

## 2011: The Sesquicentennial of the Birth of America's Top Hebrew Humorist The Sweat of the (Low) Brow: New York Immigrant Life in Gerson Rosenzweig's Satire. Facets of his Talmudic Parody *Tractate America*.

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**Abstract.** Gerson Rosenzweig's is far less visible in Jewish American literary studies, as well as in Hebrew literary studies, than he would deserve to be. This is because he wrote his parodic prose — an apex of Hebrew-language humoristic literature — in early rabbinic Hebrew with Aramaic admixtures. Appreciating its quite considerable merits requires of readers the ability to make sense of his dense intertextuality, through familiarity with the traditional Jewish canon of early rabbinic writings. Such familiarity was widespread in his days (even among less affluent Jews, immigrants who in the Old Country were schooled mostly in religious matters) but is not available for the great majority of potential readers at present, nor has it been in the second half of the 20th century. This article provides an analysis in depth of most of Chapter 3 of Rosenzweig's masterpiece, *Tractate America*. That chapter is concerned with employee relations and labour strife, as well as with the work of women, and child labour. Rosenzweig's is artistically quite successful at treating this subject, clearly on the mind of his original readership among the Jewish immigrant community in New York City, by camouflaging it as a parody styled as early rabbinic literature. That parody would deserve the notice of that compartment of literary studies that is specifically concerned with the literatures of ethnic Americans. Arguably however it is especially in humour studies that Rosenzweig's *opus* deserves close scrutiny.

**Keywords:** literary studies, sociology, parody, pastiche, immigrant life, labour relations.

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## 1. Introduction: What We Set Out to Do

This study does two things: it quickly (Sections 1 to 3) introduces *Tractate America*, a satirical work from 1892, about social conditions in New York's immigrant Jewish community; within American literature *Tractate America* is quite remarkable, and yet neglected because its language is a mix of Hebrew and Aramaic, a pastiche emulating pages of the Babylonian Talmud: this was accessible to and enjoyable by many among the Jewish immigrants, which cannot be said about subsequent generations, let alone outside the Jewish community. The cultural influences that shaped that satire are briefly discussed in this article, and a corrective is offered for some earlier scholarship (Sections 4 and 5). Pastiche is the subject of Baldick (2001).

The second thing that the present article does (Sections 6 to 21), and arguably this is what is more special about it and arguably unprecedented concerning the author considered, is that the relatively demanding Chapter 3 of *Tractate America*<sup>1</sup> — dealing with the grim social realities of factory workers (see Sections 6 and 7 below), the dilemma of strikes (Sections 6 and 17), toiling women (Section 18), and child labour (Section 19) — is examined and dissected, its sometimes even stunning intertextual references analyzed, and the social discourse to which it was responding, pointed out. The text is thoroughly and densely studded with subverted talmudic and biblical intertextual references, not in order to attack the hypotext (to which the author of *Tractate America* was deeply affectionate), but in order to make his social critique effective and razor-sharp, with surprising effects at every turn.

For example, trade unions' rationalization of anti-alienism (cf. Section 13) is briefly, yet vividly presented in *Tractate America*, in a situational context and a deep question evocative, as though, of a pattern befitting an ecstatic vision on theodicy (see Sections 8 and 12 below); only, the actual intertextual *locus* turns out to be a talmudic passage about trivial questions in zoology answered by a cheerful expert among the Babylonian rabbis, at the entrance not of either Heaven or Hell, but of his in-laws (see Section 10). What the vulgate lore about Jewish mysticism would ascribe to the prophet Elijah since his ascent to Heaven — namely, until in his good time he will herald the coming of the Messiah, he enlightens some elect few, especially deserving rabbis — is a role that by recycling with virtuosity some peculiar talmudic wording into surprising intertextual references, *Tractate America* ironically bestows upon a benevolent trade unionist (Sections 8, 13, and 14) willing to partake with his peerless knowledge of the reasons for the poor state of the working class: the unfair competition that established workers suffer from greenhorns. That was a time when Jewish trade-unionists were struggling to contrast anti-alienism among their Gentile counterparts in both the United States and Britain (Section 13).

Even "scabs", strike-breakers who walk past the picket line of striking workers, and take over their jobs — greenhorns, Rosenzweig's trade-unionist berates them — turn out (Section 8) to co-occur on the same page of the main talmudic intertextual reference, in a passage about how to deal with scabs (medically). And close by, in the same talmudic *locus*<sup>2</sup> that provided the model for the parody in the given passage, evidence is enumerated from (Graeco-Roman) zoology that the weak do overcome the strong (cf. Section 9; lore is still current about elephants being afraid of mice. And do you really think a CEO is not afraid of the workforce?). But the artistry of *Tractate America* is such, that you may read it and be satisfied with

<sup>1</sup> I discuss in other papers other parts of that literary work, as well as giving a *précis*.

<sup>2</sup> When it comes to locality within a textual corpus, contiguity does arguably matter.

grasping just a small portion of its intertextual references. In our discussion of its Chapter 3, we show what treasures are to be found by digging ever deeper (Sections 7 to 12, and 14 to 16).

Gerson Rosenzweig,<sup>3</sup> the author of *Tractate America*, was sometimes referred to, in his lifetime, as the *Hebrew* Mark Twain; the *Jewish* (i.e., Yiddish) Mark Twain was Sholom Aleikhem. But the latter through the extremely rich nuances of his Yiddish, Rosenzweig through the depth and density of his intertextual arabesque, were resorting to devices Mark Twain avoided, because in his case, directness eliciting reader's mimesis were his successful tool. Sholom Aleikhem was both narrationally and narratively direct, and stylistically and linguistically evocative. For Rosenzweig, defamiliarization of the now and here by casting them into the historically remote, yet emotionally intimate mould of talmudic style did the trick. Rosenzweig, the least known of these three authors, deserves to be better known, as he achieved for New York a literary representation of unique value.



Fig. 1. Gerson Rosenzweig

<sup>3</sup> *Gerson* is the Lithuanian Hebrew pronunciation of the name *Gershon*. Gerson Rosenzweig was born in Bialystok (in Lithuania in the broader sense it had for Jews) in 1861; "he taught Hebrew in Bialystok, and in 1888 he emigrated to the United States", to say it with Ernest Schwarcz (1972). In his new country, Rosenzweig was the editor of several short-lived Hebrew periodicals, and "also edited Hebrew columns in the Yiddish press" (*ibid.*). "[H]e had a genuine flair for satire and was known to his contemporaries as the 'sweet satirist of Israel' and as a parodist he earned an honorable place in Hebrew literature" (*ibid.*). He was the editor of the Hebrew weekly, *Haibri*, and later edited a Hebrew monthly, *Kadimah*. Moreover, he was an editor for the Yiddish newspapers, *Yiddishes Tageblatt*, *Yiddishe Gazetten* and *Yiddishe Velt*.

The obituary that *The New York Times* published for Rosenzweig on 15 February 1914 was headlined 'HEBREW MARK TWAIN' DEAD / Gerson Rosenzweig, Well Known for / His Satires, Dies of Cancer'. It begins by stating: "Gerson Rosenzweig, who by his satirical and humorous writings, had earned the name of 'Hebrew Mark Twain,' died yesterday, aged 53 years, at the New York Skin and Cancer Hospital, 330 Second Avenue, where he had been for four months under treatment for cancer. He leaves his wife and seven children, and his funeral will take place at noon to-day, from his late residence, 1,772 Madison Avenue."

The next paragraph provides some background: "Mr. Rosenzweig was born at Byelestok, [sic] Russia, and was educated at Berlin. He came here in 1888 and became a contributor to the local and foreign Hebrew papers. From 1891 to 1898, he published and edited the Hebrew weekly 'Haibri,' [*quod corrige*: 'Haibri', i.e., 'The Hebrew'] and gave much time to an effort to improve the tone of the American Hebrew press."

Take note: the Hebrew rather than the Yiddish press, and yet, Rosenzweig was active in the Yiddish press as well. In the third and last paragraph of the obituary, there is a key item of information, which provides fodder for reflection: "'The Star-Spangled Banner' was translated by him into Hebrew, and under the title of 'Massekhep America' [correct into either *Masséikhes*, as per Ashkenazi pronunciation, or *Massékhet*, as per the Sephardic pronunciation that in the early 20th century emerged to become the standard] he published a collection of his most important satires, ballads, and epigrams in 1891. Some of his later writings he published in 1895, and of late he edited a humorous and personal column in The Jewish Daily News."

## 2. The Genre and the Context of *Tractate America*

The year 2011 is 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. The slaving away of workers of immigrant background, along with the poor standards of Jewish education in New York City, are prominent themes in Rosenzweig's 1892 talmudic parody *Tractate America*, a remarkable literary text written in a mix of rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic.<sup>4</sup> All the more remarkable, because Rosenzweig had himself only immigrated in recent years, and yet, the understanding he had of the social dynamics in the Jewish immigrant neighbourhoods of New York, as far as aspects he satirised are concerned, is arguably profound.

The two themes — working conditions, and poor standards of Jewish education in New York City — are connected. They are two facets of the circumstances and cultural consequences of *oysgrinung* — the 'greening-out' process that both 'greenhorns' (new immigrants) and their native-born progeny were required to undergo on their way to Americanization.<sup>5</sup> As a scholar responding to my efforts concerning Rosenzweig put it, "*Tractate America* is in many ways a profound comment not only on Jewish intellectual life in America in the late 19th century, but also on what Amos Funkenstein [1995] has termed 'the dialectics of assimilation' within Jewish communities generally."

I expect to expatiate about the literary traditions upon which Rosenzweig drew (especially, on how he can be situated with respect to the Hebrew Maskilic satire from the nineteenth century in Eastern Europe), and well as on Rosenzweig's wider literary activity, in companion articles nearing completion. Whereas the Maskilic literature oftentimes attacked the rabbinic tradition, Rosenzweig instead respected the latter, and this may have made him rather unpopular in strongly secularized quarters or politically radical circles in New York City's Jewish immigrant community.<sup>6</sup> He was not concerned, in *Tractate America*, with Hasidism (whereas he is, with Orthodoxy vs. Reform), so this literary work is not concerned with the anti-Hasidic Maskilic satire. As I argue elsewhere, Rosenzweig does not hate the butt of his satire. He is benevolent, and in that respect, he is more likeable than much Maskilic satire.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Of course, Rosenzweig's vernacular, and that of his readers, was Yiddish. See Sec. 5.

<sup>5</sup> 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).

<sup>6</sup> While writing about the Eastern European cultural context of Martin Buber's collecting Hasidic tales (he was not isolated in romanticizing Hasidism), Zeev Gries (1989–1990) remarked about some Maskilic circles that had been collecting in print such tales: Gries (*ibid.*, p. 56) claims precedence for his own insight that the spread of printed collections of Hasidic tales, beginning in the 1860s, responded to a demand stemming from a Maskilic literary fashion, something similar to German or French writers trying to capture the spirit of their respective national common folk.

Gries in the same article noted that one critic, Ish Horowitz, attacked Buber for concerning himself with the Hasidim, because "we", wrote Ish Horowitz, have "Spinozismus". Of course this was grotesque but it was still kinder than some radicals of Jewish ancestry on the U.S. Eastern Coast throwing pork at religious Jews attending service during the High Holidays. In *Tractate America*, Rosenzweig included a fleeting, chiding reference to anarchists who preach "blood, fire, and spires of smoke" (this wording is lifted from the Passover Haggadah, where it is applied to Pharaoh's oppressive regime getting its comeuppance).

<sup>7</sup> Josef Perl from Tarnopol (1773–1839), prominent in that genre, and actually writing sometimes in a style parodying Hasidic writing, not only abhorred, but hated to death the butt of his satire, gloated in

At any rate, consider in particular that the choice of style and genre in *Tractate America* had a tradition to draw upon, of pseudo-talmudic humorous and irreverent parodies dating back from the medieval Kalonymos ben Kalonymos (b. Arles, Provence, 1286),<sup>8</sup> and continuing in early and high modernity. Talmudic parodies, especially for the joyous and carnivalesque, thus irreverent festival of Purim, had been known as early as the Middle Ages, but arguably no such work achieved as high an artistic level as *Tractate America*.

*Masseikhes Amerike* (this is the original title) is indeed a pastiche that satirized 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. Bear in mind that the Talmud is a loose commentary on the Mishnah, and that a 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).

It was an apt choice of style for Rosenzweig's satire, because Rosenzweig had the creative skills to make the most out of it, and because by casting the sometimes terrible woes of immigrant life in the comforting mould of a talmudic page, still familiar to his readers and emotionally connotated because of their expected biographical memory, Rosenzweig was able to defamiliarize the storyworld and its details enough, for him to voice often painful criticism. Rosenzweig's authorial voice, however, was loving and free of hatred. What is more, he managed to promote the minor literary genre he had made his own to levels of artistry it arguably did not have earlier.

### 3. Some Features of *Tractate America* and Its Expressive Choices

*Tractate America* is at present not an easy read even for native speakers of Hebrew (which is unsurprising: rabbinic Hebrew is unlike Israeli Hebrew). Problems of accessibility have made this literary text not as widely read as it deserves to be. While not discussed as much as it should be in the criticism, it is nonetheless reasonably well-known, if one is to judge from the inclusion of an excerpt and headnote appear in the Norton Anthology of *Jewish American Literature*, for example.<sup>9</sup> An interlocutor of mine aptly referred to *Tractate America* as a "sadly neglected hybrid work of immigrant literature", and I feel this is an accurate descriptor indeed. To this

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the ending about their imagined death, and in covert approaches to the Austrian police state, pestered the reluctant Austrian authorities to take measures against the Hasidic camp.

<sup>8</sup> Kalonymos ben Kalonymos is discussed in detail in Schirmann's posthumous book (1997) on Hebrew literature from Provence and Christian Spain, in Chapter 12 on pp. 514–541. Kalonymos ben Kalonymos's relevant work is *Tractate Purim* (*Massekhet Purim*), whose *editio princeps* was printed in Pesaro, Italy, in 1513. Of course, the text circulated before in manuscript.

<sup>9</sup> In fact, Chametzky et al. (2001) included an anthological section for *The Yankee Talmud* (1892, 1893) on p. 296, and samples from two texts from that satirical series are present: "From The Tractate *America*" (by Gershon Rosenzweig, on p. 296), and "From The Tractate *The Ways of the New Land*" (by Abraham Kotliar, on p. 297). These were authors unselfconscious about their use of humour *qua* Jews. I would not subscribe however to any claim that would consider their humour to have been essentially Jewish. Elliott Oring (1983) claims that the commonplace that Jews are distinctive for their humour, or that there is distinctively Jewish humour, is quite recent; "as late as 1893, Hermann Adler, the Chief Rabbi of London, still found it necessary to defend the Jews against the charge that they were a humorless people" (Oring 1983, p. 264, citing Adler). Cf. Ben-Amos (1973), on Jewish humour.

day, Kabakov's book<sup>10</sup> remains the main among the far too few studies of Rosenzweig.<sup>11</sup> Dagmar Börner-Klein discussed Rosenzweig's *Tractate America*, focusing on a few examples, especially Rosenzweig's contrasting Orthodox and Reform rabbis.

It is my main argument concerning Rosenzweig in this study that it was Rosenzweig's basic expressive choices,<sup>12</sup> 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, which he harnessed to the needs of his critique of immigrant lifestyles, and of the social problems his community was facing.

The problem with accessing Rosenzweig's text is not merely one of knowing Hebrew, or Aramaic. It is also a problem with being able to appreciate intertextuality, which is a major factor in what makes the text so rewarding for the *cognoscenti*. As a humorist, Rosenzweig excelled especially in how he seamlessly managed to juxtapose epigrammatic humour, heavily relying on intertextuality indeed; he tries not to make it too hard for his readers, as he selects such intertextual references that they were likely to recognise. What matters most is that he was doing this in America, as opposed to Eastern Europe. That America was bereft of Jewish and Hebrew learning, in comparison to the Old Country, was something decried by Rosenzweig himself in *Tractate America*, and it is also, though in different though likewise desolated tones, in Silberschlag's 1955 history of Hebrew literature in America (415–416):

The sparseness of literary documents in Hebrew can only be excused by the paucity of Jews and the rarity of learned Jews in colonial America in the first decades after the establishment of the United States. [...] In 1860 there appeared in New York a commentary on the *Sayings of the Fathers* — the first original Hebrew book with an

<sup>10</sup> Kabakoff's Hebrew-language book (1966) — also see his article (1954) on the same subject — is on pioneering authors of Hebrew literature in America, and comprises both studies and documents. Those Hebraists include Zeev Wolf Schorr / William Schur (1839–1910), and Gerson Rosenzweig (1861–1914), as well as Henry Gersoni (1844–1897), Isaac Rabinowitz (1846–1900), and Jacob Zevi Sobel. Kabakoff dealt with Rosenzweig in over fifty pages of Kabakoff's book (1966, pp. 211–266). Also note Epstein's book (1952) and Ribalow's (1943) overview on Hebrew writers in America.

<sup>11</sup> In 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 Davidson (1907). Zellentin (2011) see parody inside early rabbinic literature itself. Cf. Diamond (2007). The critical idiom of parody is the subject of Dentith (2000). Cf. Freund (1981), Rose (1979, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> From 1996, and resulting in a 2002 paper, I analyzed the opening page of *Tractate America*, in terms of graphically representing the goal-and-plan hierarchy of the narrative (and the narration), thus adopting an approach known from computational models of narrative. In the COLUMBUS model (Nissan 2002), I have analyzed the opening page of *Tractate America* by resorting to a knowledge-representation formalism from artificial intelligence. The perspective is, within computational linguistics, that of automated story-processing (see a survey in Nissan, in press, a), a domain to which I contributed in 1989 ALIBI (papers of mine on ALIBI with the students I supervised include Kuflik et al. 1989, Fakher-Eldeen et al. 1993). Apparently ALIBI was at the time the only reported story-generation project east of the Atlantic, apart from Yazdani's (1983) ROALD in England.

My own more recent understanding of *Tractate America* is also informed by my own literary experience as an author of rabbinic Hebrew literary pastiches resorting to a variety of humorous devices, part of which are also present in *Tractate America*. Those recent works of Hebrew literature by myself will not be discussed here, but I already undertook a scholarly treatment of these in Nissan (2009a; in press b: Part II; in press, c), Nissan and HaCohen-Kerner (in press), Nissan et al. (in press, a, b), HaCohen-Kerner et al. (in press), and Nissan and Zuckermann (in press), as well as more briefly in Nissan (2008a: especially Sec. 4 and n. 22; 2007–2008 [Jan. 2011]: Sec. 4).

unfulfilled promise of a second to come. It was called *Sefer Abne Yehoshua* (Book of the Stones of Joshua) and it was authored by Joshua Falk, an adventurous traveler and scholar.

Moreover (417):

It was this feeling of unreasonable certainty that intellectual avidity, so characteristic of Jews throughout the ages, would perpetuate itself in this country, that brought countless disappointments to aspiring Hebrew writers. For America which differed in its political and social pattern from Europe, offered them few intellectual opportunities and fewer incentives. Their books, first a trickle and then a flood, were ignored, and their periodicals — with few notable exceptions — were short-lived. Indifference of the reader induced apathy in the writer. This, in turn, lessened the chances of receptivity on the part of the reader. It was a vicious circle of failure and futility. Within a decade after the publication of *Sefer Abne Yehoshua*, there appeared, in 1871, the first Hebrew periodical in this country, *ha-Zofeh be-Erez [quod corrige: ba-Arez] ha-Hadashah*, under the editorship of Zevi Hirsch Bernstein. Although no complete set is known to exist here or elsewhere, it is fairly certain from the extant issues that no extraordinary talent blossomed in the periodical which appeared irregularly for five years. In content, *ha-Zofeh* resembled Hebrew periodicals of Russia and, to a certain extent, American periodicals of Jewish content. What its writers lacked in talent, they endeavored to make up with devotion.

It must be said that *Tractate America* cannot be credited with drawing individual characters. In *Tractate America*, Rosenzweig's self-imposed constraint that (apart from the character of Columbus, whom one only encounters very briefly in *Tractate America*) 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. This apparently was by choice. Rosenzweig transforms social history into a natural history of New York.

#### 4. Previous Mischaracterization, and a Preamble to Chapter 3 of *Tractate America*

Silberschlag (419) generalized about the quality of Hebrew humorous texts in America:

The sense of humor in early Hebrew periodicals is particularly distressing. While Mark Twain and his Jewish counterpart, Shalom Aleichem, were creating immortal classics of fun, the Hebrew writer in America could not rise above vulgar feuilletons. "Breach of Promise", written in a mixture of bad Hebrew-Yiddish-English, is a characteristic product of the nineties. A ludicrous, almost fantastic tale of pre-marital complications, it indulges in a type of mannered humor which speaks for itself.

Thus far, fair enough, on the evidence of the passage Silberschlag translated from the periodical *Ner ha-Ma'aravi*, 1, p. 13, and on which he commented that its author "succeeded in cataloguing the crass blasphemies of American Judaism but he failed to transmute them into art." Even though he generalized earlier on, Silberschlag did not begrudge Rosenzweig (to whom he barely devoted one page) some measure of recognition: the anonymous first author "was to be exceeded by Gershon Rosenzweig who possessed a healthier sense of humor and a greater gift of expression." (420). Nor did Silberschlag confine himself to only exemplifying from Rosenzweig's *Tractate America*: by him, he also quoted an epigrammatic statement from *Tractate Laymen (Massekhet Hedyotot)*. Silberschlag (421) introduced a

quotation from it with the preamble "Even anarchists are not forgotten", the example being: "What is the difference between a convert and an anarchist? A convert denies what he believes and an anarchist believes what he denies."

Silberschlag offered an apt contextualization of Rosenzweig's complaint about the lack of learning: "And, in summation of American Judaism, he repeats the perennial dirge on neglected learning" (421). Because, you see, that was usual among promoters of Hebrew in America. Nevertheless, Silberschlag did not quite translate properly the example he quoted in support from *Tractate America*: "By two things is America sustained: by worship and by deeds of loving-kindness... but not by Torah for it is written (Deut. 30.13) 'And it is not beyond the sea'." Let us try to improve upon that understanding.

Chapter 3 in *Tractate America* is about the indignities a menial worker's life (including child labour), and about the effect of this on family life. The United States of America being a federation (in Israeli Hebrew the country is called *Artzot ha-Brit*, i.e., literally, 'the countries of the covenant') enables Rosenzweig to liken worker's life there to Egyptian slavery, by juxtaposing *Ezekiel* 30:5, "Cush, and Put, and Lud, [...] and all the children of *eretz ha-bris* (the land of the allies)" (actually, Rosenzweig skips a few words in the middle), to *Exodus* 1:14: "All their labour, in which they had them toil exhaustingly". In a note, he explains that the children of *eretz ha-bris* are America. Rosenzweig goes on to remark (through Rav Kapparo), that "America stands on two things: on work, and on charity".

Consider however that in the Jewish sources, the word for 'work' stands for 'worship' in context. In the American context, instead, the reference is to slaving away, which is clear from the general thrust of Rosenzweig's social fresco. As to charity, Rosenzweig quotes a verse from *Proverbs*, which in context he interprets as self-directed charity, and in a note he explains: "As they are charitable with themselves". (Elsewhere, he describes the socially prominent place of fund-raising in America, but bemoans how closely it is linked to donors being entertained.) The traditional trio of which Rosenzweig's passage is evocative is *avodah* (worship), charity, and the Torah, but Rosenzweig instead proceeds to state, by concluding the chapter: "but not Torah, and it is written (*Deuteronomy* 30): 'And it is not beyond the sea'". That is to say, it's not across the pond (as they say in England), not on the *otra banda* (as they used to say in Spanish), but strictly in the Old Country, and once you cross the Atlantic, it's nowhere to be found, as those individuals who are learned are not chosen as teachers.

The opening page of *Tractate America* begins in cosmological *grandeur*, with America's creation as a place of refuge (upon request of the other continents: the place of refuge, in the Pentateuch, is intended for unintentional killers), then foreshadowing Columbus praying so he would be spared the indignity of having the place named after him. But American Jewry's prevalent departure from an Orthodox lifestyle and the learning that would enable it also finds expression in cosmic terms (and referring to lowly spiritual conditions) in the standard idiomatics of a present-day ultra-Orthodox denomination.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> 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 a book by Heilman and Friedman (2010), includes the following entries: "*chatzi kadur tachton*: Lubavitcher hasidic conception of the other side of the globe, the spiritually lowest hemisphere, the exile of America" (literally: "lower hemisphere"); "*khutse she'eyn khutse mimenu*: spiritually the lowest point on earth" (literally: "such outside that nothing is more outside than it"); "*takhtn she'eyn takhtn mimenu*: lowest spiritual realm" (literally: "such 'lower', than nothing is lower than it"). Cf.

## 5. *Tractate America* as a Case of Jewish Multilingualism and Literature

Consider again the Hebrew text from 1890s America, whose quite low artistic quality Silberschlag reprehended, before turning to Rosenzweig: this was the text one written "in a mixture of bad Hebrew-Yiddish-English" (419). Concerning that example, Silberschlag remarked: "Seventy-five years earlier Josef Perl, the Galician satirist, castigated the vices of Hasidism in an intentional mixture of bad Hebrew and Yiddish. His American counterpart copied the method with poor results" (420). This does not do justice to either the place of multilingualism, nor the difference between what the talented but unlovable Perl had been doing, and what the talented and lovable Rosenzweig was going to do when opting for this or that language variety.<sup>14</sup> When writing in earnest (rather than tongue-in-cheek), East Europe's Maskilim (Enlighteners), to one of whose early stages Josef Perl of Tarnopol (1773–1839) belonged, 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>15</sup> But quite importantly, Rosenzweig's choice of rabbinic Hebrew as a

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"*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" (literally: "exile inside exile"). This geographical conception makes sense if one considers that both to Jewish tradition, and to some medieval Gentiles such as Dante himself, Jerusalem is the highest point on earth, i.e., the top of the globe. Just as to Dante, the island of Purgatory in the Ocean is at the antipodes of Jerusalem, so that the mountain top is the point on Earth is the most distant place from Jerusalem, so are the Americas, in the Lubavitch metaphorical idiomatics. The western hemisphere is conceived of as being "the lower hemisphere", apparently because of the Rabbinic traditional dictum *Eretz Yisra'el gvoha mikkol ha'aratot*, "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*). On the Earth as being a globe in Jewish sources and lore, see Nissan (2010 [2011]; submitted, c).

<sup>14</sup> Another thing about which I tend to disagree with Silberschlag (1955) paper is when he wrote: "In the next generation, the humorous feuilleton was to develop [...] in the hands of Isaac Dob Berkowitz — into full-fledged comedies which were undeservedly neglected and overshadowed by his masterful Hebrew translations of the works of Shalom Aleichem, his father-in-law." Dan Miron and others have pointed out how inadequate is Berkowitz's Hebrew translation for doing justice to the richness and nuances of Shalom Aleichem's Yiddish. Still, there is something to Berkowitz's literary Hebrew to commend it. Once in the Israeli media it was pointed out that in a working-class neighbourhood, a reading group whose members were of Yemeni family background savoured Berkowitz's literary Hebrew precisely because they were more acquainted with the traditional texts of Judaism than the average Israeli is. This is quite relevant for understanding what triggers appreciation in a successful reader of Rosenzweig's *Tractate America*.

There is a lapsus to be signalled in Silberschlag (1955): "Though the indigenous writers, with the possible exception of Dolitzki and Naphtali Herz Imber, could not compete with such names from abroad, [...]". But it is far from being the case that Imber, the author of Israel's national anthem, was "indigenous" in America. Naphtali Herz Imber was born in Złoczów, Galicia (now Zolochiv, Ukraine) in 1856. He died in New York in 1909, from the effects of chronic alcoholism. A secularist, he declared his favourite gods to be Hebe and Bacchus, thus identifying his constant interests as womanising and drinking. In 1882, he moved to Palestine as secretary of Sir Laurence Oliphant (1829–1888), a British pro-Jewish and pro-Druze writer. In 1887, Imber returned to Europe and lived in London, travelling (including to India) and then moving to the United States in 1892. In 1877 in Iași, Romania, Imber had written an early version of the poem that was to become the Zionist anthem. It then appeared in 1886 in Imber's first published his first book of poems, *Barkai* (i.e., *Morning Star*), which was in Jerusalem. At the time, the poem was titled *Tikvatenu* ('Our Hope'), not yet *Hatikva* ('Hope').

<sup>15</sup> In the Yiddish memoirs of Yechezkel Kotik (1847–1921), in Ch. 20 of Vol. 1 (1998 [1913]) he relates that in Kamenets, when he became betrothed in his early teens, his uncle wrote for him a draft

language variety and of talmudic style was a corollary of his choice of genre: the long tradition of the Purim parody,<sup>16</sup> 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.

A significant body of criticism has been built up about Jewish multilingualism and literature, most notably by Hana Wirth-Nesher (1990, 1998, 2001, 2006). Joshua Fishman (1976, 1979) discussed the sociolinguistic role of Hebrew among Yiddish speakers in traditional Ashkenaz, and what he called "The Sociolinguistic 'Normalization' of the Jewish People". Alan Mintz (1992) discusses the state of Hebrew in America.<sup>17</sup> As a Hebraist, Rosenzweig's choice of the rabbinic Hebrew stratum, registers, and stylemes was in a sense at odds with the Maskilic satire, from which he had drawn the very legitimacy of the satirical genre.

To Maskilic authors, the would-be "Enlighteners", Europeanizers of Jewry, with little patience with mystics and Hasidism, the ideal style was based on Biblical Hebrew. Some variety of rabbinic Hebrew was only resorted to in Maskilic literature, notably in *Mgalle-Tmirin (The Revealer of Secrets)*, the venomous satirical epistolary novel by Josef Perl, from 1819, as authorial mimesis: Perl was parodying those whose language variety that was, and whom he (admittedly in the novel) loathed to their death.<sup>18</sup>

Perl's novel ends with death and gloat indeed. Nothing could be more remote from Rosenzweig's attitudes: he satirized Jews he loved, and he satirized America, while loving her and foreseeing a bright future for the American nation (he

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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.

<sup>16</sup> Davidson (1907) is a classic on the parody genre in Hebrew literature.

<sup>17</sup> Glinert's (1993) '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 discussed current levels of fluency expected of the British Jewish demographic sector.

<sup>18</sup> In the end of *The Revealer of Secrets*, Perl, to whom the spread of Hasidism was like cancer, had his Hasidic characters die, after they cowered in fear of an informer. And Perl himself was an informer indeed: "he bombarded officials with memoranda hostile to Hasidism, hoping the authorities would suppress the movement" (Meir in YIVO, 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." (Meir, *ibid.*). As the end of the English summary of Rubinstein's paper on Perl puts it (1974, p. xvii): "Perl kept inundating the authorities with hate material and unbridled accusations against Hassidim and their spiritual leaders, and proposed far-reaching measures with respect to Jewish education. But he kept this activity secret. It appears that his contacts with the authorities went far beyond [t]he ideology of the Haskalah, and it may be said that, in historical perspective, their main significance is biographical."

Which is like saying: don't let Perl's misdeeds tarnish the Haskalah movement in its entirety. It may be that I in particular react with a knee-jerk to informers of the Restoration-era Austrian police, because having been raised in Milan, Italy, from primary school I was conditioned to consider that regime very negatively. But it is a fact that under the lead of Johann Anton Perger (1725–1814), the Habsburgic empire became a police state; see Bernard (1991) about Perger.

Perl tried to use that police state for his own purposes. Austria only turned to liberal democracy after the loss of Lombardy in 1859 and of Veneto in 1867, having lost respectively a war against Piedmont and France, and a war against Prussia and Italy. These are known in Italy as her Second and Third Wars of Independence.

also translated into Hebrew the U.S. national anthem). By contrast, Perl's attitude towards the state was that the Austrian police state would be hopefully amenable to imposing upon the Jews coercive measures to Perl's own liking.<sup>19</sup>

Maskilic satire<sup>20</sup> found its model in the Menippean satire, or in the dialogues of Lucian (Werses 1978), whom some Jewish Enlighteners revered, but in Rosenzweig's days, reverence for Lucian was *passé*.<sup>21</sup>

His non-Jewish influences, if any, Rosenzweig hides under a heavy coat of talmudic outer style,<sup>22</sup> and they are expressed through bilingual puns with English,<sup>23</sup> and social angst in those passages that are most seething. Whereas Rosenzweig's puns are ubiquitous, they usually are riddles that require the reader to access not English, but rather biblical verses whose sense is subverted, a device that entered Hebrew literature at least as early as Immanuel of Rome,<sup>24</sup> Dante's contemporary.<sup>25</sup> In his entry for 'Parody' in the *YIVO Encyclopedia*,<sup>26</sup> of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York (the leading institution for research into Yiddish), Edward Portnoy pointed out:

<sup>19</sup> Rubinstein remarks (1974, p. XVII): "Perl was in favor of having the struggle against Hassidism decided by coercive action on the part of the authorities of the state." In this he differed from Lefin. Mendl Lefin, in Poland in the early 1790s, had preceded Perl in prescribing unrelenting struggle against Hasidism (Rubinstein 1974, p. XVI): "Lefin believed that the eradication of Hassidism was a *sine qua non* for the realization of the goals of the Haskalah, and that Haskalah and Hassidism were natural enemies. [...] Lefin classified the anti-Hassidic literature into two categories: the philosophical and the satirical. Lefin's program of using literature to combat Hassidism was totally accepted, but he remained alone in his conditional attitude towards the state, in that he denied the state the right to determine matters of the spirit and the way of life."

<sup>20</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 (1997).

<sup>21</sup> Werses concludes (1978, p. 247) 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, and then again, as part of a book of 1907.

<sup>22</sup> Incidentally, bear in mind that humour is found also inside the Babylonian Talmud itself. This is the subject of Engelman (1990) and Karff (1991). Kovelman (2002) is concerned with farce in the rabbinic literature. Early rabbinic wordplay is discussed by Eilberg-Schwartz (2004).

<sup>23</sup> For example, the Hebrew of *Tractate America* alludes to English when it refers to newcomers as "green ones" (‹yrwqym› *yerikim*), 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; e.g., "What is green (*yerikim*, green ones)? Said Rav Safrō: "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. A note to Ch. 1 defines the nickname for them by reference to the vernacular, this implicitly being English (because of the Jewish glosses tradition of referring to the vernacular as *la'az*, the language of a foreign people).

<sup>24</sup> 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 Hebrew texts by Immanuel Romano, who was also a humorous poet in Italian. See on him, e.g., Adler (2002) and Alfie (1998).

<sup>25</sup> The modern myth of Immanuel's supposed friendship with Dante was discarded by Cassuto in a monograph (1921) discussed by Fortis (1996). The myth was based upon mention of both Manoello and Dante in correspondence by common acquaintances of theirs. Drawing upon research by Jacqueline Genot-Bismuth, Umberto Eco in the last section ('Dante e Abulafia') of Chapter 3 of his book (Eco 1993) on the quest for the perfect language mentions the Jews Immanuel of Rome's, Yehuda Romano's and Lionello di Ser Daniele's involvement with Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

<sup>26</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>

### פרק שלישי, אלו חייבים.

מתני' אלו חייבים בעבודה האנשים והנשים וקטנים שהגיעו לחנוך. רב עניא אמר כל שהוא חייב באכילה

חייב בעבודה :

גמ' אמר רב פעלן לא שנו אלא בשעת הבזה אבל בשעת הסלק הכל פטורין, דתניא שתי עתים לעבודה עת בזה ועת סלק, מי שמרח בבזה יאכל בסלק ומי שלא מרח בבזה ירעב בסלק, דכתיב (קהלת ג') עת לבקש ועת לאבד, עת לבקש עבודה ועת לאבד כחו, ומאי מעמא נאמר עת לבקש תחלה משום דתדיר ושאינו תדיר תדיר קודם. מתקיף ליה רב תופרא והא כתיב (אסתר ט') ובבזה לא שלחו את ידם. א"ל התם שאני דבשעת הכמריק הוה דכתיב ברישא דקרא ועמד על נפשם : רב עובדא אישכח למר יונין דהוה קאי אפתחא דבי פקמורא וחזיה דהוה בדיחא דעתיה ואי בעי מיניה כל חללי עלמא הוה אמר ליה, א"ל מאי מעמא העובדין בעמיריקא אינם רואין עולמן בחייהן. א"ל משום דעמיריקא מרובה באוכלסין של ירוקין, וירוקין נעשו כקבין, וכקבין מבלי עולם הן. מאי בזה, שמבזין העובדין את כחן בחנם. סלק, שמסתלקין מעבודה ומתין ברעב. כמריק, שבשעה שמניחין את עבודתן נשיתן ובניהן כומרין על פניהן וכופין אותן להחזיר את גרושתן : האנשים והנשים. ונשים חייבות בעבודה, והתנן כל הנשים בעמיריקא דיון מה שהן עושות בביתן לבעליהן לבניהן ולפרדריהן. לא קשיא כאן פנשוואות כאן בשאינן נשוואות. ואפעית אימא תנא דמתניתין עבודה שבבית

מתני' וקטנים שהגיעו לחנוך. לקמיה מפרש לזמן חנוך :

גמ' בשעת הבזה. ששכיחא עבודה : בשעת הסלק. שאין עבודה מצויה כלל : דתדיר ושאינו תדיר. וסלק תדיר הוא לבזה : בשעת הכמריק הוה. שבמלו העובדין ממדאבתו ע"י עצמן ושלא ברשות בעלים : וכאן בשאינן נשוואות. שהן ודאי חייבות בעבודה

Fig. 2. The first page of Chapter 3 of *Tractate America*.

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 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 of a talmudic *pastiche*.

## 6. "These have the duty of 'avodah' ('Work' Rather Than 'Worship')

We are now going to focus on Chapter 3 of *Tractate America*, especially its initial part. We are especially interested in exemplifying passages about the indignities of earning one's life, and about the low standards of education that Rosenzweig associates with America. Chapter 3 of *Tractate America* is headlined "These have the duty".<sup>27</sup> This is because the initial pseudo-Mishnah states:

These have the duty of 'avodah [double sense: 'worship' / 'work']: men, and women, and minors who have reached being educated. {note: below it explains: the time/age of being educated.} Rav 'Anyo [Rabbi Poorman] said: 'Whoever must eat, must do 'avodah.

The double sense makes one expect a definition of who has the duty to worship. The three categories listed make sense in that context, and therefore fulfil the deceptive expectation. The first part of the pseudo-Mishnah is stated as the general rule. It is the individual opinion of the sage whose name reminds the readers of the needs of the poor, that alerts the reader to the intended sense of 'avodah being 'work'.

The pseudo-Gemara begins by stating, in the name of Rav Pa'lon (Rabbi Hired-Worker), that the rule in the Mishnah only applies to "the time of the *bizzah*" (which literally means 'looting', but here alludes to English *busy*: 'the time of business', 'when factories are busy'), whereas at the time of the <slq> (i.e., 'slack', but <slq> is also the Hebrew lexical root of *silleg*, 'to dismiss') "everybody is exempt".

He who toiled in the *bizzah* shall eat in the *slaq* (slack), and he who did not toil in the *bizzah* shall starve in the *slaq*, as it is written (*Ecclesiastes* 3) 'There is a time to seek and a time to destroy/waste', a time to seek 'avodah ('employment'), and a time to waste one's force. Why is 'There is a time to seek' mentioned first? Because [a famous rabbinic rule states that between] what is frequent and what is not frequent, what if frequent comes first.

Thus far, it sounds like praise for the active life. But it is not so. Social realities are dire. This emerges both in Rosenzweig's notes, and in what follows in the main text. A note to "the time of the *bizzah*" states "when 'avodah can be found". Next, a note to "the time of the <slq>" (slack) explains: "when 'avodah cannot be

<sup>27</sup> "These have the duty" is אלו חייבים in Hebrew. There is no dearth of Mishnaic passages that begin with "These" (*Ellu*), such as: אלו טריפות/אלו הלוקין/אלו הנשרפין/אלו עוברין. I am thankful to an anonymous referee for pointing out the need to remark about this stylistic feature.

found at all".<sup>28</sup> A note to "what is frequent and what is not frequent" drives in the point: "and <slq> is more frequent than *bizzah*". As to the main text, it continues as follows:

Rav Tofra (Rabbi Taylor) retorts: "it is written (*Esther* 9): 'And to the *bizzah* (spoils) they [the Jews] did not extend their hand'. They replied to him: «There it is different, as it was at the time of the <stryq> (i.e., strike), as it is written in the beginning of that [biblical] passage: 'And they stood [i.e., defended] their lives'".<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Whereas in Israeli Hebrew, *piṭṭrúhu* (*mimmisrató*) is standard for 'they dismissed him from his job', in the nineteenth century the Hebrew standard expression was *sillqúhu mimmishmarto* (root: *slq*).

<sup>29</sup> This is not the only context in which "And to the *bizzah* (spoils) they [the Jews] did not extend their hand" is put to humorous use. In an article, nearing completion, on fish names in a few Jewish vernaculars, considered in the sociology of language, I am concerned with the fish called /bizz/ [bəzz] in Iraqi Arabic. (In Syrian Arabic, the same word means '[a woman's] breast', 'teat'.) Of the *bizz* fish, Brian Coad states (2010, p.109): "This species is characterised by large size, a long, tapering and depressed head (rather pike-like in shape, hence the scientific name [i.e., *Barbus esocinus* < *esox* 'pike', and *Luciobarbus esocinus* < *lucius* 'pike']), two pairs of barbels, lateral line scale count high (62–78)". Like the pike, the *bizz* "is a predator on other fishes" (*ibid.*, p. 110). "Anglers and commercial fishermen seek this fish in the Iranian Zagros Mountains using ducklings (!) as bait. Baits in Iraq have included balls of dough and dates, chicken and sheep livers, flies and spoons, and bread" (*ibid.*, p. 111). "This species is in heavy demand on fish markets and is heavily exploited in the Dukan and Derbendikhan reservoirs as evidenced by absence of older fish in catches. It is the most valuable fish caught in Iraq" (*ibid.*, p. 110). Coad remarked to me *in litteram* (email of 16 December 2011): "*Luciobarbus esocinus* is the correct name for *bizz*, also called Tigris salmon. A colour photo is on the front page of my Iraq book." The reference is Coad's (2010) *Freshwater Fishes of Iraq*. "The man holding the giant *bizz* is a British army sergeant in Baghdad at one of Saddam Hussein's palace ponds" (B. Coad, email of 9 February 2012).

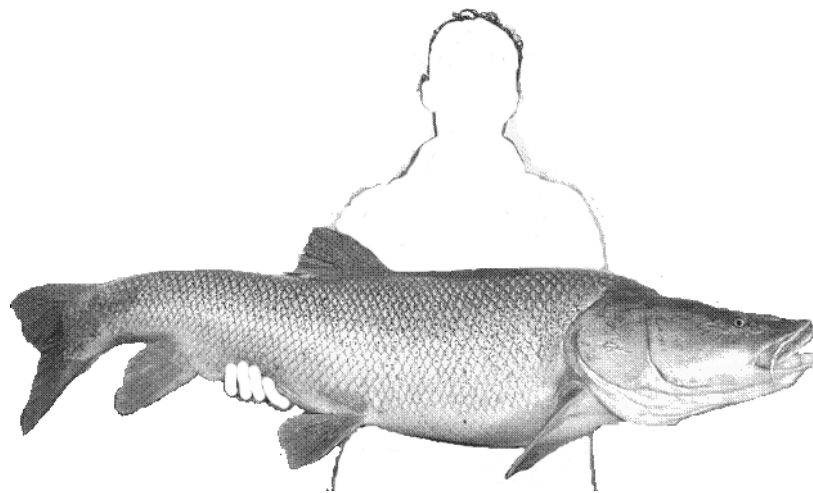


Fig. 3. A much modified version of the photograph of a large *bəzz* (phonemically in Iraqi Arabic: /bizz/) fish held by a British army sergeant, from the cover of Coad (2010). The landscape and the man's portrait are whitened out. The contour of the man's silhouette conveys an idea of the size of this giant specimen of a *bizz*.

In early March 2012, along with greetings for the Jewish festival of Purim — a merry festival, traditionally associated with jest, and falling in the month of Adar, itself associated with the constellation of Pisces (thus, fish) — which I emailed a scholar in England, I joined the image shown here, and pointed out:

By asking somebody to shoot him (with a camera), that sergeant surely fulfilled an angler's dream, but he apparently threw the fish alive back into the pond. That species is

as voracious as a pike, and the other fishes jump out into the air when such a fish approaches. Therefore, the sergeant would have been more charitable to fish, had he eaten that one. Perhaps had he been a general, he would have been allowed to do so. The relation to Purim is that the name of that fish is "bizz", and in the Megillah [i.e., the Scroll of Esther], we read three times: "u-va-bizzah lo shalchu et yadam" [i.e., 'And to the *bizzah* (spoils) they did not extend their hand'] (Esther, ch. 9, vv. 10, 15, 16). Just as Jonah was swallowed by a "dag" ['fish' in the masculine], and then came out of a "dagah" [in the feminine], I suppose that substituting "bizzah" for "bizz" is also compatible with tradition.

Incidentally, the hypothetical situation of a general (rather than a sergeant) being allowed to eat the huge fish is illustrated in Fig. 4 as shown on the next page, of the detail from a 1795 British engraving, *Substitutes for Bread*, by James Gillray. See Patten (1983, p. 332, Fig. 2).



Fig. 4. Detail from James Gillray's coloured engraving *Substitutes for Bread*, of 1795.

There is a late antique Jewish midrashic tradition according to which the *dagah* (whose name is in the feminine, and who according in the Book of Jonah released, "vomited" Jonah), threatened the *dag* 'fish' (in the masculine) who had originally swallowed Jonah, so that Jonah was spewed out by the male fish and swallowed by the female fish, which was pregnant, so that Jonah

A note to "it was at the time of the strike" explains: "as the workers ceased work of themselves, and not by permission of the owners". Historically, consider that in manufacturing in New York City in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century: "In season, workdays could last sixteen to eighteen hours with no overtime pay" (Goldberg 2011, p. 30). "In fact, unemployment was a real and constant fear in the garment industry for it ran on a five-season year: winter, spring, summer, fall, and slack. In 1913, less than 20 percent of New York City's garment workers were employed continuously throughout the year" (*ibid.*).

## 7. A Holder of Superior Knowledge at the Door of a Factory

What follows is a parody of an early rabbinic account of some especially deserving sage seeing a supernaturally knowledgeable agent while he is at the opening (*appitha*)<sup>30</sup> of an other-worldly space, and even though the first character cannot

found himself in a cramped environment instead of in a spacious one. (The worsening of his conditions was because while in the belly of the *dag*, Jonah had not been praying, which he did instead once in the belly of the *dagah*.) Such exegesis distinguished between the two textual mentions, *dag* and *dagah*, in *Jonah*, as standing for two different creatures. Talmon (2001) claimed that the female fish could have been conceived of, by the illustrator of a particular manuscript, as being a large mermaid, drawn about the size of the ship shown in the background.

The usual interpretation considers the standard *dag* 'fish' and *dagá* to be interchangeable. This can be shown to be the case for some rabbinic texts: a norm stated in *Mishnah*, tractate *Betsah*, 2:1, has *dag* ("They recognize that a fish and an egg that is upon it, are [to be considered as being] two distinct kinds of cooked food"). The word *dag* is consistently used in three instances in the parallel text in the Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Betsah*, 17b. In *Tosefta*, *Yom Tov*, ii.4, 203/14–15 (ed. Zuckerman, according to MS Erfurt), the parallel text has *dag* once and then *dagah* twice; yet in MS Vienna these, too, are *dagah*. In the Palestinian Talmud, tractate *Betsah*, ii.1, 61b, what in the parallel text of the Babylonian Talmud is *dag* all three time, is found instead as follows: the first occurrence is *dagah*, the second occurrence is *mal'ah* (i.e., a particular fish kind), and the third occurrence is *dag*. These parallels are discussed on p. 70 (=40) in Moreshet (1974). Moreshet (*ibid.*, pp. 71–73, was concerned with the use of *dag* and *dagah*:

*Dagah* is usual in the [Hebrew] Bible as a collective noun, even though it also co-occur as a stylistic variation with no semantic distinction: "And G-d sent a big *dag* ... and Jonah prayed ... from [inside] the intestines of the *dagah*" (*Jonah*, 2:1–2); such a change for the sake of variety can also found, for example, [in the announcement of Samson's birth,] in "And do not eat anything unclean (*tamé* [masculine])" (*Judges*, 13:4, being the instructions of the angel to the wife of Manoah), its parallels being: "And do not eat any uncleanness (*tum'ah* [feminine])" (*ibid.*, v. 7, in the woman's report to Manoah), and "And any uncleanness (*tum'ah*) let her not eat" (*ibid.*, v. 14, in what the angel tells Manoah).

In the rabbinic literature, an attempt is made to introduce a distinction between *dag* and *dagah*, such that for small fishes *dagah* is applied "in the way people speak". Hence the distinction in tractate *Nedarim*, if one says "a vow: *dag* I taste" or "*dagah* I taste" (*Tosefta*, *Nedarim*, iii.5, 279/2–3), and see the discussion in the Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Nedarim*, 51b, and in Rashi's commentary *ad loc.* [...]

Moreshet (1974, p. 72), finds that this supposed norm concerning the semantic distinction is not applied coherently, in the relevant rabbinic texts, and that moreover, in the Babylonian Talmud *dagah* disappeared, "a small *dag*" being used if that is what was meant. Moreshet (*ibid.*, p. 72, fn. 15) points out that the Hebrew writer Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888–1970) adopted the distinction between *dag* and *dagah*, in his literary work *'Ir u-Mlo'ah*: "Here he ate *dag*, and there, *dagah*", and on the next page, "from *dag* to *dagah*" (Agnon, *ibid.*, 5733=1972/3, pp. 611 and 612).

<sup>30</sup> An anonymous referee pointed out that the Aramaic words קאי הפיתחא about standing at the door have several occurrences in the talmudic corpus, in both anecdotes and homilies set at the entrance of a

glimpse inside, he can ask questions, because his interlocutor is in good spirits. But Rosenzweig has what at first sight might appear to be a sage, find another character while the latter is at the door of a *bei factoro* (i.e., "house of <pqtwr>": a factory). The first character "saw that his interlocutor was in good spirits, and had he asked him (for) all *halelei 'almo* (secrets of the world), he would have told him".

In context, if the *bei factoro* (the factory) is sublimated into Hell (which is one of the possible other-worldly spaces, the other one being Heaven, which a factory is not), this means that factory workers are like the damned. The noun phrase *halelei 'almo* means "the underground treasures of the world" in *Sanhedrin* 97a and *Bava Metsi'a* 49a, whereas in *Shabbat* 77b one finds "if they asked him all *halelei 'almo*", which in that particular context, Jastrow (471, col. 1, top) renders as "about all the secret processes of nature". Even just this idiom has such intertextual ramifications, ones that greatly enrich the reading of the given passage by Rosenzweig, which we are going to devote to it a detailed discussion further on in this study.

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house; for example, at *Berakhot*, 58b, at *Shabbat*, 126b, and at *Betsah*, 29b. The referee remarked: "The entrance [the Hebrew term literally means 'opening'] is a position which watches over the world from within the person's private dimension."

At *Shabbat*, 126b, there is this passage (given here as per H. Freedman's translation in Isidore Epstein's Soncino edition; single brackets are Freedman's; double brackets are my one):

R. Isaac the smith lectured at the entrance of the Resh Galutha [[the Exilarch]]: The *halachah* [[i.e., the law in this particular matter]] is as R. Eliezer. R. Amram objected: And from their words we learn that we may close [a skylight], measure [a mikweh], and tie [a temporary knot] on the Sabbath! — Said Abaye to him, What is your view: because it is taught anonymously? [But the Mishnah concerning] a dragging bolt is also anonymous! — Yet even so an actual incident is weightier.

At *Betsah*, 29b, we are told (here, as per the Soncino translation, single brackets being from there, and double brackets my own): "Raba the son of R. Huna Zuti expounded at the gate of [[the city of]] Nehardea: One may [sift] flour a second time on a Festival." At *Berakhot*, 58b, there is this passage, given here as translated in the Isidore Epstein's Soncino edition (in which tractate *Berakhot* was translated by Maurice Simon):

Once when 'Ulla and R. Hisda were walking along the road, they came to the door of the house of R. Hana b. Hanilai. R. Hisda broke down and sighed. Said 'Ulla to him: Why are you sighing, seeing that Rab has said that a sigh breaks half a man's body, since it says, Sigh therefore thou son of man, with the breaking of thy loins, etc.; and R. Johanan said that it breaks even the whole of a man's body, as it says: And it shall be, when they say unto thee, wherefore sighest thou? Thou shalt say: Because of the tidings for it cometh; and every heart shall melt, etc.? — He replied: How shall I refrain from sighing on seeing the house in which there used to be sixty cooks by day and sixty cooks by night, who cooked for everyone who was in need. Nor did he [R. Hana] ever take his hand away from his purse, thinking that perhaps a respectable poor man might come, and while he was getting his purse he would be put to shame. Moreover it had four doors, opening on different sides, and whoever went in hungry went out full. They used also to throw wheat and barley outside in years of scarcity, so that anyone who was ashamed to take by day used to come and take by night. Now it has fallen in ruins, and shall I not sigh? — He replied to him: Thus said R. Johanan: Since the day when the Temple was destroyed a decree has been issued against the houses of the righteous that they should become desolate, as it says: In mine ears, said the Lord of hosts: Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitants. R. Johanan further said: The Holy One, blessed be He, will one day restore them to their inhabited state, as it says: A Song of Ascents. They that trust in the Lord are as Mount Zion. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, will restore Mount Zion to its inhabited state, so will He restore the houses of the righteous to their inhabited state. Observing that he was still not satisfied, he said to him: Enough for the servant that he should be like his master.

Literally, *ḥalelei* means "caverns of", "hollow spaces of", and sometimes the term is also used in order to refer to an inner organ (in the Yerushalmi, *Avodah Zarah*, II, 40d top, according to an interpretation of Jastrow, 470, col. 2, bottom). But the same term also denotes those unfit for the priesthood because born from a misalliance of an Aaronid priest. Unfortunately, Israel's circumstances make the term mainly denote, to an Israeli ear, those fallen in armed conflict. But metaphorically, the term is sometimes applied to victims who succumb to something unfair. In rabbinic technical terminology, the term also refers to the slain (as opposed to the specifically strangled, or to one who is rolling in dying agony: so in *Sotah* 45b, after *Deuteronomy* 21:1).

And here we get something quite interesting, even though we cannot be sure Rosenzweig was actually thinking of it: the co-occurrence of *ḥalelei* with a nominal compound with *bei* ('house of'). In the talmudic tractate *Hullin*, which is about kosher meat and slaughtering, one finds: *de-ḥalelei bei tabbaḥa*, "when they washed the meat in the slaughterhouse". This may be taken to suggest that the workers who got into the *bei factoro* (the factory) are like the beasts that entered the *bei tabbaḥa* (the slaughterhouse) where they are routinely slaughtered, as that is the very purpose of the place. It is unsurprising that the beast that got inside come out as dead carcasses. The foregoing however does not do justice to the intertextuality of the compound *khalelei almo* (this is the Ashkenazic pronunciation of *ḥalelei 'alma*, the standard pronunciation at present in Israel being *khalelei alma*), and we are going to devote to it a detailed discussion further on.

## 8. Questioning the Expert: Why Cannot Workers Enjoy Their Life?

The first sage, who is called Rav 'Ovdo (Rabbi Worker) asks the second man, who is an unordained rabbi, as he is referred to as *mar*, for 'Mr.' (but in the Babylonian Talmud, this is usual for some Jewish nobleman). What is more, he is called <mr ywynyn> (Mr. Union), and the rabbi is finding him cheerful (*bdiḥa da'teih* [Ashkenazic *bdikho datei*] 'he was in good spirits', cf. *bdiḥa da'tay*, 'I am happy' at *Sabbath* 77b), so he is approachable with questions: "Why do the workers in America not see their world in their life?", i.e., why aren't they able to enjoy life while they are in this world. (This is a momentous question, one evocative of traditional questions in theodicy: see below, §12.) The other sage replies that this is because America has a large population of greenhorns, "and greenhorns become scabs, and scabs destroy the world" (*skabin*: the English word appears in Hebrew transliteration, with a Hebrew plural suffix). Social realities are promptly evoked, as nonunion workers, and workers willing to take the place at work of strikers, nullify what the strikers have been trying to do in order to improve their lot.

There is something remarkable that must be said concerning scabs. The talmudic locus that is directly most relevant for making sense intertextually of the compound *ḥalelei 'almo* is in *Shabbat* 77b, where one finds "if they asked him all *ḥalelei 'almo*", which in that particular context, Jastrow (471, col. 1, top) renders as "about all the secret processes of nature". But on that very same folio of the Talmud, indeed on the same side, at 77b, one finds this passage about scabs in the medical sense:

HONEY, SUFFICIENT TO PLACE ON A SCAB. A Tanna taught: As much as is required for putting on the opening of a scab. R. Ashi asked: 'On a scab': [does that mean] on the whole opening of the scab, {1} or perhaps [it means] on the top of the scab,

{2} thus excluding [sufficient for] going all round the sore, which is not required? {3}  
The question stands over.

This translation is from Isidore Epstein's Soncino edition of the Babylonian Talmud, whose Tractate *Shabbath* was translated by H. Freedman, and was first published in 1938. What appears in all capitals is quoted from the Mishnah, and the rest of this passage is the Gemara about it. The Soncino edition has these notes for this passage; I renumbered them, and in the passage I replaced the exponents with numbers in curly brackets:

1. The entire surface being referred to as the opening.
2. Lit., 'the first projecting point'.
3. Before a penalty is incurred.

Consider again "and scabs destroy the world":  $\langle \text{sqbyn} \rangle$  *skabin* 'scabs' [are] *mvallei oylom* (מבלי עולם — present standard pronunciation: *mevallei olam*), literally: 'causing the world to wear out'. An anonymous referee pointed out that this phrase occurs in various places in the talmudic corpus, and these are worth mentioning. Consider in particular, in the Babylonian Talmud at *Sotah*, 20a: "Rabbi Joshua says: 'A woman would prefer [just] one *qab* [a measure of capacity], and [i.e., even if it is] of *tiflut* (frivolity, but here: sexual indulgence), to nine *qabs* of abstinence'. He used to say: 'A silly pious man, a cunning wicked man, an abstinent woman, and blows from the Pharisees, these are *mevallei olam*'.<sup>31</sup>

Jastrow (1903, p. 781), defines the fourth item (with reference to *Mishnah* at *Sotah* 3:4) as "the wound inflicted by the Pharisees, i.e. injury done under the pretext of strict adherence to the letter of the law, or of benevolence", with this example from the *Palestinian Talmud* at *Sotah*, 19a: "'the plague of the Pharisees' is he who advises heirs to avoid paying alimentation to the widow."

The anonymous referee also mentioned this other example, from the Babylonian Talmud at *Sotah*, 22a: "A virgin who always prays, a gadabout widow, and a minor whose months are not over, these are *mevallei olam*". A gadabout widow's chastity is open to suspicion. As to the maiden who prays exceedingly, "In the J. Talmud there is a variant: 'gives herself up to fasting'. We seem to have here an expression of disapproval of conventual life" (note in the English Soncino edition). The talmudic text was translated as follows in Isidore Epstein's Soncino edition of the Babylonian Talmud (the brackets are in that edition):

A FEMALE PHARISEE, etc. Our Rabbis have taught: A maiden who gives herself up to prayer, a gadabout widow, and a minor whose months are not completed — behold these bring destruction upon the world. But it is not so; for R. Johanan has said: We learnt fear of sin from a maiden [who gave herself up to prayer] and [confidence in] the bestowal of reward from a [gadabout] widow! Fear of sin from a maiden — for R. Johanan heard a maiden fall upon her face and exclaim, 'Lord of the Universe! Thou hast created Paradise and Gehinnom; Thou hast created righteous and wicked. May it be Thy will that men should not stumble through me'. [Confidence in] the bestowal of reward from a widow — a certain widow had a Synagogue in her neighborhood; yet she used to come daily to the School of R. Johanan and pray there. He said to her, 'My daughter, is there not a Synagogue in your neighborhood?' She answered him, 'Rabbi, but have I not the reward

<sup>31</sup> The translation in the Soncino English translation is as follows: "R. Joshua says: a woman prefers one *kab* and sexual indulgence to nine *kab* and continence. He used to say, a foolish pietist, a cunning rogue, a female pharisee, and the plague of pharisees bring destruction upon the world." Tractate *Sotah* was translated by Rabbi A. Cohen, the editor of the Soncino English edition being Rabbi I. Epstein

for the steps!' — When it is said [that they bring destruction upon the world] the reference is to such a person as Johani the daughter of Retibi. What means 'a minor whose months are not completed'? — They explained it thus: It refers to a disciple who rebels against the authority of his teachers. R. Abba said: It refers to a disciple who has not attained the qualification to decide questions of law and yet decides them; for R. Abbahu declared that R. Huna said in the name of Rab, What means that which is written: For she hath cast down many wounded, yea, all her slain are a mighty host? 'For she hath cast down many wounded' — this refers to a disciple who has not attained the qualification to decide questions of law and yet decides them; 'yea, all her slain are a mighty host' — this refers to a disciple who has attained the qualification to decide questions of law and does not decide them.

## 9. How to Treat Scabs? And the Weak Overcoming the Strong, on the Very Same Talmudic Page Intertextually Referred To

It can hardly be the case that Rosenzweig, while using the compound *halelei* 'almo from that talmudic folio, did not also have in mind the talmudic discussion about how to treat *scabs*, intended in the medical rather than employee relations sense. Not only that. That same talmudic page says something quite interesting (for Rosenzweig's social discussion) about the weak overcoming the strong:

Our Rabbis taught: There are five instances of fear [cast] by the weak over the strong: the fear of the *mafzia* {1} over the lion; the fear of the mosquito upon the elephant; {2} the fear of the spider upon the scorpion; {3} the fear of the swallow upon the eagle; {4} the fear of the *kilbit* {5} over the Leviathan. {6} Rab Judah said in Rab's name: What verse [alludes to these]? That strengtheneth the despoiled [i.e., weak] over the strong. {7}

1. Lit., 'plague'. The Ethiopian gnat (Lewysohn, *Zool. d. Talmud*, p. 316). Rashi: a small animal that terrifies the lion with its loud cry.
2. Caused by entering its trunk.
3. In whose ear it lodges.
4. Rashi: it creeps under its wings and hinders it from spreading them.
5. A small fish, supposed to be the stickleback.
6. Likewise caused by entering its ear.
7. Amos V, 9 (E.V. 'that bringeth sudden destruction upon the strong').

Rashi (1040–1105) is the main Jewish commentator of both the Bible, and the Babylonian Talmud. Lewysohn's 1858 book, *Die Zoologie des Talmuds*, is still important, albeit superseded by a volume published by zoologist Dor shortly before he died a centenarian.<sup>32</sup> The *kilbit* is a tiny fish which was much consumed by Jews. Dor, 175, identified the *kilbit* with a freshwater equivalent of the sardine, namely the Kinneret sardine (*Mirogrex terrasanctae*), especially because a talmudic sage discussing it as a small fish of which multitudes are captured used to live in Tiberiad. By contrast, the marine sardine used to be called *tarit*. We need not be concerned because in the passage quoted earlier, the *kilbit* is said to interact with the Leviathan, a huge marine animal, certainly not from the Lake of Tiberiad, as it is fantastic lore which is discussed in context. The *mafzia* is a tiny animal known to the Graeco-Roman world by the name *leontophonos* ('lion-killer') — as early as Aristotle, and as late as Isidore of Seville — and causing death to lions. Isidore explained

<sup>32</sup> I have written about talmudic and rabbinic zoology myself (e.g., Nissan 1999 [2001]; 2007; 2011b; submitted, d, e, f). I have also written about the encounter between zoology and botany and the belles-lettres, in particular concerning the writings of Agnon (Nissan 2009 [2011]; Nissan and Amar, in press).

(*Etymologiae* XII.ii.34) that the *leontophonos* "is a small animal; it is so named because when captured it is burnt, and its flesh, sprinkled with ash and placed at crossroads, kills lions, if they take even a small amount of it."<sup>33</sup>

The ending of the passage quoted is apt, given Rosenzweig's concern, in the passage considered, with working class hopes, as per the doxa of the socialist trade unions, that they would eventually overcome their oppressors. Rosenzweig himself, however, had little patience for radical politics. Elsewhere in *Tractate America* he has a fleeting reference to anarchists who preach "blood, fire, and spires of smoke" (this wording is lifted from the Passover Haggadah).

In Stith Thompson's (1955–1958) *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, there is an international motif of some large and powerful animal being afraid of a considerably smaller animal:

J2614.3. Lions flee because of the crowing of white cock, elephants because of swine's grunting. Icelandic: FSS 69–71, Boberg.

An anonymous referee found the present section superfluous, by arguing that the talmudic passage discussed here appears in its original context in relation to therapy, and is unrelated to the subject of this article. I beg to differ. Firstly, Rosenzweig is punning on the English double sense in the word scab (it also denoting 'strike-breaker' eluded the referee). Healing a scab refers to the medical sense of 'scab', but how trade unionists and striking workers are to handle scabs is of course about punitive treatment. Secondly, reception of a literary text involves much subjectivity, all the more so when readers are sent fetching for intertextual references. Fear is absolutely central to the situation of workers being confronted with strike-breakers (as then strikers may lose their jobs for good), and to the situation of strike-breakers being confronted by angry workers, as these may resort to violence, either on the spot, or later on. Thirdly, and more cogently, the talmudic passage is concerned with large animals being afraid of relatively tiny animals. This is quite relevant to what Rosenzweig is conveying about the vulnerable position of the individual employee *vis-à-vis* the powerful employer. Trade unions and strikes are something employers were afraid of, notwithstanding these employers being powerful.

## 10. The Model for the Encounter Between *Reb* Worker and Mr. Union: Rab Judah Standing by the Door of his Father-in-Law's House

Right after the passage about the weak animals being feared by the strong (didn't factory owners fear their workforce?), we find this passage that clearly provided the model for the encounter between Rabbi Worker and Mr. Union:

R. Zera met Rab Judah standing by the door of his father-in-law's house and saw that he was in a cheerful mood, and if he would ask him all the secrets of the universe he would disclose [them] to him. He [accordingly] asked him: Why do goats march at the head [of the flock], and then sheep? — Said he to him: It is as the world's creation, darkness

<sup>33</sup> Already in Aesop's *Fables*, from the sixth century BCE, lions are afraid of the rooster (the lion, feeling foolish, complains about this about this to Prometheus, a shrink *ante litteram*), whereas elephants are afraid of the gnat, lest it would get into their era and they would die. The lion, hearing that from the elephant, felt much better about his own courage, since a cock is much more frightening than a gnat.

preceding and then light. {1} Why are the latter covered, while the former are uncovered? {2} — Those with whose [material] we cover ourselves are themselves covered, whilst those wherewith we do not cover ourselves are uncovered. Why is a camel's tail short? — Because it eats thorns. {3} Why is an ox's tail long?<sup>34</sup> — Because it grazes in meadows and must beat off the gnats [with its tail]. Why is the proboscis of a locust soft [flexible]? Because it dwells among willows, and if it were hard [non-flexible] it [the proboscis] would be dislocated and it [the locust] would go blind. For Samuel said: If one wishes to blind a locust, let him extract its proboscis. Why is a fowl's [lower] eyelid bent upwards? {4} — Because it dwells among the rafters, and if dust entered [its eyes] it would go blind. {5}

1. Goats are dark coloured, while sheep are white!
2. Sheep have thick tails, which cover their hind parts; but goats have a thin tail.
3. A long tail would become entangled in the thorns.
4. Rashi: When its eyes are closed the lower eyelid turns upwards and lies upon the upper.
5. Hence this arrangement affords it the most protection.

Sorry, no otherworldly space at whose entrance the wondrous question-answerer was standing. He was at the door of his in-laws. This is not an uplifting passage. Literally, it asks you to concern yourselves with what entomologists like, such as the proboscis of a locust. And the passage quoted here is followed by an amazing list of Aramaic folk-etymologies of the kind that Western civilization associates with Isidore of Seville, who, writing in Visigothic Spain,<sup>35</sup> in his *Etymologiae* taught the forthcoming generations of the Dark Ages to think absurdly about etymologies, like some ancients did (Varro among the Romans, and Socrates in Plato's *Cratylus*).<sup>36</sup> At the end of the list of folk-etymologies, in *Shabbat* 77b, we get the information that the word *appadna* 'palace' implies *appitha din* — i.e., "at the door is judgment". Which may mean that at the King's palace justice is meted, and all come to get justice there. But it may also mean what we *did not* find in the encounter between the two rabbis at the in-laws of the one who knew it all: there is an entrance Up There, where thou shalt be judged.

<sup>34</sup> This kind of questions was much developed in *Pseudo-Sirach*, also known as the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, an early medieval humorous Hebrew text (Nissan 2009b; 2011a). The child prodigy Ben Sira answers Nebuchadnezzar's questions. I discussed in detail (2011a) the aetiological tale about why the upper lip of a bull is hairless: it was because it carried the overweight Joshua when he was riding around the walls of Jericho, and Joshua kissed the bull afterwards, so the upper lip remained smooth. There exist such medieval comic texts in the *Pseudo-Sirach* vein as the German and Latin Markolf / Morolf / Marculfus epics, and the Bertoldo cycle in Italian. These oppose a peasant trickster protagonist to a king (respectively, Solomon and Alboin) who ask him questions. We also find a non-comic counterpart of *Pseudo-Sirach*. The format of a king questioning a wiseman also typifies, indeed, the *Book of Sidrach*, a medieval French encyclopaedia composed by an anonymous lay author during the second half of the thirteenth century and which was popular well into the Renaissance (at least 63 manuscripts containing the French text are known). It is in the form of a dialogue between the Christian scholar Sidrac (a philosopher from Edinburgh) and King Boctus of Bactriana (It begins as follows, in Old French: *Au tens dou roi Boctus, au Levant roi d'une grant province...*).

<sup>35</sup> Isidore of Seville's very influential *Etymologies* is an encyclopedia arranged by subject matter, and compiled by that clergyman, saint, and Doctor of the Church between c. 615 and the early 630s.

<sup>36</sup> In Chapter 5 of his book on the quest for the perfect language, Umberto Eco has a section entitled 'Il furore etimologico'. Of examples from Isidore, Eco remarks that they instantiate what Eco (following Gérard Genette, cf. Merrim) called *mimologism* stemming from *Cratylus*: "Sono esempi di quel che abbiamo definito il mimologismo di origine cratilea, e che viene ripreso pari pari dai sostenitori dell'ebraico" ("then adopted as is by the supporters of Hebrew"), such as, in 1613, Claude Duret in his *Thrésor [sic] de l'histoire des langues de cet univers*. *Etymythologies* is the name Zuckermann gives folk-etymologizing, i.e., Eco's *mimologism*. Zuckermann has dissected the phenomenon, also when applied to nativizing loanwords as part of language planning.

Nevertheless, the encounter itself is a rather prosaic encounter between two rabbis. The questions asked are in the natural sciences, and they are extremely prosaic, even trivial. The very point is that it was their being so trivial, that required the answerer to be in a very cheerful and compliant mood. Had some deserving rabbi been rewarded with an encounter with the prophet Elijah keen on disclosing to him whatever he wished to learn, then the rabbi would presumably have asked about deep questions in mysticism or eschatology. Clearly, this is not an encounter with the prophet Elijah at the entrance of Heaven, nor is it an encounter at the entrance of Hell with, say, the Angel of Death (even he, according to legend, was on good terms with a particular rabbi, Joshua ben Levi, who cheated him).<sup>37</sup>

## 11. Answering Questions Patiently: Hillel's Precedent for Mr. Union

There is another talmudic *locus* (*Shabbat* 145b–146a) with a series of questions on the physiology and physiognomy of animals and humans, asked by Rav Ḥiyya bar Abba and answered by Rav Asi while their teacher, Rav Johanan, was napping. He wakes up as the last question (unflattering about Gentiles) is answered, rebukes his disciples, and provides himself the right answers. The last answer is about the original sing and the removal of its effects from those standing at Mt. Sinai while the Law is given. It was discussed by Urbach in *The Sages*, Sec. 15.1.

Again in the Babylonian Talmud, there is yet another place (*Shabbat* 31a) where a rabbi is made to answer a series of rather futile questions, but in that case, the purpose of the questioner was to test his patience to the limit. A man asked Hillel why, e.g., are the feet of Africans large (he apparently was referring to the mythical Sciopodes of Graeco-Roman lore, who are shaded by their enormous only foot), why are the eyes of Palmyreans (= Tharmudaeans = Thadmoraean) bleared, and why do

<sup>37</sup> The *floruit* of the historical Rabbi Joshua ben Levi was in the town of Lod (Lydda) in the Land of Israel in the early third century CE. He excelled in homiletics. According to the Babylonian Talmud at *Ketubbot* 77b, he didn't refrain from teaching Torah to persons with infective diseases, because he considered the Torah to be protective and to heal. Because of his exceeding piety, it was claimed that Elijah appeared to him often and taught him. It was even claimed that this rabbi entered Heaven alive. It is related that when his time to die had arrived, he asked the Angel of Death to show him first his place in heaven, and then also asked him to give him his knife, so he would not be scared while on the way. At the walls of Paradise, the Angel of Death raised him so he could look inside, but the rabbi jumped inside alive. He was still held by his garment, but his colleagues inside clamoured for him to stay inside. The Angel of Death asked for his knife to be returned, but it took a divine decree for that to happen (*Ketubbot* 77b). In the post-talmudic era, that story was expanded upon, in two texts: *Ma'aseh Riva"l* (i.e., *The Tale of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi*), and *Seder Gan 'Eden* (i.e., *Chapter on Heaven*).

It was also related that Rabbi Joshua ben Levi had an encounter with the Messiah, after he asked Elijah when the Messiah would come, and Elijah told him to ask him in person: he would find him (which he did) among the beggars with infirmities at one of the gates of Rome, and would recognize him because whereas the other ones took off the bandaging from their sores all together and then rebandaged them, the Messiah rebandaged himself one sore at a time, just in case he would be called out of a sudden and would have to appear immediately (*Sanhedrin* 98a). The rabbi asked him when he would come, and he replied: "Today", yet didn't come, so the rabbi complained to Elijah, who quoted to him "Today, if you will obey Him" (*Psalms* 95:7). To Urbach (*The Sages*, Ch. 17), this tale is ironic, as it took the protagonist consulting both Elijah and the Messiah to hear something that a sage his contemporary and interlocutor had stated. The motif of the Messiah with sore legs rebandaging himself was used, in his in his Yiddish play *The Golem*, by H. Leivik (Leivik Halper, who was born in Ihumen in the district of Minsk in 1888, fled Russia in 1913, and lived in New York, where he died in 1962). *Il Golem* was first written in 1921, as a dramatic epic, and then turned into a play and premièred in Moscow in 1922 by Habimah, in whose repertoire it was to remain for several decades.

Babylonians have misshapen heads, and Hillel calmly replied to the latter that this was because their midwives aren't so clever. Hillel was himself born in Babylonia, and he apparently feigned he didn't notice he was being insulted. In the end, the questioner exclaimed that because of Hillel, he had lost 400 *zuz*, and Hillel retorted that it was worth it. The man was a prankster who had bet he would go on asking Hillel questions until he would make him angry, and he lost his bet.

This anecdote about Hillel is relevant for driving in the point that to answer a series of questions like that, you need to find an answerer who is either in an especially cheerful mood, or being extremely patient. And yet, the question that Mr. Union is asked is a momentous one, and it is only one. And after all, isn't it what a trade unionist must expect?

## 12. Jacob Wanted to Sit in Peace, but Tribulations Jumped on Their Prey

By contrast to the series of rather futile questions asked in those talmudic precedents, such as "Why is a camel's tail short?" and "Why is an ox's tail long?", Rosenzweig has the man questioning Mr. Union ask a question — "Why do the workers in America not see their world in their life?" — that by cultural precedent, would have readers expect the theme to be theodicy: why do bad things befall Israel? Or: why are the righteous let to suffer in this world? (Because the righteous' reward is in the hereafter, so the pie awaiting them in the sky ought to remain intact lest when the time comes, they would be deprived of bits of it, whereas the wicked ones get a reward right away for any good deed they may have done in this world, so only punishment would await them in the hereafter.)<sup>38</sup>

I reckon that Rosenzweig's typical reader would have been reminded, however vaguely, of relevant homiletics. Probably the most accessible *locus* would have been Rashi's gloss to the beginning of the pentateuchal weekly portion *Vayyéshev* ("And he [Jacob] resided", lit. 'sat', at *Genesis* 37:1): "This is the story of Jacob: Joseph, aged seventeen", and so forth (37:2). The episode of Dinah's rape is over,<sup>39</sup> and now another sorry episode, that of Joseph's disappearance, it about to start.

<sup>38</sup> Urbach, *The Sages*, Sec. 15.3, discussed early rabbinic interpretations of sufferance, starting with an anecdote from *Sanhedrin* 101a, about Rabbi Akiva who was merry while Rabbi Eliezer, who he was visiting with other disciples of the latter, was dying. Rabbi Akiva explained that as long as he had been seeing that nothing bad befell Rabbi Eliezer in anything, he feared lest "our teacher has received 'olamo", lit. 'his world', i.e., all his reward in this world, leaving nothing for the next. The dying man showed interest, and said: "Hold me up, so I can listen to my disciple Akiva, as he said: 'Sufferance is to be cherished'. Akiva, from where did you get it?"

<sup>39</sup> See how Robin Pastorio-Newman (1993) casts in English epic verse the Dinah narrative in a U.S. social context, of feuds between rural families on the margins of the law: "Shechem saw the Sons of Jacob / take the cattle into the field / Shechem waits behind the sign / way down the road he sees her / fire-engine-red convertible / churning up the desert / he wheels his bike into the road / he kicks it over and / lies down beside it / She jumps out of her car / all bows and ribbons, she says, / *Poor Man, what happened?* / Shechem grabs her by the / neck [...]" Shechem's father thinks he can sort out the matter with Jacob while Dinah is still a prisoner: "Boss Hamor tugged at his collar / stared at his boy and for once / saw the black leather / three-piece suit, the steel-toed / cowboy boots and the scrapes— / scars all over his face. he took / a deep breath and a smile / seeped back over his teeth / *It's a done deal, he said / Let's shake on it, Jacob, / we'll meet Tuesday at Umberto's / to plan the wedding. / You'll have the calamari.*" In the end, Dinah moves to San Francisco, and "after / years of therapy she / finally sleeps until dawn / without screaming, and no / one here knows her / she's glad no one remembers / the thirteenth tribe." Dinah rebelled against patriarchy.

Rashi commented: "It was also interpreted: *Vayyéshev* ['sat'] — Jacob wanted to sit in tranquility, and the anger of (i.e., tribulations in relation to) Joseph jumped on him. The righteous ones want to sit in tranquility. The Holy One, Blessed Be He, says: 'Is it not enough, for the righteous, what awaits them in the world to come, so they want to sit in tranquility in this world!'" Rashi was rewording a passage from *Genesis Rabbah*, at pericope *Vayyéshev*, 84:1: "Rabbi Aḥa said: 'While the righteous are sitting [in] tranquility, Satan comes and utters his bill of indictment. He said: «Is it not enough, what awaits them [...]»'" and so forth.

The Hebrew idiom 'seeing one's world in one's life' is found in the Babylonian Talmud at *Berakhot* 17a, bottom: '*Olamákh tir'éh be-ḥayyékha va-ʾaḥaritákh le-h ayyéi ʾolám*, i.e., lit., "Thy world thou shalt see in thy lifetime, and thy end to life of world". In Isidore Epstein's Soncino edition of the Babylonian Talmud, in 1947 Maurice Simon translated this and the context as follows: "When the rabbis {fn.: Who had left home to study with R. Ammi} took leave from the school of R. Ammi — some say, of R. Ḥanina — they said to him: May you see your requirements provided {fn.: Lit., 'see your world'} in your lifetime, and may your latter end be for the future world and your hope for many generations" (with further blessings). About half a century earlier, Jastrow (p.1052, s.v. '*olam*') translated instead: "mayest thou see (enjoy) thy existence during thy lifetime, and thy future (reward be reserved) for the life of the world to come."

### 13. Anti-Alien Sentiment Within the Trade Unions? The Historical Context

Was Mr. Union a Gentile trade unionist, or a Jewish trade unionist? And (isn't it always on a Jew's mind?) was he an antisemite? (Which may happen whatever the answer to the first question, may it not?) And if, if he was an antisemite, did Mr. Union also explain to Rabbi Worker all those things about the locusts (these are greenhorns, right? and weren't these Jewish?), and, mark this, the locust's proboscis? Isn't this a reference to the *Jewish nose*? Sander Gilman has shown scholars how important this theme is.<sup>40</sup> Yet another question: did Gerson Rosenzweig intend all this? Perhaps he did, but which self-respecting literary critic would maintain (like the laity is likely to do) that authorial intentions are all-important?

Actually, it may be that not only Mr. Union, but also Rabbi Worker is not a rabbi: there is an Eastern European Jewish custom of using the honorific *reb* as 'Mr.' (instead of 'Mr.'), and one who does not know your name may address you as *reb yehidi*, i.e., 'Mr. Jew'. I even have a former colleague in Israel, whose Hebrew is from an older generation, and who in his Hebrew emails from Jerusalem addresses me as "Reb Ephraim", even though I was never trained for the rabbinate (he was instead, choosing a difficult subject, was ordained, and claimed that it was much more difficult than getting his Ph.D.) If *reb* as 'Mr.' is the case of the honorific in Rosenzweig's text at hand, then we have here a total transposition into the profane sphere of a situation that by generic poetic convention you would have expected to be within the sacred.

It is important to realize that Rosenzweig is distancing himself from Mr. Union. He may agree that new immigrants had no qualms in letting themselves be used as strike-breakers, thus gaining an advantage over established factory workers. But Rosenzweig may be alluding as well to anti-alien sentiment within the trade

<sup>40</sup> Gilman (1991, 1994, 1998, 1999, 2001a, 2001b). Besides, *Nose Book*, a paper collection edited by de Rijke et al. (2001), is concerned with representations of the nose in literature and the arts.

unions,<sup>41</sup> something that existed both in Britain and in the United States at the time of the wave of Jewish emigration from the Tsarist empire in the late nineteenth century. We are not told whether Mr. Union stands for Jewish or Gentile Anglo-Saxon trade unionists. Jewish trade unionists were likely to decry the indiscipline and lack of class solidarity on the part of newcomers, who would let themselves become "scabs".

In Britain in 1895, the leaflet *A Voice from the Aliens* Joseph Finn, protesting against the anti-alien resolution of the 1895 Trade Union Congress, was issued by "the organised Jewish workers of England".<sup>42</sup> It attacks the idea that immigrants in general, and Jewish workers in particular, are detrimental to British society and the conditions of its workers. According to Finn, the working class should not blame alien workers because of capitalist sins suffered by the native workers, who are not taking steps to collectivize the means of production. The following<sup>43</sup> is quoted from p. 2:

[...] The greater the producing power, the larger the surplus. The larger the surplus is, the longer is the period of unemployment. The larger the number of the unemployed, the keener and fiercer is the competition for work. Consequently, the harder are the times and the greater the sufferings of the worker. Who, then, is to be blamed? Surely we cannot blame the foreign working man, who is as much a victim of the industrial system as is the English working man. Neither can we blame the machines which displace human labour. The only party at fault is the English working class itself, which has the power, but

<sup>41</sup> New immigrants are foreign ethnics (unless they are from native group identities of Great Britain). But to Rosenzweig it was the stage of acculturation that mattered. Apart from historical anti-alienism in the trade unions, also note the use of descriptors for the ethnic Other, in a few names used by unionized workers for disliked behavior. After the American Native baby carried on his mother's back, a *papoose* is (to say it with Wentworth and Flexner, s.v.) "A nonunion worker working with union workers. *Because the nonunion worker receives the benefits won by the union workers and thus is carried 'on their back,' as a papoose is traditionally carried by his mother.*"

Only rarely does *papuso* in this sense occurs in Italian. The Italian terms *crumiro* and *crumiraggio* for 'scab' and 'scabbism' are standard instead (Devoto and Oli 1967, s.vv. *crumiraggio* and *1 crumiro*; by contrast, the entry *2 crumiro* is defined as a crescent-like little cookie of floor, egg yolks, and sugar, typical of the Monferrato region of Piedmont in northwestern Italy). The term *crumiro* was patterned (through a French conduit) after the *Khrumīr*, tribalists on the border between Algeria and Tunisia whose raids and revolts gave France the pretext for conquering Tunisia in 1881. The event was resented by Italy, because of her own rival colonial aims there (where Italy had a large emigrant community; cf. Nissan, in press, d). But the term *crumiro* in Italian is yet another example of the pervasive cultural and lexical influence that France had at the time in Italy.

<sup>42</sup> Tragically, Britain's Jews and the trade unions are again in conflict, especially as in late May 2011, the lecturers' union carried a motion denouncing the European Union's definition of antisemitism. This indicates the union's willingness to be more overt about motives, instead of always hiding behind code-words in use during the 2000s to justify U.K. unions' resegregationist formal precepts of exclusion — openly breaching extant legislation on race discrimination. Whereas in the 1890s, the argument of U.K. unions revolved around conditions in the local labour market, it is significant that by the 2000s they were rather reaffirming the old imperial episteme: some decolonised peoples are never to be genuinely sovereign, in particular the Jews, as an example for the rest. I often find members of the visible minorities in the U.K. sympathetic to this interpretation I offer of U.K. unions' boycott campaigns.

<sup>43</sup> Found at <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/modules/docs/city/> The first two pages are posted. The document is included in the papers of William Weiss; document reference: MSS.240W/4/2/9, at the Library of the University of Warwick, England. The website is introduced as follows: "The Modern Records Centre holds nationally important collections for the study of political, social and economic history. Just a small selection of documents relevant to the course 'The Victorian City' are shown below, organised into six sections — 'Crime and punishment', 'Employment and trade unionism', 'Housing and welfare', 'Immigration and the Jewish community', 'Political revolt and reform', and 'Women'. Most archive collections at the Centre come from trade unions, employers' organisations or individuals involved in the labour movement. Many of the documents below therefore reflect the attitudes and opinions of the political left."

neither the sense nor courage, to make the machines serve and benefit the whole nation, instead of leaving them as a source of profit for one class. To punish the alien worker for the sin of the native capitalist is like the man who struck the boy because he was not strong enough to strike his father.

We will assume for the sake of the argument, that the foreign worker *is* injurious to the English worker, and that the Government will prohibit him from coming here. What then? England as a Free Trade country would thereby suffer severely; because the same commodities which the foreign worker used to produce here (being at the same time a source of income to the country), he will then produce abroad — much cheaper, too, because the cost of living is lower there. Those commodities will then be imported here. Will this benefit the nation? Let Mr. Freak and Mr. Inskip answer.

The Freakians and Inskipians claim that the immigration of workers from other countries over-gluts the labour market, displaces English labour, and reduces the wages of the native workmen. From this it would logically follow that the emigration of workers from the country would have the contrary effect, *i.e.*, would relieve the market, and thus bring on good times. [...]

#### 14. Greenhorns All Over the Place

Mr. Union argument against immigrants is grounded in the poverty of local workers. Anti-alienism was of course also rampant among the better classes, as we are going to see. As to present-day anti-alienism in rich societies, consider what not 1890s socialists such as Finn, but early rabbinic homiletics had to say about the inhabitants of the rich town of Sodom (*Tosefta* 3:6–11): "They said: 'As silver and gold come [*i.e.*, sprout] out of our land, we have no need for any person to come to our place, as they would only come to lessen what we have'. The Holy One told them: 'Through the good I bestowed on you, you are casting into oblivion the leg [of foreigners] among you? I shall cast *you* into oblivion from the world!'",<sup>44</sup> by interpreting homiletically *Job* 28:4–6.

Mr. Union complains about there being greenhorns (*yerikim*) all over the place, but Rosenzweig seems to say that it could not be otherwise. *Yerakon*, 'jaundice', 'greenness', the 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*. In Chapter 2 of *Tractate America* we are told: "It is stated: When Moses cursed Israel and said (*Deuteronomy* 28): 'The L-rd shall smite you with *yerakon* [green ailment]',"<sup>45</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*".<sup>46</sup>

This recycles the wording and plot of a legend from the Babylonian Talmud, *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).

A potential Rosenzweig does not appear to have exploited, or at any rate, not explicitly, is that according to *Shabbat* 33a, "*yerakon* is a symptom of hatred in vain". This intertextual reference enriches the reading of Mr. Union apportioning to the greenhorns (*yerikim*) the blame for the ills of the working class. Moreover, "All faces

<sup>44</sup> Urbach (1979) discussed this passage from *Tosefta* in his *The Sages*, Section 15.2.

<sup>45</sup> Rosner (1972) tried to identify the biblical *yerakon*.

<sup>46</sup> Rosenzweig postures as though Columbus saw the place of the future New York. The writer was taking liberties, like Cesare Pascarella (1858–1940) did in his own humorous myth of the discovery of America, in his 1894 epic in sonnets in the Roman dialect, *La scoperta de l'America*. See Haller (1992); Bosello (2007); Nissan (submitted, a).

will turn to *yerakon*" (*Jeremiah* 30:6, discussed in *Sanhedrin* 98b) could be playfully understood as: "Everybody goes to New York" — the port of entry into the United States.

### 15. Even If Given All the Treasures of the World? Its Secret Processes Are Revealed

We have seen that Rosenzweig has a "*Reb Worker*" encounter "Mr. Union" and, finding him cheerful, so much so that he could ask him for virtually anything, inquired with him about the dispiriting state of the working class. What I am now rendering as "virtually everything", in Rosenzweig's text is expressed as *halelei 'almo*, a noun phrase that means "the underground treasures of the world" in *Sanhedrin* 97a and *Bava Metsi'a* 49a, whereas in *Shabbat* 77b one finds "if they asked him all *halelei 'almo*", which in that particular context, Jastrow (471, col. 1, top) renders as "about all the secret processes of nature".<sup>47</sup> The intertextuality of this idiom is reasonably limited, as there are just three *relevant loci* in the Babylonian Talmud, and yet, these are enough to enrich the reading of Rosenzweig's passage enormously.

In Chapter 3 of *Tractate America*, the individual worker finds "Mr. Union" in a cheerful mood, and this is why the former could ask for much: it could be all the riches in the world, or then it may merely be more immaterial goods, explanations for all the secrets of the world. It is the worker character, then, who is hypothetically allowed to be greedy, whereas "Mr. Union" would gladly part with all those (material or ideational) riches upon request. "Mr. Union" is therefore on a part with the two rabbis from the Talmud who would rather renounce all the riches in the world rather than being untruthful.

In *Sanhedrin* 97a, we are told about the town of Qushta (Truth), where nobody ever told lies, and it is in that context that a tradent is mentioned "who, even if he were given all the treasures of the world, would not lie", and who informs Raba, a famous rabbi, who was dispirited because it appeared to him to be the case that truth is not of this world, as no person always speaks the truth. Brackets are from the Soncino English translation of the Babylonian Talmud:

Raba said: I used to think at first that there is no truth in the world. Whereupon one of the Rabbis, by name of R. Tabuth — others say, by name of R. Tabyomi — who, even if he were given all the treasures of the world, would not lie, told me that he once came to a place called Kushta, in which no one ever told lies, and where no man ever died before his time. Now, he married one of their women, by whom he had two sons. One day his wife was sitting and washing her hair, when a neighbour came and knocked at the door. Thinking to himself that it would not be etiquette [to tell her that his wife was washing herself], he called out, 'She is not here.' [As a punishment for this] his two sons died. Then people of that town came to him and questioned him, 'What is the cause of this?' So he related to them what had happened. 'We pray thee,' they answered, 'quit this town, and do not incite Death against us.'

<sup>47</sup> An anonymous referee pointed out that Rashi's medieval gloss to the Babylonian Talmud at *Shabbat* 77b has *בכל חלל העולם דברים הנעשים* "things done in the entire space of the world", that is to say, a wide contemplation of how the world proceeds and of the marvellous or hidden things that happen in it. The referee added (in agreement with my own understanding of Rosenzweig's text and use of intertextuality) that likewise, the difficult life and daily routine of the immigrants calls for contemplation.

They actually *did* take liberties with truth, because what the translator rendered with "do not incite Death against us", on the evidence of the original (and the translator's note) literally meant: "do not incite Death against these men", thus avoiding the first person, lest it would attract the very thing they were afraid of.

## 16. "Have you Poppy Seed for Sale?" Rather Than Being Untruthful

In *Bava Metsi'a* 49a, we are told about another character who, he, too, would rather renounce all the treasures in the world, than be untruthful (in this case, by breaking his word):

A certain man gave money for poppy seed. Subsequently poppy seed advanced in price, so he [the vendor] retracted and said, 'I have no poppy seed: take back your money.' But he would not take his money, and it was stolen. When they came before Raba, he said he him: Since he said to you, 'Take back your money,' and you would not, not only is he not accounted a paid bailee. but he is not even a gratuitous bailee. Thereupon the Rabbis protested before Raba: But he [the vendor] would have had to submit to [the curse] 'He who punished'! — He replied: That is even so.

R. Papi said: Rabina told me, 'One of the Rabbis, named R. Tabuth — others state, R. Samuel b. Zutra — who, if he were given all the underground treasures of the world would not break his word, told me: That incident happened with me. That day was Sabbath eve, and I was sitting when a certain man came, stood at the threshold, and asked me, "Have you poppy seed for sale?"

Consider the structure of the poppy seed story. That story had two parts to it: first, we are told the story from the buyer's perspective. In the second part, a character who is declared to be squeak clean claims that he was the vendor. According to the first part of the story, the buyer did not accept his money back, because he could not live with the word that the vendor had given him, being breached. Therefore, when the vendor lost the money, and at any rate claimed it was stolen from him (he could as well have tacitly confiscated it), the buyer had no claim on him as one who was guarding his property (a paid bailee is responsible for theft). There is no legal way to force the vendor who retracted his word, to keep it, but the Sages had devised an intimidatory formula invoking divine retribution, and this is told earlier on that very page of the Talmud: "He who punished the generations of the Flood and of Dispersion, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Egyptians at the [Red] Sea, He will exact vengeance of him who does not stand by his word". The translator of this tractate in the Soncino edition (Epstein 1935–1952) added to "But he [the vendor] would have had to submit to [the curse] 'He who punished'!" this note: "And possibly he would not have submitted, in which case it was his money that was lost."

Lo and behold, earlier on that same page of the Talmud (unsurprisingly, as tractate *Bava Metsi'a* is precisely where you would expect the norms about hired workers to be stated), one finds a story about an employer who (if you would rather adopt an uncharitable reading) is willing to be impossibly good to the menial workers in his employment (so much they are deserving as fellow-Jews), and in his exceeding goodness sees to it that a limitation of his duties toward them is enshrined in a verbal contract, so that they would not expect who knows what, and that there would be no breach of faith:

It once happened that R. Johanan b. Mathia said to his son, 'Go out and engage labourers.' He went, and agreed to supply them with food. But on his returning to his father, the latter said, 'My son, should you even prepare for them a banquet like

Solomon's when in his glory, you cannot fulfil your undertaking, for they are children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But, before they commence work, go out and tell them, "[I engage you] on condition that you have no claim upon me other than bread and beans." Now, if you should think that words involve a breach of faith, how could he say to him, 'Go and withdraw'? — There it is different, for the labourers themselves did not rely [upon him]. Why? Because they knew full well that he himself was dependent upon his father. If so, even if they had [already] commenced work, it is also thus! — Once they have commenced work, they certainly rely [upon him], for they reason: He must have reported to his father, who agreed thereto.

The translator's notes in the Soncino edition explain that the workers knew full well "that the terms he offered were subject to his father's ratification." "It is also thus!" gets this explanation: "He could still withdraw: why then was he particular that this stipulation should be made before they began?". But let us go back to the poppy seed story. In its second part, a spotless rabbi character claims for himself the role of the vendor in that very same story. And he is one who would never ever break his word! (except on that special occasion). There is more to this. The personal name *Tabuth* has a transparent literal meaning in Hebrew and Aramaic, from 'goodness'. But Babylonia at the time of the Sages of the Talmud was under Persian rule, Persian was spoken along with Aramaic, and in Persian, *Tabuth* would rather remind of *tabúč*, a bier in which one who is dead would be carried. A traditional Judaeo-Persian formula mentions that the evil Haman, the villain of the festival of Purim, in the end only remedied a *tabúč* for himself. There is little reason to suppose that the editors of the Babylonian Talmud were unaware of the term, as Mesopotamia was then under Persian rule. It has been shown that a few Persianisms containing *č* do occur in the Babylonian Talmud.<sup>48</sup>

This sinister double sense of the personal name ambiguous character *Tabuth* (spotless, or a villain? would he do you good, as the Aramaic etymology of his name would have it, or would he cause you to be, G-d forbend, carried away in a bier, as a Persian pun would suggest?) certainly eluded European learners of the Talmud, and almost certainly almost every Levantine Jew engaged with the same text. But it so enriches the reception of the text, that it's worth pointing out. It was certainly beyond Rosenzweig's authorial intentions, but perhaps, just perhaps, it was not beyond the authorial intentions of the editors of the Babylonian Talmud. The odds are that this is an instance of creative overreading. On the face of it, the talmudic text dispels the suspect that the vendor may have been dishonest. Paradoxically, however, the vendor in the story did *not* keep his word, and yet the character who claims that *he* was the vendor, is stated to always stand by his word. *Tertium datur*: perhaps he was misidentifying somebody's else experience as his own?

<sup>48</sup> The Orientalist H.L. Fleischer — in his comments to J. Levy's German dictionary (1889–1876) of talmudic Hebrew and Aramaic — was given credit by Kutscher (1972, on p. 7 in Hebrew, and in English in §6 on p. IV in the English extended abstract) for showing that one finds in the Babylonian Talmud Persianisms including non-Semitic phonology, including Persian *čarak* 'expedient', Aramaicized as *čárqa*, but (for all of its traditionally being given the same meaning) it is traditionally read *tatsdeka* (by mistaking the letter for *r* for the similar letter for *d*). And including even (in the garb of a word deceptively spelled in the Hebrew alphabet as *tšhr*) the Persian numeral *čahár* 'four' (a derivative of the latter penetrated Iraqi Judaeo-Arabic up to the present: *čáRak* 'one quarter', with *R* standing for a rolling *r*, and which to Iraqi Jews occurs, e.g., in their idiom for 'a quarter past eleven'). The noun *tabūč* 'bier' is also in use in Baghdadi Judaeo-Arabic. For Iraqi Jews, in their traditional pronunciation of Hebrew, the phoneme /b/ between vowels or at the end of a syllable is the phonetic value [b], and does not result in the allophone [v] like among other Jews. As to the talmudic personal name *Tabuth*, in Ashkenazi pronunciation it is *Tóvis* or *Túvis*, whereas for Iraqi Jews it is *Tabúθ*. This sounds differently from *tabúč* in both the initial and last consonants.

## 17. Going on Strike (Your Wife Will Strike You for That)

After Mr. Union has answered *Reb Worker's* question, the text of Chapter 3 of *Tractate America* proceeds: "What is *bizzah*? That the workers *mebazezin* (waste) their force in vain. [What is] *slq*? That they go away (*mistalqin* [reflexive participle from root *slq*]) from work and starve to death. [What is] *strike*? As when they leave their work, their wives and their children *sotrin* (strike, slap) them on their faces, and force them to take back their divorcee". The latter is a sarcastic allusion to a situation from marriage law. The divorcee is the workplace the workers had abandoned.

Moreover, arguably the difficulties in earning a living were destabilizing family life, which was already vulnerable to the circumstances of migration and thus dislocation in several spheres of human life. In particular, the husband and father who not only fails to earn a decent salary, but is also striking could easily be perceived by those he had to maintain as irresponsibly failing in his adult male role, of husband and father.

Concerning overcrowding in Jewish tenements in the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Goldberg states (2011, p. 27):

Such heavy population pressure restricted privacy and could only exacerbate interpersonal tensions, thus tearing at the fabric of family life. The relationships between husband and wife, parents and children, already strained by the circumstances of immigrant life, suffered still more under the press of people.

The very idea that a wife would retaliate against a striking husband also occurs in an Italian song written and sung by the famous singer Adriano Celentano and his wife, presented as early as 1964, but relaunched in the aftermath of 1968, namely, Italy's period of extremely conflict-ridden employee relations. The refrain of the song was "'Chi non lavora, / non fa l'amore!' / Questo mi ha detto / ieri mia moglie!" ("He who does not work, / Shall make no love.' / This I was told yesterday by my wife."). It was sung twice, as early as the song's beginning, and the melody made the most of the scansion of the hemistichs in these lyrics. The wife is assertive, and the husband is resigned to this. Of course, Italy's leading trade union and other leftists were incensed by the song, as it appeared to be sabotaging their efforts at the *autunno caldo* (hot autumn) of 1969 and later. The music and the refrain made the song memorable. The first stanza is quite relevant for the point Rosenzweig appears to be making. The Italian lyrics of the first stanza state: "A casa stanco ieri ritornai / mi son seduto... niente c'era in tavola / arrabbiata lei mi grida che ho scioperato due giorni su tre... / Coi soldi che le dò non ce la fa più / ed ha deciso che, lei fa lo sciopero contro di me!" ("Yesterday, weary, I went home / I sat down... nothing was on the table. / She was mad at me, she shouted I had been on strike two days on three... / With the money I give her, she cannot make ends meet. / So she has decided: she is on strike against me!") The following stanza however is no longer similar to what Rosenzweig was agreeing about. Celentano's little known stanzas (as opposed to the famous refrain), at the second stanza (and now we can fully understand the angry reactions) relate that the narrator became a scab (even though, of course, he doesn't use the word for it, *crumiro*): he went to work while the others were striking. Punched (in retaliation), he had to walk to the Emergency, as also the tramway was on strike. Even the doctor wasn't there (also on strike). The song ends with these words: "Dammi l'aumento signor padrone / così vedrai che in casa tua / e in ogni casa entra l'amore." ("Give me a raise, Mr. Boss, / You'll see, once you do:

into your home / and into any other home, love will come." Hardly an inspiring or uplifting ending.

In 1874, the New York-based Thomas Nast,<sup>49</sup> an opponent of the trade unions, published a cartoon (Dewey 2007, p. 231) — entitled 'The Emancipator of Labor and the Honest Working People' — in which a worker (whom his wife and child try to dissuade) is being tempted by a skull-faced human figure. The latter has a skeletonized left hand, and a right hand deformed by death, and otherwise has its body fully covered by garments. The sash on that demonic figure's chest is inscribed COMMUNISTS and is kept in place by a buckle with depicted skull and crossbones: a depiction within the cartoon, that functions as a *mise en abyme*<sup>50</sup> with the added element that the two bones under that smaller skull constitute with it the symbol of piracy. On the far left in the cartoon, the woman looks at her husband who does not return her gaze and is attracted to the demonic character. The wife has her right hand under her husband's left armpit, and the ends of fingers of her left hand are visible gripping her husband's body, whose back we see. As to the child, frightened, also to the far left of the cartoon, he embraces his father's left leg. At the far right, under the skeleton's extended left arm, one sees a sign (COMMITTEE / OF / SAFETY), with club wielding men and a man threatened by one of them, whereas above the skeleton's arm, beyond a tree, one sees a tall building, apparently with people on top, and with FOREIGN / WEINS (*sic*) on its façade. Arguably FOREIGN sends a message.

Dewey (2007) captions another cartoon, on p. 232: "In 1886, [Joseph] Keppler was sufficiently sympathetic to the unions to praise Knights of Labor leader Terence Powderly for giving the back of his hand to both a scab and an employer." Those two characters are labelled accordingly. On the next page in Dewey's book, a cartoon by Keppler is shown, with Powderly as a robotic character, his legs turned into metal bars nailed to the floor, and his hands holding a huge hammer tied to his neck, and labelled STRIKE — above the body of a man with closed eyes, tied to an altar-like anvil. The ribbons tying him, pulled by his own hands, are labelled TIES OF NECESSITY. Dewey's caption is: "Four years later, the same Keppler decided it was the worker

<sup>49</sup> The cartoonist Thomas Nast (1840–1902), who in New York politics was especially an obsessive enemy of William Tweed's Tammany Hall (see Keller 1968 on Nast's art and politics), was both a nasty antisemite (Dewey 2007, p. 30) and a rabid anti-Catholic. He also was a supporter of Abraham Lincoln (and by wishful thinking, expected him to eventually reveal himself as an antisemite, which Lincoln was not), and a supporter of the Italian Risorgimento (which itself was in conflict with the Pope's policies). In Nissan (2008b), I analysed a cartoon by Nast that represented Catholic education in New York as a children sacrifice to monsters swimming in the river, with the bodies of men but wearing bishop mitres that open like crocodile jaws. As to American cartoonists' antisemitism: "Toward the end of the century, the money theme was gradually transferred to the second-wave immigrants from eastern parts of Europe, but on a lower social scale. The German Jew thought about nothing but money from within his store or medical studio; the Russian Jew exhibited the same single-mindedness while peddling cheap goods on the street" (Dewey 2007, p. 31).

Both Thomas Nast and Joseph Keppler, another prominent American cartoonist of the same generation, were born as Catholics in Germany, and turned against that religion while in the U.S. (Dewey 2007, pp. 26, 29). Keppler's pet hatred was for Irish immigrants; he captioned an allegorical cartoon of his in *Puck* of 7 June 1882, showing an Irish boarder shouting at Uncle Sam (see Fig. 6 below), with the following: "The raw Irishman in America is a nuisance, his son a curse. They never assimilate; the second generation simply shows an intensification of all the bad qualities of the first ... They are a burden and a misery to this country. The time has come to clear the Irishman from 'Uncle Sam's Lodging'" (see Soper 2005, pp. 265–266).

<sup>50</sup> On the *mise en abyme* as a device in either visual art or text, see e.g. Nelles (2005); J. White (2001); Hallyn (1980).

who was caught between Powderly's hammer and Capital's anvil." Here strike is represented as a kind of human sacrifice.<sup>51</sup>



Fig. 5. A skull-faced trade-unionist is tempting a worker, in a 1874 cartoon from New York, by Thomas Nast.

<sup>51</sup> Generally speaking, even the passage in the U.S. of the Wagner Act in 1935 did not change the judiciary's basic values and underlying assumptions concerning labour, and therefore "judges in common law jurisdictions such as the US and the UK tend to interpret protective legislation for workers more with an eye to limiting their incursion into managerial prerogatives than to ensure that they are given a purposive interpretation" (Anderman 1987, p. 547). For all of the social change since Rosenzweig times, there are gripping sides to his social fresco that have not lost their relevance for the present. By contrast, there are aspects of material culture that are no longer current. In Chapter 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* or *karbal*), patterned after the noun *krblt* (*karbólet*, Ashkenazic *karboyles*, 'cock's comb'). See on this in Nissan (2008c).

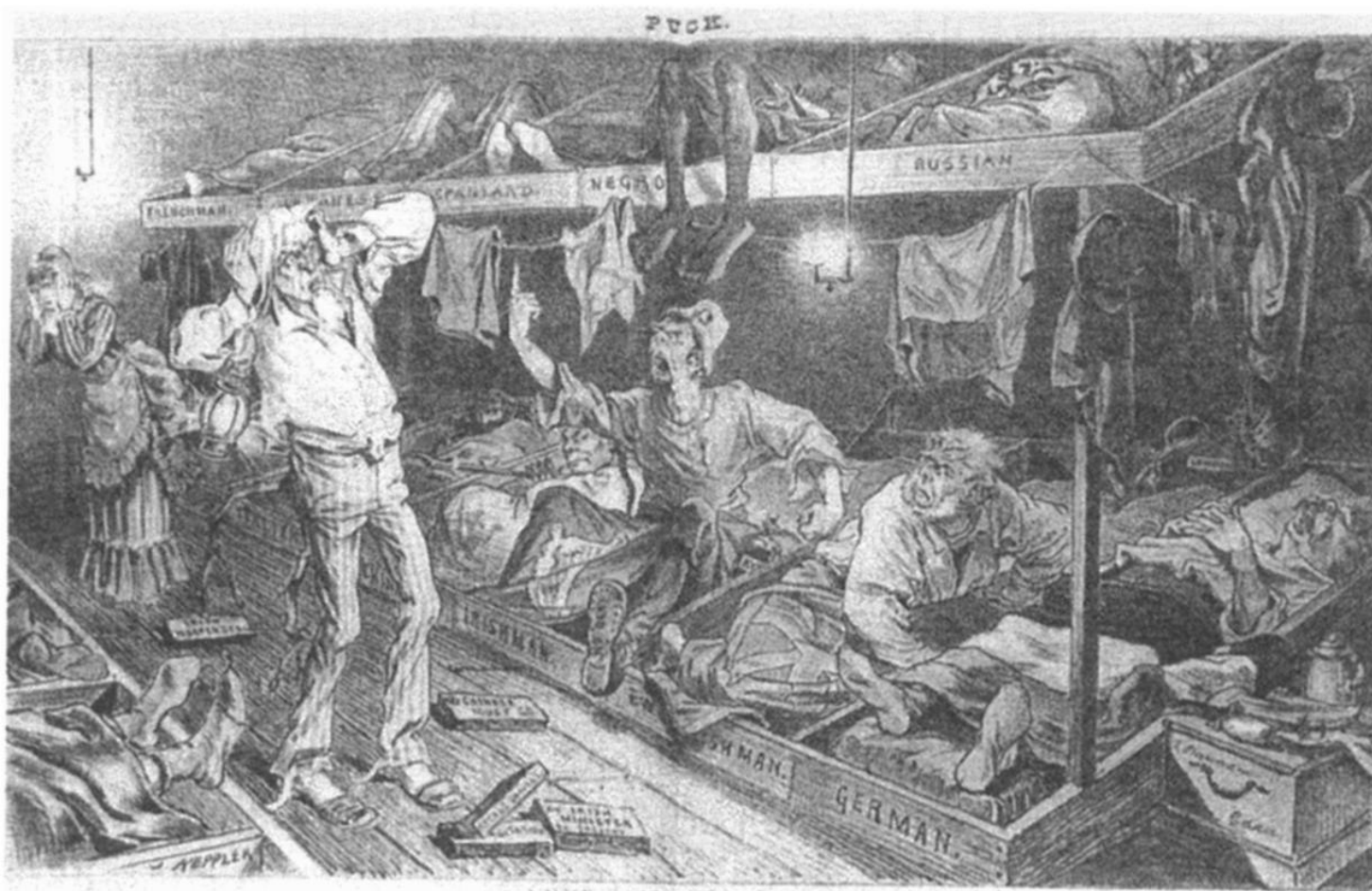


Fig. 6. In this cartoon by Joseph Keppler (from *Puck*, 7 June 1882), Uncle Sam is horrified by the Irishman who, alone among the other ethnic immigrants, complains about the boarding he provides at his establishment (i.e., conditions within U.S. society). Cf. Soper (2005, p. 266).

Keppler, the cartoonist, was punning on the sense of the word *strike*: the robot-like character is about to strike with a huge hammer the intended sacrificial victim, the worker tied to the anvil. Rosenzweig was also punning about the word *strike* (spelled in the Hebrew script as <stryq>): the striking workers' wives and their children *sotrin* <swtryn> (strike, slap) them. Rosenzweig, however, is nowhere horrific. Rosenzweig manages to be incisively satirical without ceasing to be *debonnaire*. His virtuosity and critique with the refusal to be wicked is what makes him endearing.

Goldberg has much to say about the personal toll of immigrant Jewish families' poor working conditions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the slums of the East Coast (Goldberg 2011, p. 29).

Further complicating the New York City and Philadelphia housing situations was the intimate relation between home and work. The massive influx of immigrants to America coincided with the transformation of clothing manufacturing to a mass production and distribution industry. [...] There were other factors making the garment industry a Jewish enclave.

For example: "Family integrity could be maintained because work was performed in the tenement apartment", and "the business placed few language demands on its employees, for Yiddish was the medium of exchange" (*ibid.*). "Tenement apartments became workshops, with father in the front room treading the sewing machine, the children around him basting and finishing, and mother pressing the completed garment in the kitchen" (*ibid.*). Or then, workers were assembled in one or more apartments. "At the pinnacle of the sweatshop system were the relatively few factories which occupied several floors or an entire apartment building" (Goldberg 2011, p. 30). "Tuberculosis was so common in the garment industry that it was known as the 'tailor's disease'" (Goldberg 2011, p. 33). "The sweatshop maimed its inmates physically as well as psychologically" (*ibid.*). "Deplorable and humiliating working conditions accompanied low wages and long hours" (*ibid.*, p. 30). For example, in the garment industry: "Employees were docked for toilet visits and fined if supervisors believed they wasted time" (*ibid.*). Moreover (*ibid.*):

Talking was forbidden and workers fined for lateness, staring out windows, and laughing. In addition, workers paid fees for lockers, stools, needles, and for the electricity to power their sewing machines. Less obvious but more exploitative was the speed-up which demanded increased output without matching pay raises.

"Employers also aggravated firetrap conditions by boarding up windows to eliminate distractions and locking doors to prevent absenteeism" (Goldberg 2011, p. 32), resulting in tragedies such as the life toll of the fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company on Saturday, 25 March 1911. As the doors were bolted from the outside, and the windows nailed shut, for many there was no escape. "In eighteen minutes the fire claimed 146 lives, mostly Jewish and Italian women between the ages of thirteen and twenty-three years" (*ibid.*). Employers control over their workforce included resorting to blacklists, scabs, lockout, and company spies (Goldberg 2011, p. 32).

The law stood behind the owners and their efforts to keep workers powerless. During a 1909 garment industry strike, a judge sentenced two women to scrub floors at the Blackwell Island workhouse in New York with these words: "You are on strike against G[-]d and Nature; whose primary law is that man should earn his bread in the sweat of his brow." (Goldberg 2011, p. 32, citing Newman 1977, pp. 301–302).

Laws for the protection of workers passed at the state level had to be repealed because at the federal level they were considered unconstitutional. Whereas

antitrust laws were effective, state laws regulating work conditions (such as hours and wages) were struck down by the Supreme Court. The basis for this was the Due Process Clause in the Fifth and Fourteenth amendments. The Due Process Clause states: "No person shall be [...] deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law." Businesses are property. The pursuit of business success was regarded by the Supreme Court as a protected liberty, which under the Due Process Clause could not constitutionally be subjected to government control. In *Lochner vs. New York* (1905), the Supreme Court found against New York State, disallowing the regulation of work conditions. The Court used the Due Process Clause to protect freedom of contract.

Let us say something about the history of trade unionism, and Jewish involvement in it, in the United States. Consider for example Samuel Gompers (1850–1924). He was the British-born Jewish founder and first president of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). He is the subject of Kaufman (1973). Mark Joy points out (2011, p. 469):

Two labor leaders he worked with in the union, Adolph Strasser and Ferdinand Laurrell, were instrumental in leading Gompers to embrace the ideals of trade unionism, in which skilled workers organized their own unions within their trades or craft specialties. These unions represented only the skilled workers and often charged relatively high dues, but they sought to provide a strike fund and other benefits out of the money collected.

Already in the 1870s, Gompers was a national leader of the Cigar Makers' International Union. In 1881, he and other national labour leaders formed a first umbrella organization for trade unions from the United States and Canada, but it had little support. In 1886, it was replaced with the AFL, "a coalition of trade unions, and only trade unions, rather than universal workers' organizations, such as the Knights of Labor, were allowed to join" (*ibid.*). "By 1894, more than a quarter of a million workers belonged to the AFL" (*ibid.*). "Skilled workers, who could not be easily replaced by employers, often questioned why they should strike or take other job actions in order to protect the jobs of unskilled workers" (*ibid.*). Such understandings were in place at the time when Rosenzweig was writing *Tractate America*. Nicholson (2004) is a history of organised labour in the United States.

## 18. Women's Work

Next, Rosenzweig elaborates on "men and women" in the pseudo-Mishnah. His pseudo-Gemara explains: "And women, have they the duty to work? We have learned that all women in America, it is enough what they do at home for their husbands, for their children, and for their tenants". In fact, having tenants at home was a side earner. "There is no contradiction: here it is about married women, and there it is about unmarried women." Then Rosenzweig introduces through talmudic formulae the notion that "work at home is really called 'work', and as Rav Mevino [Rabbi Maven] said: 'It is great, the work that a woman does at home, as everything that a Canaanite maidservant was doing for her owner, a woman in America does by herself'. Rosenzweig then lists chores, then remarks that women were given work in excess with respect to men, and the verse which in genesis states Eve's punishment is quoted: the pains of a woman are greater.

Concerning serving tenants, a punning clarification of *bardarin* ('tenants') is ascribed to Rav Safro (Rabbi Teacher)<sup>52</sup> who is made to say that "‹myswt› ('the missus', Mrs.) of Rav Rokhlo (Rabbi Peddler) told me that it like what we have learned: the one who *medayyer* his field". The Hebrew participle denoting the action of letting cattle live on one's field, so that it be strewn with manure. Whereas this is good for a farmer, of course it is disaster for a lady who has tenants at home. "The street activity on the Lower East End never failed to draw the attention of observers. The sidewalks were crowded spaces filled with people buying, socializing, arguing, or merely lounging. [...] Few strangers, however, connected the rich street life with the need residents felt to escape their tenement homes" (Goldberg 2011, p. 26). "Most New York City Jews lived in tenement houses narrowed at the center and constructed in the shape of a dumbbell" (*ibid.*), a format that won a competition in 1879 for the design optimizing utilization of the standard city lot (21 feet by 100 feet).

There was an air shaft between adjacent buildings, for giving some (indirect) light and air to such rooms that were on neither the façade nor the back, but it became a trash receptacle, a hazard in several respects, including hastening the spread of fires. The dumbbell tenement design was mass-produced, but its effects on living standards, hygiene, and safety were so dire, that it was outlawed in 1901 (*ibid.*), when Old Law tenements (especially dumbbell tenements) were succeeded by New Law tenements. In tenements built under the Old Law — i.e., the Second Tenement House Act (1879) — rooms were seven feet by eight feet, bathrooms were on the landing outside apartments, stairs were often broken and unsafe, and families typically rented living space to lodgers, to increase their income. "To make ends meet, homes were opened to boarders, second jobs were found, and children who could earn \$1.50 for a six-day week were sent into the sweatshops" (*ibid.*, p. 30).

Such renting to boarders resulted in further overcrowding of tenements housing poor families with many children (Goldberg 2011, p. 27). "There was an average density in 1910 of 600 persons per acre in the Lower East Side with some areas registering as many as 1,000 inhabitants per acre. Jewish sections ranked second, third, fourth, and fifth in population density among Manhattan's twenty-two wards" (*ibid.*). "In the better tenements two water closets were provided for each floor. Many, however, had only a sink in the hallway for washing, bathing, and drinking. Backyard privies, often neglected and filthy, constituted a significant health hazard" (Goldberg 2011, pp. 26–27). "Philadelphia, which sheltered the second largest Jewish community in America, offered different living arrangements yet problems of a similar sort" (Goldberg 2011, p. 27).

Women's work and family roles in the United States from 1900 to 1940 were discussed by Dimmit. Lamphere is concerned with immigrant women in a New England industrial community — Central Falls, Rhode Island — and their coping with both work and motherhood. In Victorian Britain, the better classes could afford to berate as "unnatural mothers" those working-class women who found themselves compelled to be working mothers.

Nevertheless, some women of the better classes sought a career: in the United States, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Women and Economics*, which upon its appearance in 1898 made that 38-year-old into a celebrity, was a milestone for thinking about women's place in society (Gilman 1998 [1898]). In *Women and Economics*, pp. 20–21, she had this to say, concerning homemaking (*ibid.*, p. 20): "It

<sup>52</sup> Aramaic *sifra* (Ashkenazic pronunciation: *sifro*) means 'book', but *safrā* (Ashkenazic pronunciation: *safro*) means 'teacher'.

is not motherhood that keeps the housewife on her feet from dawn till dark; it is house service, not child service. Women work longer and harder than most men, and not solely in maternal duties." And then (*ibid.*, p. 20): "And the women who are not so occupied, the women who belong to rich men, — here perhaps is the exhaustive devotion to maternity which is supposed to justify an admitted economic dependence." But (*ibid.*, pp. 20–21):

In spite of her supposed segregation to maternal duties, the human female, the world over, works at extra-maternal duties for hours enough to provide her with an independent living, and then is denied independence on the ground that motherhood prevents her working!

Herself from a well-to-do family and of a distinguished American lineage, Charlotte Perkins Gilman pursued a socially visible career not out of want, thus unlike the *Tractate America's* Jewish women working to eke a living. In their introduction to the centenary edition, of 1998, of *Women and Economics*, Michael Kimmel and Amy Aronson remarked that that author, who called New York "that unnatural city where every one is an exile", especially disliked that city because of she found there so many Jews:

Her major nativist nemesis remained the Jews. Gilman's anti-Semitism was pronounced and consistent throughout her life. Claiming that New York City, where she had never enjoyed living, had become one-third Jewish by 1920, she declared herself pleased to leave, to "escape forever this hideous city — and its Jews. The nerve-wearing noise — the dirt — the ugliness, the steaming masses in the subway." Her anti-Semitism again surfaced when she considered the Russian Revolution. Bolshevism, she said, was a "Russian-Jewish nightmare."

And mention the Jews she did in *Women and Economics*, too, as early as Chapter 1, but as corruptors of society through moneylending.<sup>53</sup> They had become specialised, she claimed, like the animal kinds in nature. The Jewish masses of New York hadn't come into her personal picture as yet. Figures 7 and 8 illustrate how the tenement houses of the poor looked like, in New York City. We also explain the difference between Old Law and New Law, concerning the design of the tenements.

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<sup>53</sup> "The sheep, the cow, the deer, differ in their adaptation to the weather, their locomotive ability, their means of defence; but they agree in main characteristics, because of their common method of nutrition. ¶ The human animal is no exception to this rule. Climate affects him, weather affects him, enemies affect him; but most of all he is affected, like every other living creature, by what he does for his living. Under all the influence of his later and wider life, all the reactive effect of social institutions, the individual is still inexorably modified by his means of livelihood: "the hand of the dyer is subdued to what he works in." As one clear, world-known instance of the effect of economic conditions upon the human creature, note the marked race-modification of the Hebrew people under the enforced restrictions of the last two thousand years. Here is a people rising to national prominence, first as a pastoral, and then as an agricultural nation; only partially commercial through race affinity with the Phoenicians, the pioneer traders of the world. Under the social power of a united Christendom — united at least in this most unchristian deed — the Jew was forced to get his livelihood by commercial methods solely. Many effects can be traced in him to the fierce pressure of the social conditions to which he was subjected: the intense family devotion of a people who had no country, no king, no room for joy and pride except the family; the reduced size and tremendous vitality and endurance of the pitilessly selected survivors of the Ghetto; the repeated bursts of erratic genius from the human spirit so inhumanly restrained. But more patent still is the effect of the economic conditions, — the artificial development of a race of traders and dealers in money, from the lowest pawnbroker to the house of Rothschild; a special kind of people, bred of the economic environment in which they were compelled to live. ¶ One rough but familiar instance of the same effect, from the same cause, we can all see in the marked distinction between the pastoral, the agricultural, and the manufacturing classes in any nation, though their other conditions be the same." (Gilman 1998 [1898]).



Fig. 7. Photograph taken by Jacob Riis (1849–1914) for *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), a book 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)



Fig. 8. Old Law tenement in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. From Wikimedia Commons.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>54</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:LowerEastSideTenements.JPG> Photograph of 2004, placed in the public domain by its contributor, Moncrief.

The following is quoted from the Wikipedia entry for 'Old Law Tenement':<sup>55</sup>

The 1879 law required that every inhabitable room have a window opening to plain air, a requirement that was met by including air shafts between adjacent buildings. Old Law Tenements are commonly called "dumbbell tenements" after the shape of the building footprint: the air shaft gives each tenement the narrow-waisted shape of a dumbbell, wide facing the street and backyard, narrowed in between to create the air corridor. They were built in great numbers to accommodate waves of immigrating Europeans from troubled nations. The side streets of Manhattan's Lower East Side are lined with dumbbell structures. [...] The 1879 Act was a response to the failure of the 1867 Tenement House Act which merely required a window in each room. [...] The symmetrical floor plan of the typical Old Law Tenement included four virtually identical apartments per floor, three rooms each, with the entry opening to the kitchen containing a wash tub alongside a sink opposite a wood-burning stove feeding into a flue. Two bathrooms were located on the landing in the hallway for common use."

Dumbbell tenements had four apartments sharing a corridor, and in the middle the house plan was narrower, because of the air shaft, which itself caused problems, whereas it had been introduced in order to provide a remedy for other problems.

This other quotation is from the Wikipedia entry for 'New York State Tenement House Act':<sup>56</sup>

One of the reforms of the Progressive Era, the **New York State Tenement House Act** of 1901 was one of the first such laws to ban the construction of dark, poorly ventilated tenement buildings in the state of New York. Among other sanctions, the law required that new buildings must be built with outward-facing windows in every room, an open courtyard, indoor toilets and fire safeguards.

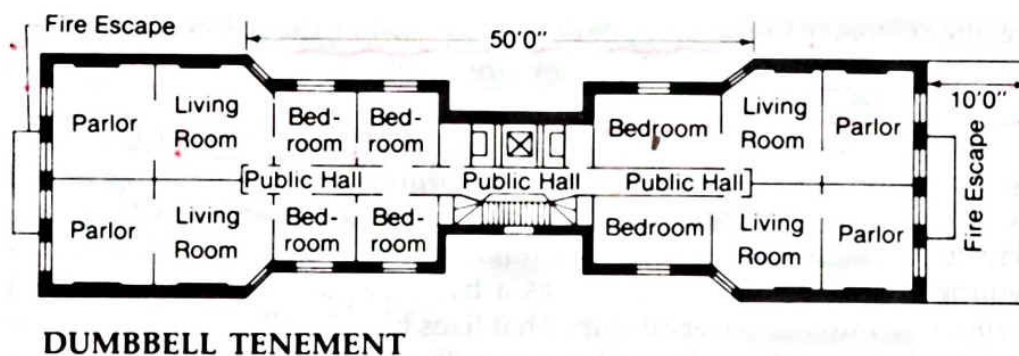


Fig. 9. The house plan of a dumbbell tenement from New York city.

<sup>55</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Old\\_Law\\_Tenement&oldid=479102435](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Old_Law_Tenement&oldid=479102435)

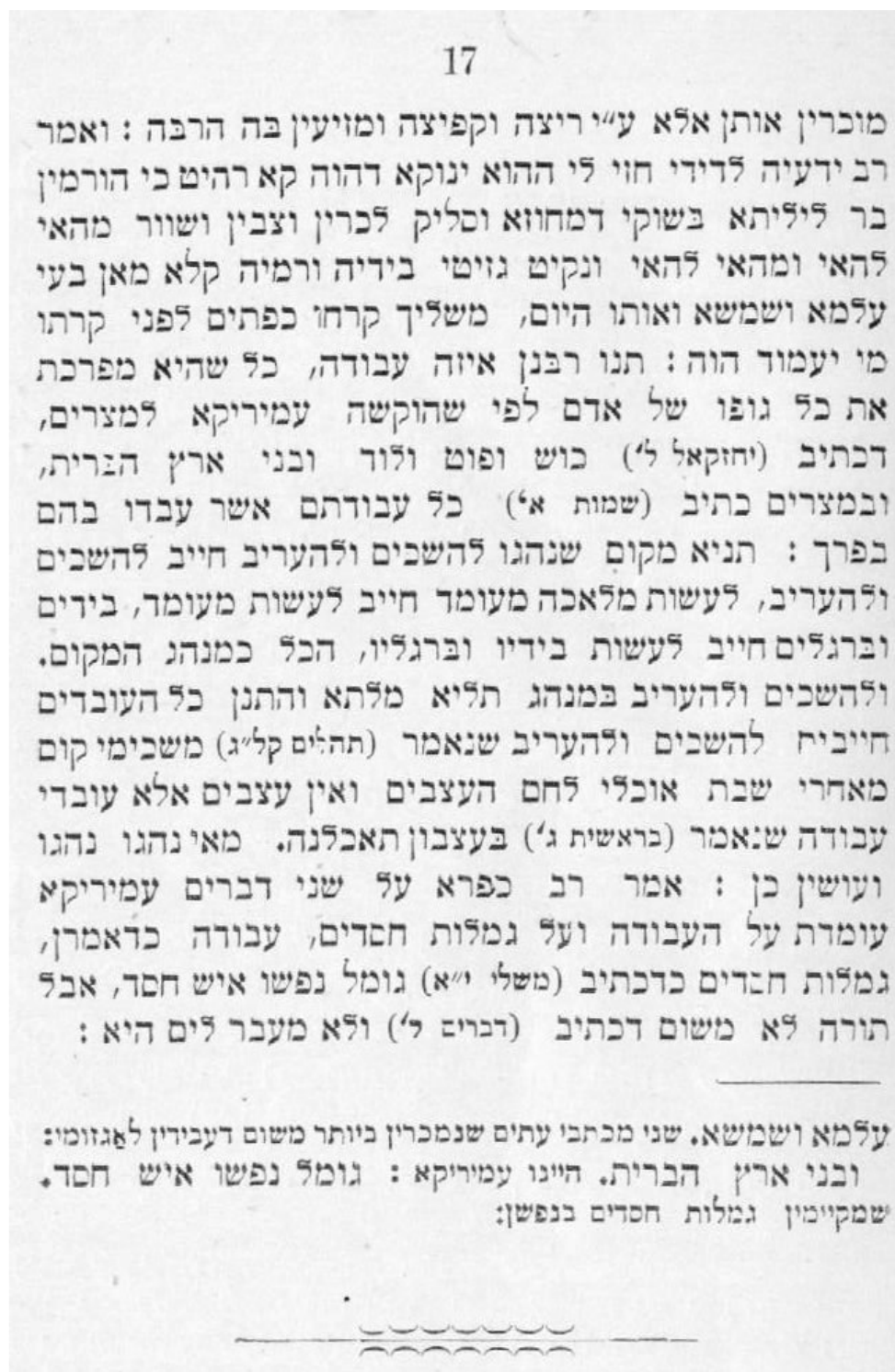
<sup>56</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=New\\_York\\_State\\_Tenement\\_House\\_Act&oldid=479587843](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=New_York_State_Tenement_House_Act&oldid=479587843) It also states: "An amendment of 1887 required privies interior to the building. The failures of the Second Act — the air shafts proved to be unsanitary as they filled with garbage, bilge water and waste — led to the 1901 "New Law" and its required courtyard designed for garbage removal."

## 16

נמי עבודה קרי לה וכדאמר רב מבינא גדולה עבודה שאשה עושה בביתה, דכל מה ששפחה כנענית היתה עושה לאדוניה אשה בעמיריקא עושה בעצמה. באמת אמרו האשה מכבסת את הבגדים, גורדת את הרצפה, מבשלת התבשילין, מצעת את המטות, ומשמשת את הברדרין. תניא נמי הכי עבודה יתירה נתנה לאשה מלאיש דלאיש נאמר (בראשית ג') בעצבון תאכלנה ולאשה נאמר הרבה ארבה עצבונך :אמר מר ומשמשת את הברדרין, מאי ברדרין, אמר רב ספרא אמרה לי מיסות דביתהו דרב רובלא ברי דיירין, כאותה ששנינו המדייר את שדהו :וקמנים שהגיעו לחנוך. ואיכא חנוך בעמיריקא והא תנן אין מחנכין את הבנים ואת הבנות ואין מגדלין אותן לתורה ולמעשים טובים אלא לחופה בלבד. מאי חנוך זמן חנוך. ואבעית אימא חנוך מלאכה כדתניא הקמן כיון שהפטיר בנביא, אביו פטור מעונשו ומחנכו לעבודה : ורב עניא אומר וכו' במאי פליגא, אמר רב ספרא בקמן שלא הגיע לחנוך. מנא ליה לרב עניא דקמן שלא הגיע לחנוך חייב נמי בעבודה. מקרא דכתיב (בראשית לג) לרגל המלאכה ולרגל הידים, נאמר מלאכה אצל ידים ללמד שחייבים במלאכה. ותנא המא אמר לך שפיל לסיפא דקרא, עד אשר אבוא אל אדוני שעירה, אינו חייב בעבודה עד שיבוא שתי שערות. תניא כותיה דרב עניא, הכל חייבים בעבודה ואפילו ידים קמנים שנאמר (שמות י') לכו עבדו וכתיב בתריה גם טפכם ילך עמכם : אמר רב ידעיה השולח את בנו הקמנים למכור עתונים יצא, כדתניא מכירת עתונים לגבי גדולים מסחר, לגבי קמנים מלאכה, לפי שהקמנים אינן

בפקטראות ופחניות : ברי דיירין, לפי שמדיירין ומרפין זבל בבית : שהפטיר בנביא. שנעשה בר מצוה : שעירה, דריששעירה מלשון שערות : עתונים, מכתבי עתים :

Fig. 9. The second page of Chapter 3 of *Tractate America*.

Fig. 10. The third page of Chapter 3 of *Tractate America*.

## 19. Child Labour

Rosenzweig then turns to children, neglect of education, and child labour. Quoting from the pseudo-Mishnah "And minors [lit., 'little ones'] who have attained education", the pseudo-Gemara elaborates: "Is there education in America? As it was taught: sons and daughters are not educated, and they are not raised for Torah and good deeds, but for the wedding canopy alone". Thus, two of the three wishes in the greetings for a newborn are discarded. "What is 'education'? [Understand:] 'time of [i.e., suitable for] education'". Rosenzweig concedes that vocational education may also qualify, as it is taught that a minor, upon his having read the Haftorah in the *Prophets*, i.e., once he is barmitzvahed, his father is no longer liable for his the boy's sins, and he teaches him how to work.

So what is the controversy about, Rosenzweig make a rabbi ask. Another rabbi claims that the point is about a minor who has not yet attained [the time for] education [vocational!]. The text asks how is this rabbi to know that even such a minor has the duty to work. "Because of the work (*mlokho*) and because of the children (*yelodim*)" (*Genesis* 33:14) is quoted in support: as the two lexical concepts co-occur in the same verse, this is intended to teach that *yelodim* have the duty to perform *mlokho*. That verse is from the encounter between Jacob and Esau, so Rosenzweig claims that according to the opposing view, one needs to read further down, "Until I shall come to my lord [Esau] to [the land of] Se'ir". As the place-name enables a pun with the Hebrew for 'hair', that opposing view is that the child has to grow two [pubic] hairs first (a standard legal concept about majority), before he has the duty to work. The matter is decided in agreement with Rav 'Anyo [Rabbi Poorman], the one who maintains that everybody must work, even little children, on the evidence of Pharaoh relenting and agreeing to let the Hebrews go and worship (lit., 'work'), which is followed by his saying: "Also your children will go with you" (*Exodus* 10:24).

Child labour was historically an important factor in the Industrial Revolution<sup>57</sup> (as shown by Nardinelli 1990), remained associated with factory work, and has especially survived (see Morice 1981) in the informal sector. Nardinelli (1990) stated a universal (*ibid.*, p. 54) when claiming: "the single most important factor affecting the supply of child labour to industrial and other occupations has always been family income". But Nardinelli, whose evidence is from nineteenth-century Britain, also claimed (*ibid.*, p. 155) that "we cannot say that children who worked in factories were worse off than children who did not". A Napoleonic decree of 1813 banned the employment of children younger than ten in mining.

An anonymous referee pointed out that there is mention of child labour also in the early rabbinic literature. Of course, child labour was a fact of life in antiquity in the Roman period, in both Mediterranean and Mesopotamian cultures.

## 20. Selling Newspapers Under the Snow

"Rav Yedoyo said: He who sends his minor children to sell newspapers, has done his duty, as it is taught: selling newspapers is trade for the adults, [but] for little ones [it is] *mlokho* [lit., 'work', 'artisanship'], because the little ones only sell them by

<sup>57</sup> By comparison to the Industrial Revolution, British economy in the Victorian and Edwardian eras was stagnant, unlike the growing economy of the resource-rich United States of America.

running and jumping, and they much perspire". Then Rav Yedoyo claims he himself once saw a child running like a demon he names, and a wondrous situation is conjured. Of course, here, too, there is a precise intertextual reference to a given passage in the Babylonian Talmud. Moreover, that day it was snowing (a situation common in North America, but not in Babylonia), and Scripture is quoted about snowing. Moreover, note by Rosenzweig explains that the two Aramaic terms (for 'world' and for 'sun') for what was being peddled by the boy stand for "two of the newspaper that sell most, because they are used to exaggerate." The latter concept, is also expressed by a talmudic idiom.

Importantly, Rosenzweig here chose to make a concession to the widespread, still extant, and not so terrible employment of children in selling or distributing newspapers (and in so doing, Rosenzweig resorted to the then recent Hebrew word for 'newspapers', *'ittonim*, now still in use, and felt it necessary to define it by the older term *kitvei ha-'ittim*). The newspaper boy is working in the open air, and when child labour regulations play a role, it is often assumed (see on this, White 1994, p. 851) "that work in enclosed spaces is more harmful than work in the open air", but also (and this clearly mattered to Rosenzweig) "that work is never a proper substitute for, or complement to, school".

Referring to the Netherlands, Ben White lists official inquiries into child labour in 1841, 1860, 1863, 1877, 1883 and 1886, but "none of which, interestingly, recommended the introduction or (after 1874) expansion of legislation prohibiting or restricting child labour" (B. White 1994, p. 855), rather expressing concern about children acquiring the morality of the lower classes, growing up in a state of savagery, without the opportunity for regular education in church and school. "Children's employment was considered natural (for the poor) and even beneficial; local authorities and charities were themselves active in setting the children of the poor to full-time work in semi-philanthropic institutions", and concern, if expressed at all, "generally focused not on the damage done to children by the work itself, but on the fact that work kept them out of school (B. White 1994, p. 855).

## 21. Pharaonic Toils in the Land of the Alliance (as Intended by Ezekiel)

Chapter 3 in *Tractate America* concludes with a comparison between America and Egypt: "Our teachers taught: 'What is *'avodah* (work)? Everything that tires (*mforekhes*) the entire body of a person, because America is analogized to Egypt, as it is written «Cush, and Put, and Lud, and the children [inhabitants] of the Land of the Alliance (*bris*)» (*Ezekiel* 30:5), and about Egypt it is written: «All their work they made them carry out as heavy toiling (*forekh*)» (*Exodus* 1:14)'" The pun here is that the United States are called in Hebrew 'the Lands of the Alliance'. Ezekiel was referring to a particular alliance led by Egypt.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>58</sup> An anonymous referee stated that slavery in the United States until the Civil War should also be mentioned. I don't think this was much on the mind of Rosenzweig or his public; at any rate, not in the context of writing *Tractate America*, or of making sense of it. Working conditions at factories and sweatshops were harrowing, and were urban. Rosenzweig is not concerned with rural America.

There was in the United States a movement involving some Jewish philanthropists, and hundreds of working-class Jews, aiming at establishing agricultural settlements in the United States and settling them with Jews from the slums of the East Coast, but this relatively interested only a small minority; see e.g. Goldberg's book (2011) on the settlement in Clarion, Utah, in the 1910s, and Feld (1970) on the settlement at Beersheba, Kansas, in the 1880s.

"It is taught: a place where they are accustomed to do early in the morning and to do late in the day, one must do early in the morning and late in the day. [Where they are accustomed] to do work while standing, one must do work by standing". Here the pun is on the two senses of *'avodah*, which means both 'work' and 'worship': there are prayers said early or late, and there are prayers uttered while standing. "[Where they are accustomed to do work] with hands and feet, one must do with one's hands and feet, everything according to the custom of the place." The latter is a formula concerning minor differences in rite. Scripture is then quoted in support.

The motif of Pharaonic enslavement also occurs in a Marxist comic magazine in Yiddish, published in the United States in 1909–1927. Tabachnick (2008), surveying the contribution of American Jews to the comics, points out (*ibid.*, p. 470): "During this early period, another form of assimilation came in the form of socialism, which replaced Judaism for many Jews. There were political cartoons in the Yiddish press. In 1909, Russian immigrant poet Jacob Marinov started the *Groysser Kibitzer* (Bog Joker), which was renamed the *Groysser Kundes* (Big Stick), after Teddy Roosevelt's aphorism — speak softly and carry a big stick [...]. In a typical political cartoon, the Jewish American working class was shown toiling in Pharaoh's [*sic*]; and, from which they would supposedly be led out by Karl Marx, who looked like and replaced Moses. This magazine, which lasted until 1927, was in Yiddish, but it had little traditional Jewish content." Bear in mind that *kundes* also means 'prankster'.

## 22. Concluding Remarks

The end of Chapter 3 of *Tractate America* is something we already saw in Section 4: "Rav Safo (Rabbi Teacher) said: 'By two things is America sustained: by *'avodah*, and by deeds of loving-kindness [with Scripture quoted in support], but not by Torah for it is written (*Deuteronomy* 30.13) 'And it is not beyond the sea'." Jewish religious learning, Rosenzweig is complaining, was something you would find as a matter of course in the Old Country, but it did not cross over to the New World. And this is the big paradox — and the tragedy — of *Tractate America*: how are you to make sense of that text, if you didn't get the education necessary for that purpose? Rosenzweig himself admitted that such education was almost absent from America. His satire, thanks to its elaborate humour, is a sweet reward for those schooled enough in the tradition to make sense of it and of its dense web of intertextual references.<sup>59</sup>

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*Tractate America* does not make reference to American group identities other than Jewish and non-Jewish, the latter lumped together. Of course, when reference is made to a stereotypical policeman from New York City, and it is then said that he and the judge are akin to each other (by modifying a rabbinic dictum that originally referred to father and son), it is unnecessary to assume that their social or ethnic identities were actually the same (the judge's social superiority may be suited by the intertextual reference being in the original about father and son). The policeman may have been an Irish Catholic, living in an immigrant neighbourhood, and the judge may have been from the city's veteran Protestant elite, but as far as a new immigrant turned peddler and being faced with problems with law enforcers was concerned, they were all the same, which is what Rosenzweig conveys about the peddler's predicament.

<sup>59</sup> In this article indeed, I have chosen to rather abound in examining possible textual passages from the early rabbinic literature that could come to readers' minds, regardless of Rosenzweig's actual authorial intentions. Understanding those intertextual references — or rather, references that it is worthwhile to

It is because of his *Tractate America* that Rosenzweig is remembered, other than by specialists in the New York Jewish press up to the First World War. Several years ago, I hosted a professor visiting from Israel at home here at London. He was born in pre-state Israel to Polish parents. When I mentioned *Tractate America*, my guest (whose specialty is materials engineering) responded with a broad smile, and commented on the subject with relish. He had fond memories of reading that book, that apparently his mother had brought to Palestine from Poland.

Nevertheless, consider that so few people alive are aware of Gerson Rosenzweig and of *Tractate America*, even ones who can read Hebrew (which by itself would not be sufficient), and who can appreciate the intertextual reference of the pseudo-talmudic text. Rosenzweig lived almost a quarter of century after publishing *Tractate America*, which he wrote as a recent immigrant. It is difficult to think that he could surpass what he said there, in artistry. The vivid portrait of Jewish New York the way he depicted it, stands out as "definitive". Perhaps this is so, because where his text is brilliant is when it is epigrammatic, and because the intertextual references are from what to the culture is a "timeless" sacred corpus.

In this article, we have considered in detail the workings, and the dense and demanding intertextuality, in a particular chapter from *Tractate America*. That literary work by itself is such a gem, that Gerson Rosenzweig deserves to be considered

- one of the great Jewish writers in the United States,
- one of the great humorists in the United States,
- one of the great humorists in the Hebrew language.

Such a recognised status has eluded Gerson Rosenzweig. The main reason for that is the inaccessibility of the text, with the generational turnover that eliminated the particular segment within the immigrant Jewish community that had a reasonable traditional Jewish schooling enabling them to tackle pages from the Babylonian Talmud, and that moreover had an interest in the social realities he was describing. (This is not the case of the present-day ultra-Orthodox Jewish public in the United States, whereas interest among the Modern Orthodox is an important potential, yet only a potential.)

The Yiddish prose of Isaac Bashevis Singer was translated (including by himself) into English, and from English into other languages, and such translations made his compelling narratives available to a broad public, as much so that he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Even the complex nuances of Yiddish in Sholom Aleikhem's humorous, yet often sad narratives, notwithstanding their typically being lost in translation, have not prevented those who read him in English or in Hebrew from enjoying the experience.

With Gerson Rosenzweig, it is a different story. *Tractate America* is a literary work he wrote soon after moving to the United States from Europe. The angst of the incensed educated immigrant is still there, fresh and reverberating. *Tractate America* is his masterpiece. Translating it is, alas, almost mission impossible. It has taken this article to make one of its chapters accessible to a public of scholars, without requiring them to have previous knowledge of the talmudic literature. This difficulty by itself is reason enough to explain why Gerson Rosenzweig's contribution

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hypothesise — and the alternatives that readers had for them to understand, is extremely relevant in the perspective of literary studies and of research into intertextuality.

to American ethnic literature, to Hebrew literature, and to the literature of humour is typically neglected. There is something we can do about it. This article is a step in that direction.

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