Anthroponyms) in Hebrew and English" (HaCohen-Kerner et al. 2013a), and "Graphemic Puns, and Software Making Them Up. The Case of Hebrew, vs. Chinese and Japanese" (HaCohen-Kerner et al. 2013b) pay attention to how the script system affects amenability to playful explanation of onomastic or lexical items. If the latter, the device has been historically applied in the modern period within language planning, in such neologisation which "nativises" a loanword by posturing as though it was formed within the native lexicon. This has occurred in Republican, Turkish, Modern Icelandic, as well as Modern Hebrew, and when ideograms are involved, it is a device not infrequently resorted to also in modern Mandarin Chinese and modern Japanese (Zuckermann 2000, 2003).

<sup>46</sup> Nissan (in preparation, Part I, from the abstract. "Part II is attentive to the humanities context of historical antecedents. The Noah narrative across cultures is a good example, as different cultures came up with puns or aetiological tales for proper names pertaining to that core narrative" (*ibid.*, from the abstract of Part II).

<sup>47</sup> 'Etymythology' is Ghil'ad Zuckermann's coinage.

Nissan and Zuckermann (2013) discussed this device (re-etymologisation, or semantic remotivation of a loanword), concerning how Abramowitsch's 1866 Hebrew-language zoological lexicon of birds (by an author who went on to become the famous novelist Mendele Mokher Sfarim) adopted the word *alqum*, which is a hapax legomenon in the Hebrew Bible, in order to denote the Great Auk (hunted to extinction earlier in the 19th century). *Alqum* was doubly remotivated: from *Alk* (i.e., 'auk'), and from *al-qum*, 'not stand', presumably because the Great Auk, a flightless bird no longer seen, would never again stand, never again walk the earth.

Zuckermann (2006) speaks about "Etymythological Othering" in inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations, such that playful etymologies plays a conspicuous part. Nissan (in press, e) discussed how, in the Middle Ages, playful interpretations were offered for the name, *Paul*, of an apostate by a former coreligionist of his, and how the toponym *Tavormina* (i.e., *Taormina*) of the town where he died was playfully interpreted; that same paper also discussed how late antique rabbinic homiletics playfully elaborated upon the name of Nebuchadnezzar, in a homiletic tale about Daniel's three companions whom Nebuchadnezzar tried unsuccessfully to burn alive in the fiery furnace.

Nissan (2013 [2014] b, c, d) and Nissan and HaCohen-Kerner (2013 [2014]) discussed how some animal names in Hebrew or other languages are playfully etymologised within an aetiological narrative, from my own *Liber animalium* (Hebrew: *Midrash kol chay*), an alphabetised literary lexicon in early rabbinic as well as medieval Hebrew.

## 16.2. Japanese Toponomastics in *Speculum totius orbis*

By considering literary examples from the corpus used in Nissan (2012a), we are going to elucidate here some features of the interplay of myth-making, myth-appropriation, and punning aetiologies in *Tractate America*, by contrasting it to such interplay in my own corpus, which is also a pastiche in rabbinic Hebrew, and which has already been the subject of scholarly discussion elsewhere (especially Nissan 2012a). It is especially apt to consider here a sequence of passages in rabbinic Hebrew — part of *Tsurát ha-Aratsót* (= *Speculum totius orbis*), a vast literary work by myself, from the 2000s — about a made-up past of Japan, where several place-names are interpreted as though they reflected the arrival of exiles belonging to the Ten Tribes and imagined as devout Jews (or then the arrival of earlier characters from the margins of sacred history, such as the Generation of the Dispersion<sup>48</sup> which left the Tower of Babel). This example was discussed in Nissan (2012a):

There are those who say: those islands were only called *Yapan* (⟨yḡpn⟩), because a Japhethite (*ben Yéfet*, ⟨bn yḡt⟩) went out from Jaffa (*Yafo*, ⟨yḡpw⟩), and set forth ("placed his face", *sam panáv*) to come there. He was of the opinion that it was a behoving (*ya'á*) idea, therefore he went (*paná*, ⟨pnh⟩), and sailed by sea, until he set foot there. And the derivation of *Yapan* (Japan), is from two words: *ya'á*, *paná*.

And the "sons of Yapan" (the Japanese) call their country *Nihon* (⟨nyhwn⟩). Why? Because their wealth is in ships: ships of wealth (*oní-hón*, ⟨ny-hwn⟩). And their characteristic feature is called *Nipponiyyút* (⟨nypwnywt⟩). Why? Because it is a specific property of theirs, and they wave (*menofefin*, ⟨mnwppyn⟩) it, towards the interior (*pnim*, ⟨pnym⟩) and towards the exterior. There are those who say: *Nihon* (⟨nyhwn⟩), because it requires in their eyes "the Blessing of those who Take Pleasure" (*birkát hannehenín*, ⟨byrkt hnhnyn⟩).

<sup>48</sup> Nissan Ararat (1994) discussed the story, from *Genesis*, of the Generation of the Dispersion (when the peoples divided and dispersed from the Tower of Babel) as a satirical drama inside the Hebrew Bible.



A group of exiles belonging to the [Lost] Ten Tribes [of Israel] drove in (*taqé 'á*) a peg [for their tent] in the plain on the sea in that country [i.e., Japan]. They said: "Let us build a city". They said: "In order to reside, not to become enmeshed [assimilated forever]". They said: "How are we going to call our city?". They said: "It is the eve of [the Jewish] New Year's day. Let us call it *Toqe 'á* [blast of the shofar]". This is Tokyo, the capital city of Japan. They built yet another city in that plain, and called it "His call to authority [or: obedience to him] resounded (*yoqho hama*)", which is Yokohama. What is *yoqho*? [It is a new coinage, transparent because of a biblical corradical derivative]. *Yiqható* (obedience to him). In order to memorialize a wiseman/rabbi that used to stand and preach in public. That plain, they call it *Kanto*. [If this Japanese name is taken to be a Hebrew word, it is a new coinage, transparent because of a lexicalised corradical]. That is to say: *Miqnató* (What he bought/acquired). How that?! It was they who had bought/acquired it! But they ascribed it to him, to honour him, and to make it known how dear he was.

The Hebrew verb *taqá'* is used both for 'to blast' the horn (the shofar) of the Jewish New Year's Day (and when so used, it is an intransitive verb and requires a preposition), and for 'to drive in' the peg of a tent (when so used, it is a transitive verb). The action noun is *téqi 'á*, but when it refers to the blast of the horn, hymnography also knows the form *toqe 'á* or *toqé 'á*. "To make it be known how dear he is" is a cliché of rabbinic homiletics (lexically, Arabic has something similar). *Kanto* literally means "east of the Pass", vs. the Kansai region, "west of the Pass", with Osaka, Kobe, and Kyoto. Of course, claiming playfully that Tokyo and Yokohama and the Kanto plain where those two cities are situated (thirty million people now live there), got their name because Jewish congregants were fond of their rabbi, or because of the blasting of the shofar, is an extreme example of hijacking filiopietism, just as the playful derivation of the name of Seoul, actually a tragic narrative, is an extreme example of hijacking of geopiety<sup>49</sup> (the ascription of sacred status to a place) The temporal setting is after 715 BCE, before Jimmu, Japan's first emperor (660 BCE).

<sup>49</sup> *Geopiety* is "a term coined by geographer John Kirtland Wright for geographical piety. Wright regarded geopiety as a province in a larger kingdom of "georeligion", where religion and geography meet" (Kark 1996, p. 47; cf. Wright 1966). Ruth Kark further points out that Yi-Fu Tuan (1976) adopted Wright's term, but gave it a different meaning; and that "Vogel in his study on Americans and the Holy Land in the nineteenth century further expanded Wright's and Tuan's definition of geopiety, and convincingly used the term for the first time in an explicitly Holy Land context" (Kark 1996, p. 48). Lester Irwin Vogel claimed: "Geopiety, then, in the sense being used here, is the expression of dutiful devotion and habitual reverence for a territory, land, or space. In this broader form, the term seems tailor-made to describe the range of national attachments to the Holy Land, a place that has evoked devotion and habitual reverence among peoples and cultures in various ages" (Vogel 1993, cited by Kark 1996, p. 48). Also Richard Hecht (1994) and Allan Grapard (1994) are concerned with geopiety. Grapard (1994) distinguishes it from *geosophia* and *geognosis*. Also note the distinction between *place attachment* (Altman and Low 1992) and geopiety. Allan Grapard provides the following definitions (1994, p. 375):

Both *geosophia* and *geognosis* are connected with systems of symbolic representation, but their epistemological frameworks and intentionality differ in each case. Whereas *geosophia* might be characterized as the establishment of a wise use of the earth by humans and to [sic] a certain instrumentality, *geognosis* refers to a specific knowledge that is claimed to have been extracted from the earth itself, to correspond in mysterious ways to sacred scriptures and to divine rule, and to lead either to mystical achievement or to religious salvation.

*Geopiety* usually refers to a primarily religious mood of relation to sacred places. I see it as a set of beliefs and practices subsumed under *geognosis* as if it were its protosecular form, i.e., a distinct set of conceptualizations and practices that stand halfway between the mystical aspects of *geognosis* and the secular, modern forms of relationship to place. This attitude is evident in a number of texts and is related to the premodern practices of pilgrimage, which are themselves related to a certain form of government. In geopiety the emphasis is on the attitude of pious reverence to what has been called 'sacred space' by historians of religions.

Whereas there actually exist converging modern myths entertained by some Japanese Shintoists, Japanese Christians, and Jews residing in Japan<sup>50</sup> about ancient Jewish arrivals into Japan, the imaginary about the Ten Tribes has been quite powerful and pervasive in the history of ideas across a great many cultures, as recently shown by Zvi Ben-Dor Benite (2009). And David Katz entitled an essay (2001) "Israel in America: The Wanderings of the Lost Ten Tribes from *Mikveigh Yisrael* to Timothy McVeigh", i.e., from the early modern Amsterdamite rabbi Menasseh ben Israel's book *Mikve Yisrael = Hope of Israel*,<sup>51</sup> to a murderous brand of American far-rightist WASP extremism. And even inside India, modern Jews were receptive — Tudor Parfitt (2002) has shown — to the Ten Tribes imaginary.

## 17. Concocting a Fanciful History for a Place: In *Tractate America* and Elsewhere

### 17.1. The Four Corners of the Earth, and How Norway's Fjords Came into Being

Again in *Tsurát ha-Aratsót* (= *Speculum totius orbis*), one finds a story about *chelkei-hayyishuv* "the continents", literally "the parts of the Oecumene [inhabited earth]", like at the very beginning of *Tractate America*. This occurs when the book playfully discusses the fjords of Norway, as well as when it playfully discusses Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula in the far north of the Far East. *Tsurát ha-Aratsót* claims that the Old World, composed of the three continents Asia, Africa, and Europe, has four "wings" (*arba' kanfot ha'arets*), the four wings of the earth (or, as English has it after the Hebrew Bible, the four corners of the earth). This simile is based on the idea that the landmass is like a garment; in the Hebrew Bible, garments for covering the entire body are typically with four corners. This is why the pentateuchal prescription of wearing a fringe on the four corners of one's dress is fulfilled by devout adult male Jews by wearing a rectangular prayer shawl during the morning prayer (some even wear a smaller version, called *arba' kanfot*, "four corners", under their shirt all day long), and that shawl has fringes (*tsitsiyyot*) at its four corners indeed.

According to *Tsurát ha-Aratsót*, the northeastern corner of the earth (the landmass) is the Kamchatka Peninsula, or rather *kamma shatka*, "how silent she is", as that land (*erets* is feminine in Hebrew) is the corner of the earth about which you hear less often. The southeastern corner of the landmass is the Malay Peninsula, which is extended into the sea in a place where the sea is *male iyyim*, "full of islands", hence the name *mala' iyyim* of the Malay people. The southwestern corner of the landmass is the southern tip of Africa, where a metropolis (Capetown) extends under the Table Mountain, supposedly so called after the words of the verse *Psalms 23:5*, "a table against my enemies" (which does not always work).

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Of these terms, only *geopieté* has been widely used by geographers and historians of religions. One could add to these categories that of geopolitics, but with the understanding that on the level of nationalism the practices of geopolitics are not self-critical and are, in fact, informed by geosophia, geognosis, and geopieté. Geopolitics is related to the consolidation of modern nation-states, which always evidences particular techniques for occupying space and for establishing ever more precisely defined social spaces. [...]

<sup>50</sup> Search the Web for "Arimasa Kubo" and for "Joseph Eidelberg". Benite (2009, p. 3) writes: "The Scots missionary Nicholas McLeod (fl. 1868–1889) spent decades in Japan and Korea, searching for the true Israelites. He wrote Japanese history as a history of the ten tribes in the Japanese isles" (cf. McLeod 1879a, 1879b). "Today, [...] various groups around the world, from the Zebulonites in Japan, to various African-American groups in the United States, to Latin American indigenous peoples, claim that they are the descendants of one or all of the tribes" (Benite 2009, p. 5).

<sup>51</sup> *Esperança de Israel* (Spanish, Amsterdam, 1650) = *Sefer Miqveh Yisrael* (Hebrew, *ibid.*, 1697). Benjamin Schmidt (2001) discussed its Sitz-im-Leben, in "The Hope of the Netherlands". Menasseh ben Israel met Oliver Cromwell and sought from him the readmission of the Jews to England.

And finally, the northwestern corner of the landmass is the Scandinavian Peninsula, which extends southwards, but is fringed by fjords westwards. Why is it fringed? And why are they called *fjords*? This is because of the (medieval) rabbis of *Fiorda* (this is the traditional Hebrew name of the town of Fürth near Nuremberg in Bavaria). An entirely invented myth is proposed, according to which their prestigious court decreed that as by then there were Jewish communities throughout Central Europe, Europe must wear a fringe (a *tsisit*, as in a prayer shawl), which Europe does indeed on Europe's own corner of the earth: this is the "fringed" coast of Norway, full of fjords.

## 17.2. Myths of Origin, and Hebrew Derivations

Whereas *Tsurát ha-Aratsót* digs into the Jewish homiletic canon similarly to *Tractate America*, which it emulates, it also adopts other kinds of imaginary, and so does a companion literary work also by myself, the *Liber animalium* — *Animal Book* — *Sefer Hachayyot* (= *Midrash Kol Chay*), already mentioned at the end of Sec. 16.1, and which does for animals (most often in connection to the name-giver, Adam, or to Noah), what *Tsurát ha-Aratsót* does for places. Cf. Nissan (2013 [2014] b, c, d) and Nissan and HaCohen-Kerner (2013 [2014]).

Among the other things, in the *Liber animalium* the myth of Ophir in the Americas is also drawn upon. James Romm (2001) discussed Arias Montano's understanding of Ophir, the Noahide dispersion, and America, in the sixteenth century. Cf. Francis Schmidt's paper (1988) entitled "Arzareth en Amérique: l'autorité du *Quatrième Livre d'Esdras* dans la discussion sur la parenté des Juifs et des Indiens d'Amérique (1530–1729)". Early modern scholars indulged in conjectures about the origin of the Native Americans, motivated by the spirit of enquiry, or by political or religious interest, or by all those things together. Francis Schmidt already mentioned study (1988) is an enlightening study of the matter. Huddleston (1967) and Gliozzi (1977 in Italian, 2000 in French) also dealt that episode from the history of ideas, and Braude (1997, p. 106, fn. 5) has pointed out Gliozzi's merits and limits. Popkin (1989), like Schmidt (1988), discussed early modern theories about kinship to Jews.

In the entry for the llama in the *Liber Animalium*, the llama is called there *gmal-Parvayim*, "the camel from the Land of Parvaim" (cf. Modern Hebrew *gmal hatsón*, lit. "ovine camel"), patterned after the biblical *zehav-Parvayim*, "gold of Parvaim", based on the early modern claim according to which it was from Peru, identified with Parvaim, that King Solomon imported gold. *Parvaim* used to be interpreted as "the two Peru's", the other Peru being New Spain, i.e., California. In 1572 the celebrated Spanish Hebraist Benito Arias Montanus (Arias Montano), in the *Biblia Polyglotta* of Antwerp, claimed that the biblical "gold of Parvaim" (2 Chronicles 3:6) was the gold of Peru (<Prw> in Hebrew spelling). He understood *Parvaim*, a Hebrew dual form (cf. *Mitzraim* for 'Egypt'), and interpreted this according to the geography of the American pacific coast. Thus, according to Arias Montanus, King Solomon had obtained Peru gold like the Kings of Spain were doing in that scholar's own generation.

Of course, this interpretation is for us, when seeking knowledge *ad veritatem*, totally unacceptable, because of our present state of knowledge about trade routes and the likelihood of reaching Peru from Eilat (Israel's port city on the Red Sea) at the times of the biblical monarchy. But for Arias Montano to have come up with that interpretation was both brilliant, and pertinent to what Peru was to Spain in the sixteenth century and later. Arias Montanus' conjecture is still evocative, in the sense that it is fodder for the imagination. In Nissan's *Animal Book*, in a tale about King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, the king produces a "camel of Parvaim" in order to answer a riddle of hers.

Punning aetiology has a further layer for this name in Nissan's literary corpus, as none else than Yiddish *parve* intrudes in order to explain the biblical place-name *Parvayim*. At Shem and Eber's school (the one when Jewish legend has it that the patriarch Jacob was enrolled as student fourteen years), they used to reminisce about an old wise man who used to have

discussions with Shem, the son of Noah. That was before the old man left, during the dispersion from the Tower of Babel. Shem had taught about classifying food into meaty, dairy, and neither (*parve*). But his interlocutor used to maintain that *parve*, too, comes in two kinds: *parve* with a meaty inclination, and *parve* with a dairy inclination. Whence the dual form, *parvayim* ("two *parve*'s"). The old man of Parvaim (i.e., the one who had been arguing for the ritual concept of there being two kinds of *parve*), upon leaving Babel, had ended up in Peru, which became known as Parvaim because of that nickname of his.

### 17.3. Narrative Strategy and Tactics: Fable vs. Satire

The narrative strategy and tactics of *Tsurát ha-Aratsót* come quite close to Rosenzweig's in *Tractate America* in respect of devising a fanciful history for countries and places from actual geography, by using as pegs punning explications of the toponyms involved. *Tsurát ha-Aratsót* is quite unlike *Tractate America*, in that Rosenzweig's goal was to develop a satire for how New York was at the time he was living there. By contrast, in *Tsurát ha-Aratsót* on the face of it the main purpose is the conjuring up of a fabled world, a sometimes enchanted and some other times pointedly nugatory mythical world history. It is much less blatantly than in *Tractate America*, that in *Tsurát ha-Aratsót* a social critique emerges.

For example, in the case of the freshly made myth of Japan's past, — see in Sec. 16.2 above, and in Nissan (2012a) — those newcomers belong to the Ten Tribes, themselves presumably consistently sinful on the evidence of the Hebrew Bible. And yet, they behave as quite devout and cohesive Jewish congregation. What we have, for Japan, is a tale of two *kinds* of cities: the ones whose name's punning explication is traced back to the observant Israelite, and the ones such that the punning explication of their name is Hebrew, but pagan, indeed paganized. How come? We find a tale of extreme acculturation for Nagoya, whose name is, yes, you guessed it, imagined to be patterned after the episode of such Israelites who were looking for Miss Right: *Na goya*, "Please! One who is not Jewish". Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* encapsulated, if you wish, and projected back from Philip Roth's<sup>52</sup> 1969 to sometime between the Assyrian Sennacherib and Japan's Emperor Jimmu. A midrashic narrative ascribed to Rabbi Akiva ('Aqiba), about Israelites going astray in *Numbers* 25, prompted David Stern to write (1998, p. 116): "This is, one might say, the dawn of the Age of the Shiksa; in the distance Portnoy winks".

In the *Speculum Totius orbis*, i.e., *Tsurát ha-Aratsót*, so heavily indebted to Rosenzweig, a chorality of the human experience emerges from hundreds most often quite brief (and occasionally longer) tales of human interaction. By contrast, in *Tractate America* Rosenzweig consistently relates about human types, and situational patterns featuring them. The only individual human being, rather than a type, who appears there is Columbus. Quite significantly, he is there as an individual because of his unique, unrepeatably role within the foundation myth of America, and the extensions Rosenzweig appends to it. But Columbus' action is related both concisely and formulaically. Also in my own pseudo-world-history, a fantasy-history of the world (the *Speculum totius orbis*), and in my literary bestiary (the *Liber animalium*), even Adam, Noah, Solomon, are deindividualised into types, and so are people who departed from the Tower of Babel, to say nothing about the brief appearances of countless, nameless characters in the multitude of juxtaposed toponomastic aetiological mini-tales.

Both the mini-tales in that corpus, and the very brief scenes in *Tractate America*, have a precedent in the condensed, compressed narratives of the late antique and medieval collectanea of the Aggadic Midrash (i.e., rabbinic homiletics being non-legal biblical exegesis).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Philip Roth's 1974 essay on his novel *Portnoy's Complaint*, in his book *Reading Myself and Others*.

## 18. A Tradition of Foundation Myths

This foundation myth found at the very beginning of *Tractate America* has a long tradition in the three monotheistic faiths. For example, Felix Fabri (ca. 1441–1502), a Dominican monk and a traveller, devised for his native city of Ulm in Germany an etymology-cum-foundation-myth traced to Hul (Jews however pronounce this as *Khool*), the second son of Aram, the son of Shem, the son of Noah (*Genesis* 10:23). It is interesting that Fabri was satisfied with an etymology from a personal name that did not account for the *m* in Ulm. This cost was apparently offset by the advantage of finding such a close link to Noah. Writing about Fabri in his essay "Etymology in Tradition and in the Northern Renaissance", Borckhardt (1968) noted that such Italians as "Petrarch, Cola di Rienzo, Boccaccio, Salutati, Biondo, and the other worshippers of the Roman past" (*ibid.*, p. 425).

had the whole of Roman literature at the service of their patriotism, and the Germans could only look to Tacitus and very few others. The German Renaissance search for the past was obliged<sup>53</sup> to take forms different from its Italian model and progenitor. In lieu of actual texts the Germans invented one or two, reinterpreted with vast imagination the names of antiquity, and resorted to etymology. Fabri explicitly states that in the absence of actual documents on Ulm, etymology was a valid source of information [...]. Proceeding from this premise he attempts to explain the ancient history of Ulm in terms, for example, of the ancient tribe of the (H)Ulmerigi and Hul, son of Sem son of Noah.<sup>54</sup>

On the face of it, there is little to warrant relating Rosenzweig to Fabri, apart from their remote correlation of seeking authority in conveniently reinterpreted sacred texts that they partly shared. Nevertheless, the case can be made that their intents converged.

In many ways he [Fabri] is obviously rooted in the Middle Ages, and bears enough similarity to his medieval forebears to make the new and different all the more striking. His Latin is still medieval, although it carries some Humanist embellishments. Even his derivations are not always free of the markedly medieval habit of moralization. Seeking the origin of the name of his city, Fabri proposed among his etymologies the pious acrostic of *Ulma: unitas, legum observationes, modus, ad ... deum*. [i.e.: 'unity, law abiding, moderation, and orientation to the Divine'.] Fabri intended that a good lesson — civic unity, law, moderation, and piety — be learned from this analysis. Here, Fabri was a medieval moralist. In addition, however, he was a Renaissance scholar with boundless curiosity about the past of his city.

Rosenzweig, too, was a civic *vates*, the seer who sees his city from end to end (on both the synchronic and diachronic axes, i.e., both in the present, and throughout an imagined history), and whose sight pierces the ways of the locals and captures their essence. Though Rosenzweig was not a celebratory *vates*, but rather a rebuker (true to the Hebrew Bible tradition of prophecy); not one culturally hegemonic but rather an intellectual of a socially disadvantaged locally situated group; one entrenched in New York Jewish immigrant community, rather than in the hegemonic narrative of that city. What is more, he had been in town just two years, and was already able to write such a perceptive description of Jewish New York.

For sure, if we are to contrast him again to Fabri in Ulm, Rosenzweig was quite up to date, a man of his times, in how he pored over the dynamics of the city, but his moralism was one sincerely rooted in the traditional textual culture from which he drew his pastiche. Unlike,

<sup>53</sup> Borckhardt (1968, p. 425), citing Veesenmeyer (1889, p. 6).

<sup>54</sup> Borckhardt (1968, p. 425), citing Veesenmeyer (1889, p. 12).

Fabri, he was lampooning. He was lampooning the vices of his fellow New Yorkers, but, a moderate Orthodox Jew, by means of that pastiche he was seeking not to detract from the authority of his textual model, but rather to reaffirm it while recontextualising it. That you ought to have some mastery of those underlying texts, was his underlying assumption, one so obvious that to start with, you could not make sense of *Tractate America* unless you read Hebrew and were able to understand the intertextual allusions interspersed there.

## 19. Rosenzweig's Rabbinic Hebrew vs. Choices of Stratum in the Hebrew Maskilic Satire

### 19.1. Writing in Earnest vs. Tongue-in-Cheek

As being a Hebraist, Rosenzweig's choice of the rabbinic Hebrew stratum, registers, and stylemes was in a sense at odds with the Maskilic satire of the Jewish Haskalah or Enlightenment (which actually was in the nineteenth century, for Jewry in East Europe), from which he had drawn the very legitimacy of the satirical genre. Maskilic satire<sup>55</sup> found its model in the Menippean satire, or in the dialogues of Lucian (see Werses), whom some Jewish Enlighteners revered.<sup>56</sup>

When writing in earnest (rather than tongue-in-cheek), East Europe's Maskilim (Enlighteners) championed Biblical Hebrew. Rabbinic Hebrew, even the language variety of its early canon, was deemed inferior, and most inferior of all was, to them, Hebrew as found in Hasidic texts, sloppy by device (among the Hasidim in turn, were you to write Hebrew, or even Yiddish, in the style of a Maskil, you risked becoming an outcast).<sup>57</sup> A caveat: the long tradition of the Purim parody, stylistically a talmudic pastiche, had continuators broadly speaking of Maskilic tendencies, and these had per force to resort to the kind of Hebrew you would find in the *Talmud*.

### 19.2. Hebrew Satire Outside the Haskalah Movement

It must be emphasised moreover that even though Hebrew satire is closely associated with the Haskalah movement, it was not confined to such "Enlighteners". Yehuda Friedländer has researched also the response of satire other than Maskilic. Cf. Friedländer's book (2004) on Jewish law topics within satire, something clearly relevant to Rosenzweig's often mock-jurisprudential stylemes.

<sup>55</sup> E.g., see Assaf (1995, 1999). Pelli (1975) traced the beginnings of Hebrew satire in Germany, with Saul ben Zvi Hirsch Levin Berlin (1740–1794). Cf. Friedländer's (1979) *Perakim ba-satira ha'ivrit be-shilhey ha-me'a ha-shmone- 'esre be-Germanya* (*Studies in Hebrew Satire in Germany, 1790–1797*).

<sup>56</sup> Werses (1978 [1990]) concludes (p. 247 in the 1990 edn.) that interest in Lucian among the Maskilim did not endure into late nineteenth century generation of the national revival. The Galician maskil Shlomo Rubin (1823–1910) published Hebrew translations (through German) of Lucian, as early as 1864. In 1880, he reworked into Hebrew Erasmus' 1508 *Encomion Moriae*, and incorporated a dialogue by Lucian, which he reissued separately as a chapbook in 1877 (Rubin 1877), and then again, as part of a book of 1907.

<sup>57</sup> In the Yiddish memoirs (Kotik 1913–1914 [1922] in Yiddish, 1998 in Hebrew, 2002 in English) authored by Yechezkel Kotik (1847–1921), in Ch. 20 of Vol. 1 he relates that in Kamenets, when he became betrothed in his early teens, his uncle wrote for him a draft of letter in quite ornate Hebrew to the male guardian of his intended. Then a man hired by Kotik's grandfather (who himself was a wealthy Mitnagged: an anti-Hasidic traditionalist) to tutor the girls at home into writing in Yiddish and Russian (as a boy, Kotik was not supposed to also be his pupil) suggested to the boy that for half a ruble he would draft for him a letter in ornate Yiddish for his intended. Kotik showed his father, a Hasid, the Yiddish letter. The father slapped the boy for being such a *Daitsh* (*Deutsch*, i.e., one acculturated to the German Haskalah). The teacher lost his pupils and was promptly driven out of town, lest he would turn them heretics.

In Baghdad on 9 Adar 5673 (1913), independently of the East European Jewish satirical tradition, the intransigent Rabbi Shim'on Ághasi gave his last, and most important sermon, one of four hours: it was against Westernisation. It was in the local Judaeo-Arabic vernacular, but he wrote it down in Hebrew. He vividly portrayed humorous scenes from the lives of types of the Westernised wealthy (Ághasi 1913 [1964]).<sup>58</sup>

### 19.3. A Satirist Drenched in Poison (Perl), vs. a Good-Hearted Satirist (Rosenzweig)

That most intransigent of Maskilic satirists, Josef Perl from Tarnopol (1773–1839),<sup>59</sup> who had been a Hasid in his youth, wrote his own 1819 satirical epistolary novel *Mgalle Tmirin (Revealer of Secrets)* in Hasidic Hebrew, and in the end had his Hasidic characters die, after they cowered in fear of an informer. One like him: "he bombarded officials with memoranda hostile to Hasidism, hoping the authorities would suppress the movement" (Meir 2008). "A complex and twisting plot unfolds, and the main issue involves attempts by Hasidism to gain possession of 'the book' — none other than Perl's German book! — that negatively influenced the attitude of the authorities toward the movement." (*ibid.*)

Perl adopted the language of the butt of his satire, and the human beings who were the butt of his satire he hated to death. The spread of Hasidism was to him like cancer. Quite in contrast, Rosenzweig loved intensely the community he was lampooning. He chastised Gentile America in his satire, and yet conveyed his admiration and best wishes for his adoptive country in his other writings. He deprecated a diverse gallery of Jewish types, and yet empathized with several of them, and even completely identified with a few of them (the writer, the journalist, the competent teacher of Jewish traditional culture). He listed the vices of people he loved. Hmmm. Some he definitely didn't like, e.g., there is neither empathy nor mercy in how in Chapter 6 he tears apart Reform rabbis. He would apparently not walk over to them once the reading is over, and pat them on the back: "You know how I really feel about you". But even then, Rosenzweig was not a man moved by hatred. He was as far from Perl as day is from night. Between the two, I know whose satire I like, and whom I like.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Rabbi Shim'on Ághasi (1913 [1964]) began by warning about the extent of acculturation in Western Europe, one bound to be met with supernal punishment, only held back because of the moral counterweight being Western Jews' philanthropic inclinations. (Note that some Iraqi Jews, especially tycoons based in the Far East, were themselves philanthropists, some of them donating to European coreligionists.) Ághasi's income was from his own business as a merchant, and this may account both for his independence (his views were relatively conservative), and partly for his authoritativeness (the public would not perceive him as a post-holder who owed his livelihood to the community). Satirical passages in his sermon would show that deculturation, as well as other factors (e.g., a wife's excessive ambitions for wealth) resulted in dysfunctional human relations.

The little boy, coming back from school chirping in French, would kick his mother because his dinner wasn't ready, and his mother in turn would scold her maidservant. Then the boy, his head uncovered, would leave the table at which he had eaten, without saying grace after his meal. The wife would dance enlaced to some stranger at the governor's palace (she went there on her own insistence), and her bovinely indifferent husband (bovine, yet no angry bull) would let her do it, instead of knocking her on the top of her head. (In case you respond now by visualising that fixture of Western popular culture, club-wielding husbands from cavemen gag cartoons, dragging their unconscious wives behind them by the hair, please stop immediately!)

Ághasi's sermon was published in Jerusalem in 1964, as a booklet of 63 pages in small format. This is the Hebrew version of a sermon given Baghdad in 1913 in Baghdadi Judaeo-Arabic. The text is as in the author's manuscript, but passages of prayer that were interspersed for recitation on the original occasion (an extraordinary penitential session of prayer) were omitted from the chapbook.

<sup>59</sup> Dauber's book (2004) *Antonio's Devils* is on writers of the Jewish Enlightenment (the Haskalah), and much of it is about Perl. There exists an English translation of Perl's 1819 Hebrew anti-Hasidic satirical novel *Revealer of Secrets* (Perl 1997 [1819]). Also see Meir (2004).

## Appendix A: Concerning Previous Related Studies by the Present Author

Sections 4 and 7 in the present study refer to this appendix, which briefly surveys some previous publications of mine that dealt with Gerson Rosenzweig's *Tractate America*. Celebrating the sesquicentennial of Rosenzweig's birth in the inaugural issue I had put together of a journal I established, and which actually appeared one year late for that anniversary, in Nissan (2012c) I discussed Chapter 3 from *Tractate America*, and provided a heavily annotated translation. It is a chapter specifically concerned with the working conditions of Jewish immigrants in the Lower East End. In the present paper instead we are going to focus on the initial chapter of *Tractate America*.

In Nissan (2008a), an article concerned with the role of top-hats and the military busby in how recently emancipated (or not yet emancipated) Jews negotiated their social positioning in Europe and (among Jews in the military) in the Ottoman Empire, Sec. 4 (comprising four subsections) is entitled "Top-hats Among Jews in New York: Gerson Rosenzweig's Communal Satire". Out of convenience, two of the subsections, ones that deal with specific themes in *Tractate America*, are reproduced here (the citation system is from the pre-publication version of that article):

### 4.3. The top-hat in *Tractate America*

In Section 6 of *Tractate America*, there is a comic reference to the top-hat, for which Rosenzweig introduced the term *krbl* (he must have pronounced it *karbol*), patterned after the noun *krblt* (*karbólét*, Ashkenazic *karboyles*, "cock's comb"). A Mishnah-like line: "For three, the *krbl* is mandated, namely: a rabbi, a physician, and a coachman," is followed with this pseudo-Gemara: "What is *krbl*? Rav Safro said: *tsilindro* (*cylyndra*). What is a *tsilindro*? A *kapelusho* (*kplwśa*). What is a *kapelusho*? A *kolpak* (*klpka* [busby]). What is a *kolpak*? A *stovepipe* (*styw pypa*). Why is it called *krbla*? Because anybody wearing it, is as proud of it as a cock that is proud of his comb (*bkrbltw*), and crows and cackles, and lets everybody know that he is a cock." Even "tailors and shoemakers who have risen to a high status, and have become *gabba'in* (congregation lay leaders), and *presidentin*<sup>61</sup> of associations, buy *krblyn* (top-hats), and don't wear them on the weekdays, but only on Shabbat and the festivals." Children throw stones at top-hats (*Tractate America*, Section 6). "Rav Mevino [i.e., Maven, Expert] said: 'A *krbl* was mandatory for coachmen. Why has it become an obligation for rabbis of Israel? Because they ride upon the congregation of Israel and implement in it what is written: «Like a mare in the coaches of Pharaoh.»' Rav Makshan [retorts]: 'You said so of the rabbis. What will you say of the physicians?' He told him: 'The physicians surely resemble coachmen, as people are used to say: carters and physicians are honoured depending upon their horse'" (*Tractate America*, Section 6). It must be said that Rosenzweig, though, was far from an adversary of Orthodox rabbis; both belief and social differences account for the fact that by contrast, Reform rabbis, to him, were a special butt of ridicule.) "Lo and behold, how great is the power of a *krbl* (top-hat) in America, as even a total ignoramus ('*am ha-arets*) becomes by its means a *rav* (gentleman / rabbi)" (*Tractate America*, Section 6). Newspaper editors, too, wear a top-hat, as those writing for the newspapers greet their editors (*redaktoreihen*) as *rabbonim* (bosses / rabbis) (*Tractate America*, Section 6).

Rosenzweig also postures as though the halakhic concept *karmelit* – which Jastrow (1903:671, s.v.) defies as "a marked off plot in a public thoroughfare, in gen[eral] an area which cannot be classified [as either] private ground ... or as private ground," as

<sup>61</sup> In contrast, we have already seen that in Sec. 1 of *Tractate America*, Rosenzweig refers to the President of the United States of America by the Hebrew term /naśi'/ (phonemic), *nósi* (in Askenazic pronunciation), *nasí* (in Israeli pronunciation). In Biblical Hebrew it denotes the top leader of a clan or tribe (not a king). In Modern and then Israeli Hebrew, the same term denotes the president of a republic. Rosenzweig adopted the latter usage.



in the Jerusalem Talmud, [in tractate] *Shabbat* XI, 13a: "whatever obstructs the public road is called *karmelit*" – is by one fictitious sage's opinion a synonym of *krbl*, and therefore denotes "top-hat" (he was certainly helped by *m* and *b* both being bilabial consonants), and this in turns leads to a jocular interpretation of the verse from *Song of Songs*, 7:6 (from which Rosenzweig tacitly removed a few words in the middle: "Your head is upon you like *Carmel*" (i.e., a top-hat! but in the original, "you" is a woman), then "a king bound in the *rehatim* (tresses)" and to add: "Who are the kings? The rabbis / masters." Bear in mind that Rashi interpreted this as referring to the phylacteries worn on the head. See Rosenzweig's relevant text, in Figure 4.3-1 [i.e., our Fig. 18 here].

#### 4.4. "The Babylonian Periodicals" of New York (in Yiddish): considerations about the geographic divide, and co-ethnic recognition failure

Rosenzweig's Section 8 begins making considerations about "the Babylonian [= Babelic] periodicals." Surely these are not Jewish Iraqi newspapers (such as several such periodicals that appeared at various times in India), but the Yiddish newspapers, as to Rosenzweig, Yiddish was "a jargon that is a mix (*blulo*) of all languages," and the authors were *mvulbolin*, i.e., confused (*Tractate America*, Section 8). This evokes the cultural associate of Babylon as being the place of the Tower of Babel.

It would probably not have occurred to him that Babylonian newspapers could refer to Baghdadi Judaeo-Arabic newspapers, that had a following with a readership in India that was economically better positioned than most Yiddish readers in New York. Philanthropists of Iraqi Jewish background were active worldwide. Yet, in places like New York City, where Jewish Syrians (culturally very close to Iraqi Jews) and Yemeni Jews were driven into clannishness by early and later negative experiences with coreligionists, in all likelihood any Arabic-speaking Jew could expect that "the amazed cry of 'Bist du a Yid? [Are you a Jew?]' would often greet them as they appeared in a tallit [i.e., a prayer shawl], at a kosher butcher, or at the ritual bath" (Sanua 1990, quoted in Ben-Ur 2008:6). "The denial of shared ethnicity and religion was perhaps the most painful and frustrating reaction Levantine Sephardim encountered in their dealings with Ashkenazim, especially when it impeded their employment" (Ben-Ur 2008:5). "Sometimes between 1909 and 1913, a number of Ashkenazic Jews of the Lower East Side protested the presence of the 'Turks in our midst' and petitioned Mayor William Jay Gaynor for their removal" (Ben-Ur 2008:5). This phenomenon has been described as "co-ethnic recognition failure." "Forged of ignorance, it occurred everywhere Eastern Sephardim settled, including Seattle, Indianapolis, Chicago, Lost Angeles, and New York" (Ben-Ur 2008:5).

Nissan (2002) proposed a diagrammatic analysis — in terms of character's and authorial goals and plans achieving them — of the very first page of the first regular (i.e., Vilna) edition of *Tractate America*. It was an analysis somewhat indebted to artificial intelligence, and in particular, to the so-called *conceptual dependency* theory school associated with Roger Schank and Christopher Riesbeck, and based at the University of Yale between the 1970s and the early 1980s. Goals and plans loom large in that approach (cf. Schank 2009).<sup>62</sup>

<sup>62</sup> See an introduction to conceptual dependencies and other approaches to the automatic analysis of narrative text, in Nissan (2013 [2014] a). In the conceptual dependency school of automated story processing that flourished at Yale University during the 1970s and 1980s, the process is driven by goals and plans. This is in contrast to grammar-driven story-processing, in which the story has to match a formal grammar, or is generated by using a formal grammar. "A basic premise of Conceptual Dependency (CD) is that meaning arises from a combination of memory search, planning, and inference. Only a small fraction of meaning is actually conveyed directly by those lexical items which explicitly appear in a given sentence" (Dyer 1983, p. 379). The meaning of sentences is represented by decomposing them into primitive acts. There are eleven of them in CD theory. Each primitive act has a few case-frames associated, which hold expectations for what conceptualisations should follow. Those case-frames include: actor, recipient, object (if any), direction, and instrumental case. As for primitive acts, e.g. PTRANS is the transfer of physical location. For example, if the newsagent walks over to a customer and hands over a magazine to that customer, who is buying it, this involves the primitive PROPEL.

מתני' שלשה חייבין בכרבל ואלו הן רב רופא ועגלון :  
 גמ' מאי כרבל אמר רב ספרא צילינדרא, מאי צילינדרא  
 כפלושא, מאי כפלושא כלפקא, מאי כלפקא סתיו פיפא  
 ואמאי קרי לוי' כרבלא משום שכל הנושאו מתגאה בו כתרנגול  
 הוה שמתגאה בכרבלתו וקורא ומקעקע ומודיע לכל שתרנגול  
 הוא. איבעי להו כרבל רשות היחיד או רשות הרבים הוה,  
 תא שמע החייטין והסנדלרין שעלו לגדולה ונעשו גבאין  
 ופרוידנטין בחברות קונין להם כרבלין ואינן יוצאין בהן  
 בחול אלא בשבתות וימים טובים בלבד והא סתם כרבלין  
 קטנים זורקין בהן אבנים מרשית הרבים, וסתם קטנים שזורקין  
 אבנים, קטנים של ישראל נינהו, אי אמרת בשלמא כרבל רשות  
 הרבים הוה שרי להם לקטנים בפחות מד' אמות, אלא אי  
 אמרת רשות היחיד זריקת אבנים מי שרי וקא עברי על  
 לפני עור לא תתן מכשול. לעולם אימא לך רשות היחיד  
 ומאי יוצאין, יוצאין שלא ברשות חכמים. ת"ש שלשה חייבין  
 בכרבל ואלו הן רב וכו' ואתמר עלה בחול וק"ו בשבת. אמר  
 רב חכימא דלמא לכולי עלמא אסור ולרבנן שרי מידי  
 דהוה אשעמנו לכהן גדול. מאי הוה עלה, אמר רב חכימא  
 כרמלית הוא דכתיב (שה"ש ז') ראשך עליך ככרמל מלך  
 אסור ברהמים ומאן מלכי רבנן : אמר רב מבינא כרבל חובת  
 עגלונין הוה ומפני מה נתחייבו בו רבנן של ישראל משום  
 דרוכבין על כנסת ישראל ומקיימין בה הא דכתיב (שם א')

מתני' שלשה חייבין בכרבל. לקמיה מפי"ש מאי ניהו כרבל :  
 ועגלון. דריוו בלע"ז שמנהיג את הסוסים בעגלות ובצבים  
 והוה כמרא דאתרא : גמ' סתיו פיפא. סק-ופלוש בלע"ז: וקא עברי  
 על לפני וכו'. הנך שיוצאין בכרבל עוברין על לפני עור לא תתן  
 מכשול שמכשילין את הקטנים בחלול שבת : מידי דהוה אשעמנו  
 לכה"ג. דלכולא עלמא הוה אסור ולכ"ג הוה שרי :

Fig. 18. Rosenzweig's text (from the chapbook edition of *Tractate America*) about the top-hat as worn in New York City by given categories of individuals in Jewish society during the 1890s.

In a previous issue of this journal, Section 8 in Nissan (2013, pp. 226–231) was entitled "A Case Study Across Media, Visual vs. Literary: Beard's 1885 Cartoon *Columbia's Unwelcome Guests*, vs. Mock-Parroting of the Canard in Gerson Rosenzweig's 1892 *Satire Tractate America*", I proposed a reading of Rosenzweig's self-deprecation of his own immigrant group as being partly a tongue-in-cheek parroting of current stereotypes from elite culture in New York against his own and other immigrant communities. As a backdrop for that reading, I used an anti-alien cartoon, dated 7 February 1885, by Frank Beard, from his New York years.

Nissan (2008b) analysed in detail another cartoon expressing vicious prejudice, also in the context of New York City: Thomas Nast's cartoon of 1871, *The American River Ganges*, attacking Catholics and Tammany Hall concerning public education (in practice, his main target in this case were the Irish, and their perceived mutual affinities with Tammany Hall.). That cartoon, too, was aquatic: Nast drew men with bishop mitres doubling as crocodile jaws swim to a shore, then crawl in the mud with jaws open towards vulnerable children.

Frank Beard instead drew ugly faced immigrants swimming across the Atlantic from Europe's gutters, then climbing a wall to be faced by the barefoot goddess Columbia, wearing a skirt striped like the American banner and with her two dogs on leash.

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PROPEL subserves PTRANS (the newsagent moves him- or herself, and moves the magazine), itself subserving ATRANS (the primitive for transfer of possession) because of the commercial transaction. Conceptual Dependency theory enumerates the following kinds of goals: satisfaction goals (S-goals) as arising from the need to satisfy recurring bodily desires; delta goals (D-goals), which represent desires for a change in state, entertainment goals (E-goals); achievement goals (A-goals), which involve the long term attainment of social status or position (e.g., A-GOOD-JOB and A-SKILL); and preservation goals (P-goals). Preservation goals are those goals which become active only when threatened; they include P-HEALTH, P-COMFORT, P-APPEARANCE, and P-FINANCES. An entertainment goal is involved, for example, when one goes to the restaurant with a friend in order to satisfy an E-COMPANY goal rather than to satisfy S-HUNGER. The change of state desired in delta goals may be mental, or physical, or of control. The latter is the case of D-CONT, i.e., the desire to gain control of something, and of D-SOCCONT, i.e., the desire to gain control of someone (e.g., in a kidnapping). For each goal, in order to achieve it there may be a number of plans (each with its own preconditions which must be satisfied before the plan can be invoked).

Detailed planning can be avoided, by resorting to scripts. These represent a large sequence of stereotypical actions, and have roles and props associated with them. For example, \$MOVIE is the script about going to a movie. Actions involved include "buying a ticket, giving the ticket to the doorman, getting a ripped ticket in return, going to the candy counter, entering the theater, sitting down, watching the movie, and leaving through the doors marked 'exit'" (Dyer 1983, p. 383). MOPs (Memory Organization Packets), first proposed by Roger Schank, are more sophisticated and abstract than scripts. Motivations and intentions of narrative characters inside the upgraded scripts, the memory organization packages (MOPs), in Michael Dyer's BORIS are captured by so-called I-links. The roles into which characters fit are written at the top of a box encompassing the MOP. Under the role, the goals of that role appear in a column. Between role-columns, a column of plans appears. The goals are connected to plans by I-links. Various kinds of I-links exist. An event can either force, or be forced by an event. An event can motivate a goal, or thwart a goal, or achieve a goal. An event can block a goal, or be realized by a goal. A goal can be thwarted by an event, or be motivated by an event, or be achieved by an event. A goal can suspend another goal, or be suspended by another goal. A goal can intend a plan, or enable a plan. A plan can realise an event, or be blocked by an event. A plan can be intended by a goal, or be enabled by a goal. No I-link exist from a plan to a plan (Dyer 1983, pp. 199–200).

The early 1970s also saw Maria Nowakowska's theory of goals and actions in Warsaw, Poland. The latter theory was more mathematical, and notwithstanding its merits, it did not have much of an aftermath except in her own research, even though it was published in important forums. (I owe much to the late Prof. Nowakowska, in my early career in the 1980s, especially for introducing me to scholars who loomed large in my research. It began with my asking for some offprints, before she moved from Warsaw to Iona College.) See in particular Nowakowska's 'A formal theory of actions' (1973a); *Language of Motivation and Language of Actions* (1973b); and 'Action theory: Algebra of goals and algebra of means' (1973b). developed a motivational calculus (Nowakowska 1973b, 1984, Vol. 1, Ch. 6), a formal theory of actions (Nowakowska 1973a, 1973b, 1976a, 1978; cf. Nowakowski [sic] 1980), whose definitive treatment was in Nowakowska (1984, Vol. 2, Ch. 9). She also developed a formal theory of dialogues (Nowakowska 1976b; 1984, Vol. 2, Ch. 7), and a theory of multimedia units for verbal and nonverbal communication (Nowakowska 1986, Ch. 3).

The collars of Columbia's dogs are respectively inscribed "LAW" and "ORDER" (Fig. 19). Columbia looks fierce, and her face is glowing with indignation. Her dogs are threatenishong, and so is she, by her dogs' proxy. Columbia stands by the side of a column pedestal. The pedestal is taller than she is, and its façade bears an inscription, in the backdrop of Columbia's two arms (the one raised to stop the incomers, while the other holds the dogs on leash). The inscription begins: "THE / CONSTITUTION OF THE / U. S. PROTECTS RICH / AND POOR ALIKE." Gerson Rosenzweig's *Tractate America* also resorts to the Constitution, in order to point out that it is nice theory, but theory violated by law enforcement as carried out in practice.



Fig. 19. Detail from Frank Beard's 1885 cartoon. Notice the sidelocks of the nihilist immigrant, reminiscent the sidelocks of an ultra-Orthodox Jew though not curled. See Nissan (2013). The nihilist, with his own ideas about what liberty ought to be and outlandish Old Coutry attire (from the Tsarist Empire), is carrying a dish in which to eat, but Columbia would only let into the eating room good working people (preferably Anglo-Saxons).

## Appendix B. Narrative Technique in *Tractate America*, and about an Attempt to Capture it in a Formalism

On the very first page of *Tractate America*, one finds an invented myth about the creation of America as being a land of refuge for people from the three continents of the Old World, and about Columbus who (as we said earlier) foresciently prays, so that the place would not be named after him. The reason for that is the unsavoury categories of immigrants who flow there. The continent was created as a land of refuge, like the Cities of Refuge that Moses and Joshua had instituted.

For anybody conversant with Jewish homiletics, it would be immediately apparent that the connotation of Columbus being prescient "by his astrology" would stand out as a negative characterisation (as opposed to prophetic figures from the Hebrew Bible, who are seers owing to the Holy Ghost). One biblical character who according to the early rabbinic homiletic tradition foresaw something "by her astrology" (and misunderstood what she saw), is Potiphar's lecherous wife, and what she saw supposedly provided her with the motivation to tempt the chast Joseph.

As for Columbus praying so he would be spared the ignominy of having his name associated with the unsavoury kinds of immigrants to the new continent he had discovered, categories of immigrants which Rosenzweig playfully enumerates (arguably by parroting prejudices on the part of New York elite opinion against immigrant communities), this is an intertextual reference to the patriarch Jacob, who while scolding on his deathbed his sons Simeon and Levi (because of their massacring the Shechemites after using a ruse, in revenge for the rape of their full sister Dinah), said that his honour should not be associated with them. Traditional rabbinic homiletics associates this with specific descendants of theirs, the Levite rebel Korah and the Simeonite defiant clan chief Zimri, who led the Midianite princess Kozbi into his tent in full view of Moses, Aaron and the people, during an epidemic ascribed to the people's men's lecherous behaviour.

In both cases, their genealogy, as stated in the respective pentateuchal passage, stop short of mentioning Jacob (at Levi rather than "Levi the son of Jacob", and at Simeon rather than "Simeon the son of Jacob"). This fulfilled Jacob's forescient wish that his name would not be associated with those unfortunate characters, as though it would taint his name by association. See Fig. 20.

Nissan's (2002) analysis (the COLUMBUS model) of the Vilna edition's opening page of *Tractate America* was inspired by artificial intelligence. It included: considering not only characters' goals, but also authorial goals, accounting for intertextuality, and the introduction into artificial intelligence of the notion that the generation of explanations in a realistic mode is just a particular case, whereas poetic conventions may privilege abduction (in the Peircean sense, i.e., inference to the best explanation) which draws upon pools of devices from a repertoire, in a special universe of a collection of narratives.

Steps applied cyclically, in the COLUMBUS model, are shown in Fig. 21. In COLUMBUS, by means of devices in the computational knowledge representation, one can account for how the cultural repertoire of homiletic narratives is accessed, providing Rosenzweig with the traditional textual antecedents he intertextually recycles in his pastiche. Columbus is described as becoming prescient, with wording similar to how a traditional homiletic text relates about Potiphar's wife becoming imperfectly prescient, by astrological means, of her future shared offspring with righteous Joseph (but he will eventually marry her daughter — according to a homiletical interpretation of Scripture that identifies Potiphar with Asenath's father Potiphara — so this is how this will be achieved).

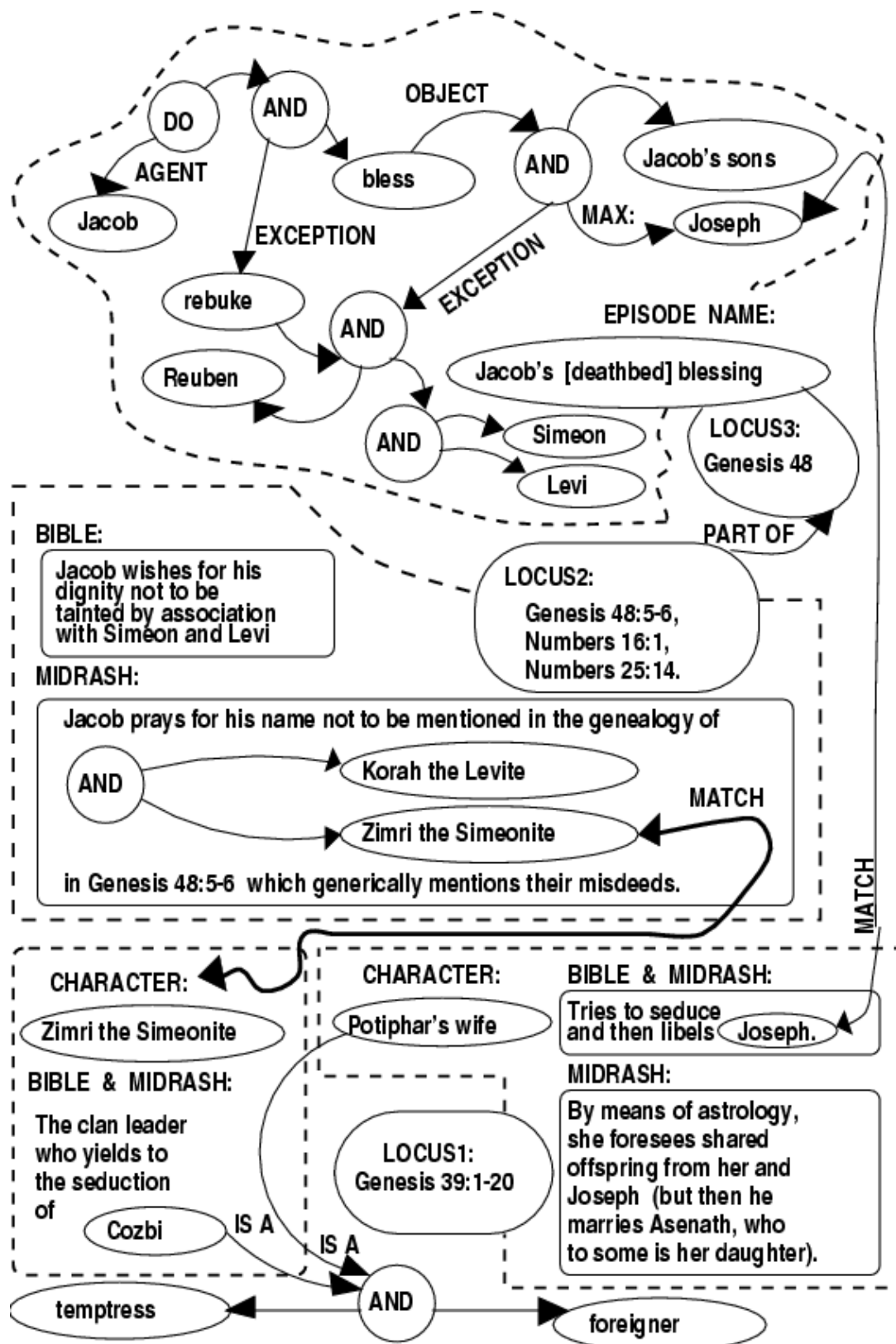
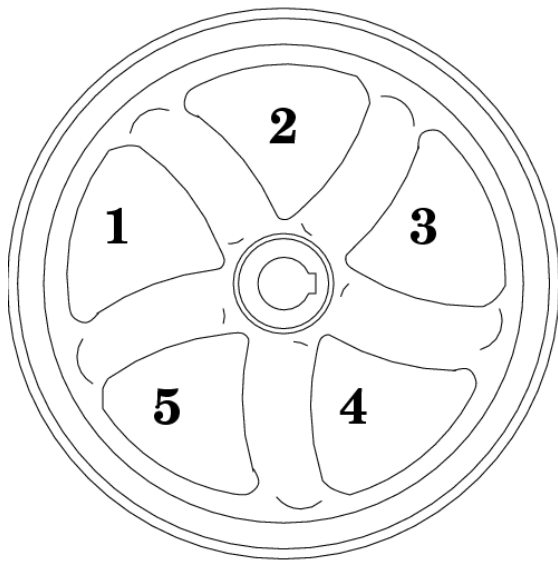


Fig. 20. A diagram from the COLUMBUS model (Nissan 2002), identifying the intertextual references of Columbus being forescient “by his astrology”, then praying so that his name would not be given to America: the sources are early rabbinic homiletics about Potiphar’s wife using “her astrology”, and Jacob being forescient of his descendants, the malefactors Korah and Zimri, and wishing his name would be spared the ignominy of being mentioned explicitly when the Pentateuch will give their genealogy.



- 1:** Analyze the hierarchy of message-intents.
- 2:** Identify a goal/plan structure for the characters.
- 3:** Figure out customized criteria of plan-selection.
- 4:** Spot idiomatic peculiarities.
- 5:** Spot further instances of idiomatic use (or of intertextual reference cue).

Fig. 21. Steps appearing cyclically in the COLUMBUS model.

Moreover, the intertextual reference of Columbus asking/praying so that his name will not be used for his discovery is, as explained earlier, to another traditional homiletic textual locus, in which the patriarch Jacob is described as asking for his name to be spared of mention in connection with two future scoundrels in his offspring (namely, Korah, a Levite, and Zimri, a Simeonite), of whom he is prophetically prescient; this episode explains homiletically why Scripture, while needing to introduce those two individuals in turn (in different passages), gives their respective genealogies, yet only mentions their tribal founder (Levi or Simeon), without going up one more generation and also naming Jacob. That particular homiletic passage is associated with the episode of Jacob rebuking Levi and Simeon on his deathbed. Clearly Rozenzweig was targeting a specific audience who could relish his intertextual references. These are not too contrived, and could have been promptly grasped by readers with a modicum of traditional schooling.

Figures 22 and 23 are taken from Nissan (2002), a study replete with diagrams. Those two figures show such parts of the overall network which handle the emulation, that is to say, taking a pattern from the model source, and replacing characters in the roles. By G with an exponent, particular goals are symbolised. arrows from a goal point to some plan, or rather a number of alternative plans, but in order to achieve a plan, it is often necessary to consider a number of subservient goals, which may be concomitant or alternative. This kind of representation draws upon basic concepts from planning as being a domain within artificial intelligence.

As for the narrative technique in the genre that serves as the primary model, namely, the corpus of late antique rabbinic homiletics, cf. Michael Fishbane's (1993) *The Midrashic Imagination*. David Aaron (1995) remarks: "When it comes to midrash, 'surface readings' never constitute good readings. Indeed, Ockham's razor does not obtain here, for midrash by its nature requires a complex decoding process for meaning to emerge. It is at once interpretation and requiring of interpretation." (*ibid.*, p. 744).

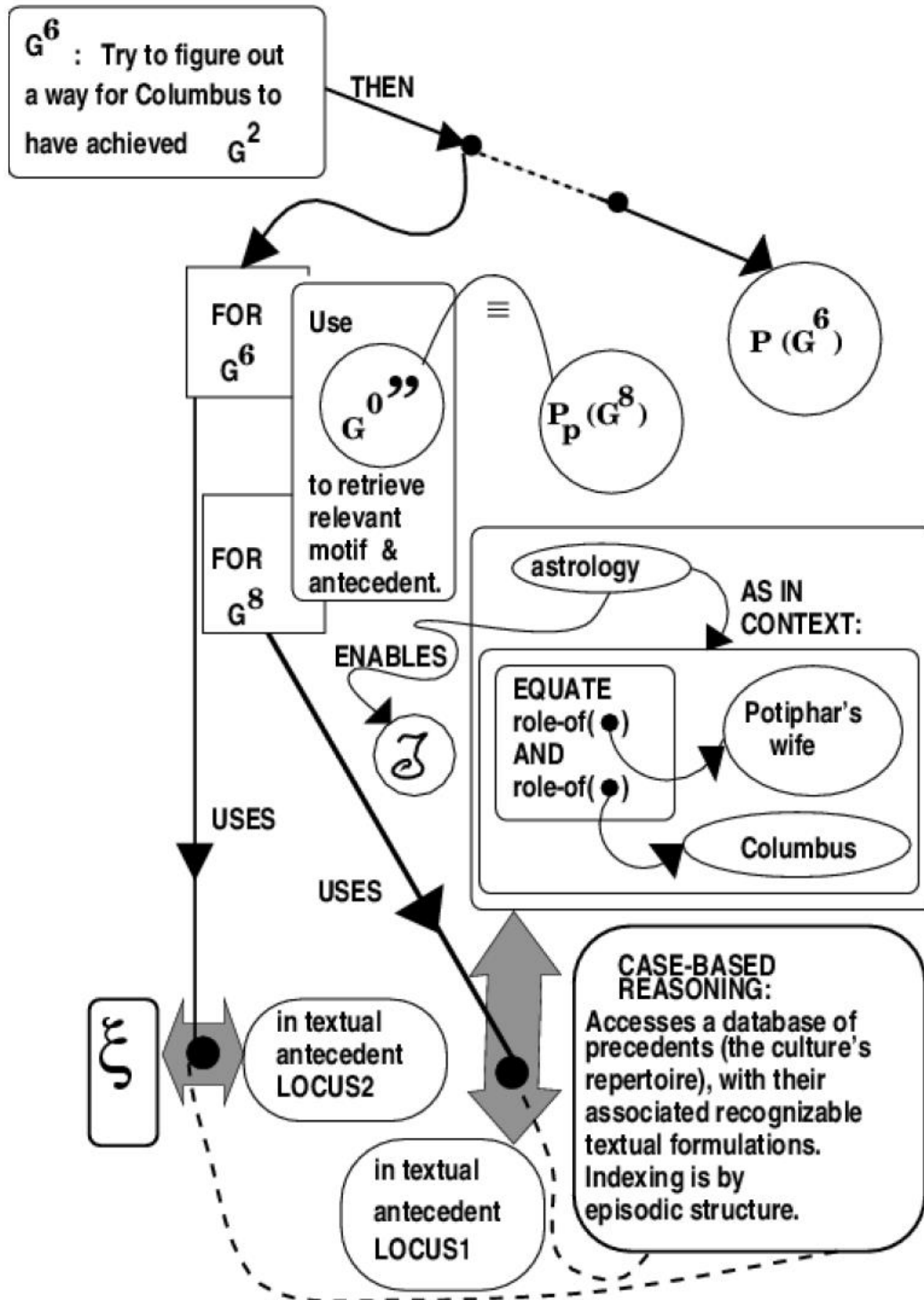


Fig. 22. Another detail from the goal-and-plan hierarchy in Nissan (2002), concerning Columbus' foreknowledge.



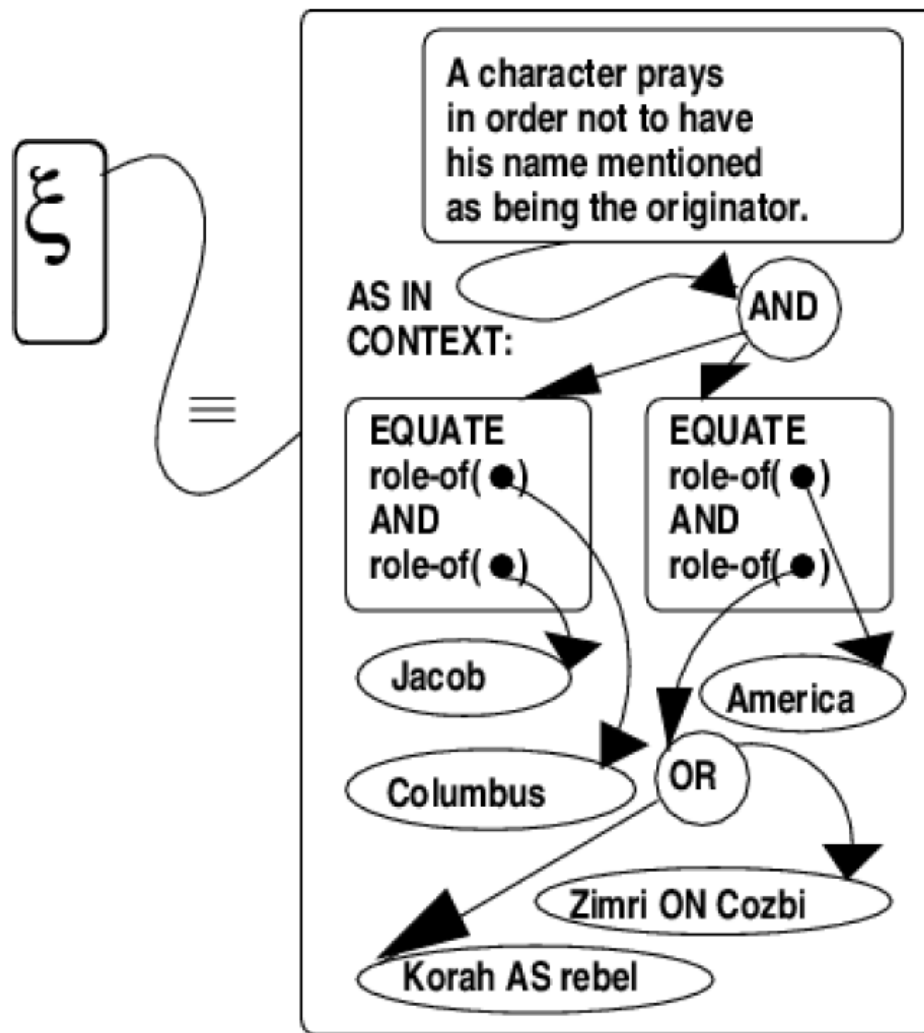


Fig. 23. Definition of a shorthand label in the diagram about using antecedents, in the analysis from Nissan (2002) of the initial page in Gerson Rosenzweig's *Tractate America*.

Potiphara's wife is not the only biblical character which according to early rabbinic homiletics, foresaw something imperfectly, and was an unholy rather than holy person. the *Babylonian Talmud*, tractate *Sanhedrin*, 101b, states: "Our Rabbis taught: Three beheld but did not see, viz., Nebat, Ahitophel, and Pharaoh's astrologers". Pharaoh astrologers are ones who foretold something in relation to Moses; Ahitophel was the wicked advisor of Absalom, during his rebellion against King David; Nebat was the father of Jeroboam, the latter being the leader of the secession of the ten northern tribes, leading to the formation of the Kingdom of Israel as opposed to the Kingdom of Judah after King Solomon's death.

The context in the *Babylonian Talmud*, tractate *Sanhedrin*, 101b, in the Soncino English translation (Epstein 1935–1948), is as follows (my boldface; their brackets; my braces enclosing comments based on their notes):

THREE KINGS AND FOUR COMMONERS, etc. Our Rabbis taught: [The name] Jeroboam [denotes] that 'he debased the nation'. Another meaning is that 'he fomented strife amongst the nation'. {By his introduction of calf worship.} Another explanation, that 'he caused strife between Israel and their Father in Heaven'. {The latter two connect Jeroboam with a lexical root *rib*, of the noun *riv /rib/* for 'strife'.} The son of Nebat denotes that 'he beheld, but did not see'. {He beheld a vision, but did not understand (see) its true significance. The vision is stated below. — Nebat is here connected with root [H], *nabat*, to see.}

A Tanna taught: Nebat, Micah, and Sheba the son of Bichri are one and the same. {Micah was a resident of Mount Ephraim who established a private idolatrous shrine and engaged a Levite to minister therein. — Judges XVII, 1-5. This image was subsequently stolen and set up in Dan; Ibid. XVIII. Sheba the son of Bichri was an Ephraimite who revolted against David immediately after the collapse of Absalom's insurrection; II Samuel XX, 1 et seqq.} [He was called] Nebat, because 'he beheld but did not see'; Micah, because 'he was crushed {according to a Hebrew lexical root sounding somewhat like his personal name} in the building'; {According to legend, when the Israelites in Egypt did not complete their tale of bricks, their children were built into the walls instead. On Moses' complaining thereof to G-d, He answered him that he was thus weeding out the destined wicked. As proof, he was empowered to save Micah, who had already been built in, but only to become an idolater on his reaching manhood. Rashi also gives an alternative rendering: he became impoverished (Cf. Lev. XXV, 25; XXVII, 8) through building — presumably his idolatrous shrine.} and what was his real name? — Sheba the son of Bichri.

**Our Rabbis taught: Three beheld but did not see, viz., Nebat, Ahitophel, and Pharaoh's astrologers.** Nebat — he saw fire issuing from him. He interpreted it [as signifying] that he would reign, {And hence he raised the standard of revolt.} yet that was not so, but that Jeroboam would issue from him. Ahitophel, — he beheld leprosy breaking out in him. He thought that it meant that he would reign, {According to legend (*infra* 107a), David was smitten with leprosy for six months on account of his sin with Bath Sheba. Ahitophel therefore interpreted the outbreak on his own person as showing that David's leprosy would bring him to the throne.} but it was not so, but referred to Bath Sheba, his daughter, {I.e., his granddaughter. Her father Eliam (II Sam. XI, 3) being identified with the son of Ahitophel (II Samuel XXIII, 34).} from whom issued Solomon. Pharaoh's astrologers, — even as R. Hama son of R. Hanina said: What is meant by This is the water of Meribah? {Num. XX, 13.} 'This is' what Pharaoh's astrologers saw, but erred [in its interpretation]. They saw that Israel's Saviour would be smitten through water: therefore he [Pharaoh] ordered, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river; {Exodus I, 22.} but they did not know that he was to be smitten [i.e., punished] on account of the water of Meribah.

Concerning Ahitophel, he is supposed to have resorted to astrology, like Potiphara's wife and Pharaoh's astrologers, but unlike Balaam who was a prophet. Moreover, by one tradition Ahitophel died (like Balaam according to another tradition) aged thirty-three, where thirty-three or thirty-five is a conventional age standing for not even reaching mid-life, or for mid-life, respectively (taking a life span to be seventy years): apparently that age-symbolism of death while aged thirty-three was also taken over by Christianity in accounts of the Passion (and when the last Inca was executed after being baptised, he was said by those who put him to death that he was not only spiritually saved, but was dying at the same age as the Passion). Age thirty-five was the age of Dante (*in mezzo al cammin di nostra vita*: in the middle of the path of our life, i.e., the half of seventy), when, at the beginning of his Divine Comedy, he found himself in a selva oscura, a dark forest, before he found the soul of Virgil and then saw the gate of Hell.

Louis Ginzberg (1910–1954) is the author of the multi-volume *Legends of the Jews* (Ginzberg 1909–1938), a digest of Jewish legendary traditions about characters and events from the Hebrew Bible. The following is how Ginzberg (*ibid.*, Vol. 4, pp. 94–95) combined and retold various Jewish traditions about Ahitophel (my boldface, brackets, and braces; I include his references to endnotes):

Ahitophel's wisdom was supernatural, for his counsels always coincided with the oracles rendered by the Urim and Thummim, and great as was his wisdom, it was equalled by his scholarship. Therefore David did not hesitate to submit himself to his instruction,<sup>{62}</sup> even though Ahitophel was a very young man, at the time of his death not more than thirty-three years old.<sup>{63}</sup> The one thing lacking [p. 95:] in him was sincere piety,<sup>{64}</sup> and this it was that proved his undoing in the end, for it induced him to take part in Absalom's rebellion against David. Thus he forfeited even his share in the world to come.<sup>{65}</sup> **To this dire course of action he was misled by astrologic and other signs, which he interpreted as prophecies of his own kingship, when in reality they pointed to the royal destiny of his granddaughter Bath-sheba.**<sup>{66}</sup> Possessed by his erroneous belief, he cunningly urged Absalom to commit an unheard-of crime. Thus Absalom

would profit nothing by his rebellion, for, though he accomplished his father's ruin, he would yet be held to account and condemned to death for his violation of family purity, and the way to the throne would be clear for Ahithophel, the great sage in Israel.<sup>67</sup> }

The following are Ginzberg's relevant endnotes, from pp. 256–257 in Vol. 6 (my boldface):

62 Nedarim 37b; Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 10, 29a; Tehillim 3, 38, which reads: His wisdom was superhuman, like that of an angel. Comp. also Tehillim 55, 391, which reads: David feared nobody except Ahitophel, who was his master and teacher in the knowledge of the Torah. According to some, David learned two things only from Ahitophel, to acquire colleagues with whom to study the Torah, and to walk quickly to the house of God for prayer and service; see Abot 6.2; [p. 257] Nispahim 18; Kallah 6, 16; Mahzor Vitry 556; Nehemias, Commentary on Abot, 77; BaR 18.17.

63 Sanhedrin 69b; comp. note 97 on vol. IV, p. 74.

64 Sanhedrin 106b; Hagigah 15b; Tehillim 55, 292-293, and 119, 495 and 500. Comp. vol. IV, p. 75, where a similar characteristic is attributed to Doeg. Ahitophel used to compose three prayers for each day; Yerushalmi Berakot 4, 8a (bottom), which is a play on the name Ahitophel

אחי תפלה = אחיתפל "brother of prayer", i. e. "man of prayers"; comp., however, Ratner, *Ahabat Ziyon*, *ad. loc.* It was his pride which brought destruction upon him, as may be seen from his haughty behaviour towards David at the removal of the ark (comp. vol. IV, p. 75); ER 31, 157.

65 Sanhedrin Mishnah 10.1. Comp. note 100 on vol. IV, p. 75.

66 **Sanhedrin 101b; an unknown Midrash in Yalkut II, 151 on 2 Sam. 16.** Comp. note 52 on vol. IV, p. 63, and note 2 on vol. IV, p. 180.

67 Yalkut II, 151 on 2 Sam. 16. Ahitophel thought that David was fallen from the grace of God for ever since he had committed the sin with Bath-sheba. But he did not know that "no sin can efface the merit acquired by the study of the Torah", and these merits stood David in good stead in the time of his disgrace; see Sotah 21a; comp. also Baba Mezi'a 59a; PK 2, 10b; Tan. B. II, 106; Tan. Ki-Tissa 4; Tehillim 2, 38, which reads: Doeg and Ahitophel used to remark mockingly: "Is it conceivable that he who took the sheep and slew the shepherd should be able to make good?" On the reading "Doeg" in this passage, see Tosafot שניץ on Sotah, *loc. cit.*

Abraham Cohen's (1932) often reprinted *Everyman's Talmud* states the following, concerning astrology of divination, on pp. 276–277 (my brackets):

To place any faith in superstitious sources of information is conduct unworthy of a member of the House of Israel as is forcibly taught in this anecdote: 'A certain convert to Judaism was an astrologer. On one occasion he walled to set out on a journey, but he said, "Can I set out in such circumstances?" [Cohen's footnote: The auguries were inauspicious.] On further reflection he said, "Did I not attach myself to this holy people to separate myself from these superstitions? I will venture forth in the Name of the Creator." On the way he was seized by a tax-gatherer, to whom he gave his ass and was set free. What caused him to be penalized? The fact that he thought (first of his omens) What caused him to be saved? The fact that he trusted in his Creator. It was declared, Whoever practises divination<sup>1</sup> his augury will befall him in the end' (p. Shab. 8d). [i.e., in tractate *Shabbat* 8d in the *Palestinian Talmud*, i.e., the *Jerusalem Talmud*.] [p. 277:] Other stories were related to prove how misleading is the information obtained from such a tainted source. It was the cause of Potiphar's wife lusting for Joseph. 'By means of astrology she foresaw that she was to have a son by him; but she did not know whether the child was to be born to her or her daughter' (Gen[esis] R[abbah] LXXXV. 2). In fact he married her daughter (Gen. xli. 45).

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