

Hila Gutfreund  
Senior Seminar  
December 2013

## Finding Home Through Journal Entries

Based on:

*Agunot*  
*Baranovich Station*  
*The Lady and the Peddler*  
*The Man From Buenos Aires*  
*The Tale of the Scribe*

Hi Journal,

What is home? Somehow, I've never really been able to figure it out. Is it a place or a feeling or a what? What does it mean to feel at home? I have traveled through life unable to reach a place or a feeling that can make me stop and say "Hey, this feels right, this feels comforting enough to be home. I think, perhaps, maybe, just maybe, I'll stay and see if this feeling lasts a bit longer..." No, so far I haven't decided to delve into the unknown and form roots somewhere. So far, to be honest, I've just been wandering, sort of lost, looking for something to draw me in and get me excited about life and the universe as a whole. Maybe that's stupid. Actually, that is stupid. With modern technology I should just be able to find that online and be done with this whole search in three seconds flat.

So really, what is home, and why am I, this little fragile awkward, and if we are to be completely honest with each other dear journal, completely terrified—mainly of making direct contact with most of humanity, specifically in the form of telephone communication and thus like to order most of my food online since it saves me the hassle of yelling out my complicated orders of Asian dishes that I do not know how to pronounce on the phone to people who do not know how to speak English—girl, trying to find it? No really? Why? Well I guess it's because I've never actually felt like I had one. Maybe when I was younger. The house I grew up in was quite nice. I used to live on this little winding road. We lived in an apartment building, but our flat was on the bottom floor and we had our own entrance to the side, so it seemed like we had our own house. Now, I'm not trying to be cynical, even though my nature tends to favor it, but the house was legitimately the smallest house known to mankind. Fine by New York standards it could be considered a Manhattan mansion, but for the neighborhood we lived in, it was a ridiculously small apartment. The kitchen was actually so small that there was no room for the

oven. Let me repeat that so you understand the severity of the situation: there was no room for an oven. No, it was wedged in slightly under the sink at the corner so that you couldn't actually open the fridge and oven at the same time. And if you wanted to open the oven door all the way, you had to slide the fridge slightly to the left in order to make room for the entirety of the oven door. Now, I'm not trying to blame the contractor who came up with the genius idea, but you get my drift. In any case, that was my house and I loved it. It was perfection. I had my room and my glow in the dark stars, which the painters painted over when we eventually moved, but you could still see them if you shined a light directly onto the walls, and the patio area with my stupid rocking horse that I loved like a pet. That was it. It was great. I loved it. I loved everything about it. It was the closest thing I've ever had to home.

Then we moved. I was five. I didn't think moving would be that big of a deal. I guess when you are five nothing really seems like that big of a deal. Everything seems insignificant and dumb. Your friends aren't really your friends, your toys just move with you, and the home you cared about so much disappears. Or so you think. See that's the thing. I moved an entire continent away from that first house and still years later that's the only place I think of when I think of home. I don't know any other place. It is embedded into my brain, and I am stuck with its image forever. I haven't even been back since the day I left when I was five and I have no clue how it looks like now, 16 years later. I don't know what home is other than that stupid apartment with a kitchen that can barely contain an oven. So here I am, 16 years later, trying to find home again. Trying for once in my life to understand what home actually means rather than what I have come to expect it to be in my head. I mean, how can it be that over the years it is just one place? Yes, I get it, it is a place that is associated with memories and laughter and family, but still it is only a place. One place. Can't a person have more than just one home? Why haven't I

been granted another one in so long? I think I deserve another one. Not to be needy or boastful, but I've been pretty good in my life, so I think I deserve to feel at home somewhere else already. I mean, maybe I should be able to feel at home in NYC, my adoptive city for the past three and a half years. I think that would be appropriate. Anyhow, just a suggestion, for whomever in the universe assigns these home-based feelings. So, here I am, on a mission. This journal, diary, etc is going to my homeless to home journal. I hope to explore different ways of approaching home. Maybe together journal, we'll find home together.

xoxo...

Wait no, we are not doing this Gossip Girl sign off. That is not happening. Ok wait, I'm thinking...

Sholem Aleichem? Too Jewy? You know my nickname is juju... ehh that's for another time...

How about #bye I like hashtags, they're fun, flirty, and awkward. I can do awkward. ok.

#bye

juju

### **Baranovich Station: Community as Home**

*Baranovich Station* is perhaps one of Sholem Aleichem's most prominent stories from the *Railroad Stories*. The story revolves around the Jew from Kaminka who tells the story of his grandfather and how he saved a man from the gauntlet. The beauty of this story is in the fact that it is in fact a story about storytelling:

Like history, like the train, the parable of Kivke the stool pigeon is dead-ended, a story heading for the brink. But the storyteller manages to jump off just in time, to save himself and the story from its terrible finality. By playing heroism against miracles and calculated betrayal against communal solidarity, the author leaves only one person standing, albeit on the platform as the train is speeding away, and that person is the storyteller as hero. His story defies the fragmented nature of modernity by turning some motley travelers into a congregation of listeners. His story defies the vagaries of historical exile by forcing travel time to obey the rules of story time. And his story subverts the absurdity of life by interposing its own parodic reading of redemption and resurrection.<sup>1</sup>

The storyteller is so well versed in telling these incredible narratives that he knows exactly when to pause, when to speak, and when to end. A true master of words, the storyteller weaves together a story so exhaustive and epic that it brings the entire compartment together into one community. As Sidrah DeKoven Ezrahi says, "...the crowded third-class coach imposes the forced, ephemeral intimacy of strangers who convene as a 'community' only for the purpose of hearing a story..."<sup>2</sup> Through the act of storytelling, a mini-shtetl is created right there on the train and a community is formed simply by the power of words.

---

<sup>1</sup> David G. Roskies, Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling, "Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996, 181.

<sup>2</sup> Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination, Berkely: University of California Press, 2000, 113.

So dear journal,

Here we are. I don't know where here is actually. I guess here is my dorm. Here is New York City. Here is America. Here is my bed. Here is somewhere. But here, as I have already explained, is not home. Anyhow, let's forget about that. That's in that past. Well, if the past can ever be the past. See that's the thing. I always want the past to be the past, but I find that it tends to sneak up on you at random. Old books and stories come drifting from every crevice of your memory to haunt you. Like the other day, I was talking to my friend about food. I'm not going to go into much detail, but I'm a big eater. Ice cream, cake, coffee, chocolate, desserts in general are just a few of the delicious things I like to indulge in every day. Oh and cheesy pasta. Cheesy pasta is the godly creation of mixing in dozens of slices of cheese with a few splashes of marinara sauce in order to create a slightly pink sauce that is bathed over noodles. Try it. Trust me. Ok what were we talking about? Oh ok, so anyhow we were talking about food and I started sending her this love letter of sorts to food and in the end it basically became the alternate version for the *I Love You* song<sup>3</sup> from the *Barney* TV show... you know... the purple dinosaur TV show... the one that slightly freaked you out at night, but you still also wanted him to be your best friend and were really jealous when you found out that Selena Gomez knew him in real life even though you hate her in every other respect. No? Just me? Ok... never mind.

Here is the original:

I love you.  
 You love me.  
 We're a happy family.  
 With a great big hug and a kiss from me to you.  
 Won't you say you love me too?

---

<sup>3</sup>Lhin Lalitha, dir. "barney I LOVE YOU" *YouTube*. June 16, 2010. Web.

And here is my version:

I love food.  
Food loves me.  
We're a happy family.  
With a great big yum and a bite for me and you.  
Won't you say you love food too?

Personally, I like my version better. Any dinosaur that likes pumpernickel bread<sup>4</sup> (he has an entire song about this, in case you thought I was just making this up out of the blue), clearly has not tasted the deliciousness that is Levain scones. Of course, Levain Bakery might not have existed in his fantasy world, but I still can't give him credit for liking pumpernickel bread.

Anyways, my point being that I find it crazy that sometimes we come across things that we only associate or realize the significance of years later. Sometimes our brains take years to connect the dots from a to z and form entirely new creative pieces, such as my artful masterpiece about food — I think it could be the next PBS remix (even better than the Mister Rogers remix<sup>5</sup> or the Bob Ross remix<sup>6</sup> from the PBS Digital Studios on YouTube).

One of my favorite stories is *Baranovich Station* by Sholem Aleichem. I thought about it while taking the train to my internship the other day. Crowded between all those strangers in the subway car, I thought of the Jews in the third carriage of the train, all packed together, some sitting, some standing, creating a home for themselves in that small cramped compartment just by the power of storytelling. And that's one of the reasons why I love that story so much. Because the story is not about the plot at all, it's about how the art of storytelling can bring people together and create communities in the roughest circumstances. And yet, we the readers,

---

<sup>4</sup> akosijaja, dir. "Barney Songs – Pumpernickel Bread song" *YouTube*. July 31, 2011. Web.

<sup>5</sup> PBS Digital Studios, dir. "Mister Rogers Remixed | Garden of Your Mind | PBS Digital Studios" *YouTube*. July 7, 2012. Web.

<sup>6</sup> PBS Digital Studios, dir. "Bob Ross Remixed | Happy Little Clouds | PBS Digital Studios" *YouTube*. July 26, 2012. Web.

and those Jews on the train, have no clue that the story is not about plot or character or style but simply the act of storytelling itself. Only at the very end, when we as readers and the Jewish audience on the train are gasping for air, waiting for more information, more story, more anything, are we truly left to grapple with the fact that our precious story has ended without a real ending and we truly come to understand the true meaning and power of the story. But even more so, we realize that in reading this story, we have become part of this larger community of Jews on this train journey, listening to this crazy man tell this age old story that has barely just begun.

I love this story. I love it like you can only love someone you have gotten to know over the years and have seen every crevice of their horrible self and decided that even though you should hate their every being with a tireless passion, the truth is that you actually somewhat love them and are willing to accept them with all your heart, body, and soul. It mystifies me. It intrigues me. And honestly, every time I read it, I'm so thankful that the wonderful group of angry uncomfortable Jews on that train are willing to open up their arms and let me join their community once more, letting me stand right there with them, listening to a story that I know will never end. And so I stand there, with them, reading happily the words that I've come to memorize, waiting for this man to interrupt everyone to begin his story in the most obnoxious way possible:

Listen well, my dear friends, because what I'm about to tell you, I want you to know, is not some opera or fairy tale. It's a true story, mind you, that took place right in Kaminka. My own father, God rest him, told it to me himself, and he heard it more than once from his father. I've heard it said that the whole thing was even written down in an old chronicle that was burned long ago. You can laugh all you like, but I tell you it's a crime it was, because it had some fine stories in it—alright better than what's printed in your magazines and storybooks these days.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Sholem Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman and the Railroad Stories*, New York: Schocken Books, 1987, 153.



And I'm waiting for the Jew from Kaminka to make his stupid asides and dramatic pauses just as the story is reaching a climax: "Seeing that the whole car was waiting with baited breath to hear what happened next, the Jew from Kaminka paused, took out a large tobacco pouch from his pocket, and slowly rolled himself a cigarette."<sup>8</sup> I want to see the entire story unfurl from the time the storyteller begins his story, to the point where he awkwardly excuses himself to ask the conductor when they will reach his station, to that epic moment when, mid-climax, he exits the carriage, needing to transfer trains, leaving the Jews in the third carriage without an ending saying, "What end? It's barely begun."<sup>9</sup> Yes, I want to be present for all of it, again and again and again. Any story that makes you feel wonderfully crazed and intrigued and desperate is a story that is worth revisiting.

So anyways, home as community. This story is full of this idea. Everyone in this story is dependent on this one storyteller. They are all connected because of him. In a way they recreate their shtetl life and community within this carriage by listening to this storyteller. I like this idea. Ok, I'm not saying find a central leader, obey, and create community around this leader. But I like this idea of trying to find a community or creating a community. There is this great moment in the story where the storyteller is rolling his cigarette and everyone is so desperate for him to get back to the story that they all throw their lighters at him: "So important had he become that several passengers jumped up to offer him a light."<sup>10</sup> He was the central figure of conversation, he created community and they wanted to keep it going. But I also find it interesting that they had other community aspects on train ride. The third car had kept many aspects of shtetl life and just moved them into a smaller compartment:

---

<sup>8</sup> Aleichem, 155.

<sup>9</sup> Aleichem, 163.

<sup>10</sup> Aleichem, 155.

This time there were no more than a few dozens of us Jews, and were sat in the third-class car in comparative comfort. That is, whoever had found a seat had one; the other passengers stood leaning against the walls of the compartments and joined in the conversation from there. And what lively conversation it was! As usual every was talking at once. It was early in the day. We had all had a good night's sleep, said our morning prayers, grabbed a bite more or less to eat, and even managed to light up a few cigarettes, and were all in the mood to talk—very much so, in fact. About what? About anything and everything.<sup>11</sup>

The compartment served as a mini-shtetl, allowing the Jews to perform their basic religious needs, while also allowing them to create a hub for conversation. Why go through a train journey alone and in silence when you can enjoy it with storytelling and friends?

I love this story but when I think about how it applies to my life... I don't know, I just think it's unrealistic. Communities seem like a great idea but I never truly ever felt part of one myself. The idea of being a part of a whole is nice when you are actually in one, but as an outsider looking in, it kind of actually sucks. Imagine being that one guy on the train who hates this story. What if this story is so boring that you want to shoot yourself just to be granted some peace instead of listening to that ludicrous drivel. Well then, you probably aren't going to feel so cozy standing next to these wonderful train passengers are you? No. Exactly. And in most cases I find myself being that girl who is outside the majority community. Because I don't pray or really care about being super culturally involved in Judaism, I don't really fit in with most of the Jewish crowd. Because I don't drink, I don't really fit in with most of the party crowd. Because I don't go crazy over coding, I tend to be on the outskirts of the computer science community, and because I don't drink coffee, I tend to be on the outskirts of the caffeinated chatters at most coffee shops around the city. Somehow, awkwardly, I am in the minority. Always. Maybe that's why I am drawn to this story. I find myself wanting to be part of the community rather than the other; I want to join the community and in books it is very hard to get turned away.

Even at JTS, a place I came to in order to find the perfect community for myself, I find myself on the very outskirts. My freshman year I tried my hardest to be involved. I tried my

---

<sup>11</sup> Aleichem, 152.

hardest to make friends. I tried to love it. So I built my life around it. But it wasn't what I wanted so I gave up for next year. And sophomore year I was involved. I made friends. I cared. I worked hard to build something for myself and create a community for myself that was perfect, wonderful, amazing, and exactly what JTS had told me I should expect in all the brochures. But then the illusion shattered and I realized that I was alone and JTS was just another stomping ground: JTS was just another place to spend a few days a week at, nothing more. I have loved being in NYC, I have loved learning about Judaism, and I have loved finding a major at Barnard that I feel I have really grown into, but I do not feel like I have developed or created a wonderful community at JTS, and that is ok. The truth is, four years is a long time, and communities come and go. People, in general, come and go, but maybe that's not what home, HOME, is supposed to be. Maybe home is supposed to be something different, something other than community.

**Agunot: Location as Home**

*Agunot* is Agnon's classic story of true star-crossed lovers. It was his first piece printed in Israel and he took his own last name from the title of the story. As Hochman describes, eventually his adopted name would take on its own communal meaning. It would no longer just be Agnon's personal destruction of home and the restoration of Israel but that of the entire Jewish people without a home from the terrible events of the Holocaust:

The taking of the name was no caprice; it was in fact a sort of prognostication of the governing concerns of his fiction. Those concerns all too quickly—some would say tragically—shifted from the personal to the historic. The loss that in “*Agunot*” seems largely sentimental and romantic becomes, in the course of Agnon's creative lifetime, a communal nightmare. The nightmare involved the disappearance of the traditional East European Jewish world, first through cultural erosion and then by means of violence directed against it in the Holocaust.<sup>12</sup>

Agnon's writing, and especially this tale of Israel and God trying to reconnect but finding it difficult and unfeasible brings to mind the idea of home as a perfect match. There needs to be a match between reality and fiction, between two entities, between everything. *Agunot* is the story of star-crossed lovers, an explanation for why we are all still searching and waiting to be swept off our feet by a place or a person.

---

<sup>12</sup> Baruch Hochman, “MEMOIR: An Afternoon with Agnon: A Face to Meet the Faces,” The American Scholar 57 (1988): 97.

Ok Journal,

New day: new entry. Ok fine. I haven't written in like three weeks. Forgive me, I've been busy with school, life, ice cream eating. Ok fine, the last one doesn't count, but you get the point. Things got in the way and now I'm at the point where I figured maybe I should say hello, reintroduce myself because maybe you forgot who I am after all this time apart... I'm juju... always lowercase. ALWAYS. Uppercase just makes me sound pretentious. Ok so last time we were talking about community. I went on this whole rant and I'm sorry I bored you witless. I'm sorry because I probably bored myself witless, but sometimes I get into these thoughts and I just like to drone on and on and on and on. So forgive me. I'm sorry.

In any case, I went to Butler yesterday for the first time since freshman year. First time. I know. I guess it's odd to avoid a library for such a long period of time but I needed to. I really did. Ok, dear journal, confession time. I used to live in Butler library. Now, I know that you have not seen this television show *Mortified*<sup>13</sup> because you are a journal, but let me explain its premise. Ok, *Mortified* is a conglomerate of TV shows, radio shows, club performances, etc of people going on stage and reading from their private journals the most embarrassing stories ever. I mean most embarrassing stories. There's a girl who wants to have sex with this one guy who she only met like three days ago. There's a twelve year old kid who wants to date this girl and they give each other loving glances and it's all so romantic and at the end you are rooting for them until he says, "She wants it. I want to give it to her. But what is it?"<sup>14</sup> I mean this is some pathetic and tragic stuff. Great stuff to coax out of the blue years later because even though it seemed to convey pure and totally understandable emotions so fully and eloquently in the past, the truth is

---

<sup>13</sup> Mortified Media Inc., "Mortified Angst Written," *Mortified*, 2010, Web, October 14, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> MortifiedMedia, dir. "Mortified: The Mysteries of Making Out" *Youtube*. March 10, 2008. Web.

that it is probably just crappy embarrassing words on paper that will come to haunt the writer later in life. Now my time in Butler is a memory I'd rather forget. I lived there. Great. Fine. Whatever. I'd rather never go there again. But sadly, being the pathetic little freshman I was, I decided to immortalize my feelings for the magnificent building in an essay. For my First Year English Seminar: *The Art of Being Oneself* with Professor Mindy Aloff, my personal goddess of all things good and pure, I wrote an homage to Butler Library about how I believed that it embodied all the qualities that I thought a home should be. I wrote how I lived in the library. I wrote about how I knew every nook and cranny. I wrote about how I sometimes cheated on Butler with Barnard Library. I wrote, in short, how Butler library was my home. Looking back, I was an idiot. I still am searching for my home. Butler has just been discarded on a pile of forgotten places that have come and gone in my life.

When sophomore year rolled around, I decided that this relationship had run its course. I said goodbye to Butler forever and never looked back. Well, until now, until today when I had to take a book from inside its depths and, foolishly, decided to try studying in the Butler stacks. The thing about a home is that when you think you found it, it's hard to let go. I really thought of Butler as my home. Just like I thought of my home in Israel as my home. I guess you are somewhat allowed to accumulate homes but in a way you also have to get rid of them. As much as Butler feels like home, it is also a stranger. Everything seems the same, but then, sitting in the stacks, waiting for the total isolation and freedom of being in the stacks to waft over me, I see it: full wireless signal. My freshman year I prided myself as being that one girl who knew exactly where to get the only wireless signal in the stacks: fourth floor of the stacks, the desks opposite the elevator, all the way at the end, third plug from the end. It was the only spot and I was always on the hunt for it. Now even on the 11th floor you can get perfect wireless signal pumping

straight into your computer without fail. And what used to be a scary elevator ride up to the thirteenth floor is now a whimsical ride without any glitches at all. The Butler that was my home might seem like the one I left my freshman year, but it's not. It's different and awkward — and has definitely added a sizable collection of weirdly placed tables that were just not needed my freshman year. It's missing the quirks that made me fall in love with it in the first place. It just isn't the same. It's not my perfect place. It's not my *besheret* when it comes to homes. That's ok. I'm not upset. This day had to come. Sometimes it's the little things, a mismatch of sorts that prevents a place from being a home.

*Agunot* by S.Y. Agnon is a story of mismatched lovers. The name comes from the plural of the word *agunah*. As Baruch Hochman eloquently states:

The story was called “Agunot,” from the plural of the word *aguna*, which designates an abandoned woman, or a woman whose husband has disappeared without divorcing her, but who cannot be proved dead. Since Jewish law holds that a woman cannot remarry until she is either certified a widow or is properly divorced, and since the divorce must be granted by an available husband, lost and absent husbands meant a lifelong desolation, a kind of living death, tormented by endless longing, for the wives. Given the vicissitudes of Jewish life in the Diaspora, the *aguna* was a ubiquitous presence, a haunting symbol of unassuageable loss.<sup>15</sup>

In this sense, the *agunah* is trapped in a type of purgatory, forced to live her life alone without any hope of being happy. In the story every character is stuck in an unfulfilling relationship.

Everyone in the story can't seem to end up with the right person. It is a circle of missed connections:

*Agunot* centers of Dinah, who loves Uriel, but comes to marry Yehezkel, who loves Friedel, and is hopelessly loved by her. But it also concerns Uriel, who loves his art, which is epitomized by the Ark of the Law that he makes, and that symbolizes the holiness of the Law itself. It has, too, the Law itself, which the People of Israel cannot adhere to but passionately crave. And it has the People of Israel, exiled from the Land of Israel, from Jerusalem, and yearning for it, even as it has the traditional Congregation of Israel and God, yearning for each other in the language of the Song of Songs, where the Shunammite so eloquently yearns for her lover, and her lover longs for her. But it has the Shechinah—the Holy Spirit as indwelling presence—too, who coos longingly for the People of Israel, who have been driven out from under its wings. And it has an old rabbi, who exiles himself from Jerusalem to wander in a kind of Limbo, trying to med the flaw in the fragmented world, which is symbolized by the experience of the bereaved souls—the *agunot*—that fill it.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Hochman, 97.

<sup>16</sup> Hochman, 98.

No one, legitimately, no one, in this story actually ends up happily ever after. It is so upsetting and unsettling. But what is more unsettling is the main message behind the entire story. Why does not one end up with each other? Why do the soul mates never get that happy ending? Why? According to Agnon, it is because Israel and God have yet to have this happy ending as well. With the Diaspora of the Jews, Israel and God have yet to fully recover and their love is as tragic as the young Polish man and his beautiful country girl: fated to be together, destined to be apart. There are little things wrong for everyone. Even if everyone should be happy with each other, they can never be. When the Israelites and the Temple were one and together, all was ok. God and Israel were connected, together, happy. But over the years, with exile upon exile upon Diaspora upon Diaspora, the Jews and God and Israel have all been separated. And because of this separation, the characters of this story can never achieve full happiness.

I feel this way about homes. I feel like my perfect home, the one that I am supposed to be in, is just out there, and I am fated to never find it. Even when I thought I found my true home in Butler, I was disappointed to realize it had changed too much for me to feel the same way about it; much like when the Jews came back to Israel after the Diaspora, the relationship between God and Israel was different. I know that's ridiculous. Homes and true loves are not the same, but maybe they are. Maybe they should be! I want to find that place where I feel at home. I'm not talking about like a house as the perfect home, but I'm talking about a place or a feeling as home. I want to feel at home somewhere. I want to walk in somewhere, like a city, or neighborhood, or I don't know group of friends or something of that sort and just say "Wow... now that feels comfy... that feels homey... that feels good to me. That feels like home. I can stay here for good!" Maybe I'm being idealistic but that just seems like something that should be a God-given right, like weekends and milkshakes and fries after midnight. Correct me if I'm wrong, but shouldn't



everyone be entitled to at least one place to feel like home at every point in their life so that you can always go there to make yourself feel good? I think so. Just like I am thinking that it's getting very close to midnight, and I am in desperate need of a milkshake.

Actually, it's interesting because S.Y. Agnon grew up in Eastern Europe. He was one of the kids of the Diaspora. He was that kid: a Jew without a real home that decided at one point to search for it. So he moved. He moved to Israel to establish his homeland and a home for himself, the *agunah* and changed his given name, "Shmuel Yosef Czaczkes to Agnon by adapting the title of his first published story in Palestine, *Agunot*: "Thus at an early point in his career, the writer arrived at a title and a name that express the longing for completeness amid the awareness of isolation and distance."<sup>17</sup> But then he unexpectedly moved to Germany. He met a young woman and they married and created a family there. It was a wonderful thing for them. It was meant to be because they were meant to be. He wouldn't have had the same family had he stayed in Israel, but something felt wrong to him. He felt wrong being apart from Israel. He did not like this image of himself being this liberally educated man; He wanted to portray himself as this very pious Jew. He did not want anyone to know that he was well read or intellectual. His friends and family were all aware of his past but his readers would be in the dark. The knowledge he had accumulated would only shine through his writing, the clothes and image he would portray would be that of a pious Jew whose only concern was of religious life and how to make sure that he could please God a little more:

Indeed, we might compare this denial of his own modernism to Agnon's public comments after accepting the Nobel Prize: he acknowledges sacred texts as the sources of his inspiration and disavows the influence of writers whose names he claims never to have heard...we see the persona of a writer at play. Agnon, whose works display a range of literary experimentation that links him to the major modernists of our century, chose to minimize that affiliation and to present instead the image of the writer who subordinates himself to traditional texts.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> S.Y. Agnon, *A Book that was Lost and Other Stories*, New York: Schocken Books, 1995, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Agnon, 11-12.

And thus he returned to Israel, to the homeland, to his home. By becoming a pious Jew, he mended his broken past and helped mend the Jewish homeland for the rest of the Jewish people as well. He found his home in the streets of Jerusalem, in the air of Mediterranean Sea, and in the completely intoxicating religious fervor of the city. Although his characters did not find satisfactory matches, he had found his perfect home, his perfect *Basheret*.

**The Tale of the Scribe: Love and Family as Home**

*The Tale of the Scribe* is one of the most beautiful stories I have ever read. It tells of a man, Raphael, who is the town's scribe and his wife, Miriam. In this S.Y. Agnon classic, the married couple is so devoted to their lives that they completely ignore each other in the hopes of making everything in their apartment pure and holy so that Raphael can work in a pure and holy space. Over the course of the story the reader realizes how dramatic the rift between these two are. Too devoted to God to touch each other, too afraid of contaminating each other with love and affection, they are in a hapless and disturbing marriage. It is a tale of loss, but also a warning to everyone: don't forget to be happy in love. It is better to build home with someone than to just inhabit the same space for eternity.

Hi Journal,

Been a while? No? Oh, it was only yesterday? Oh, hi again. Sorry I think I've developed a slight attachment to you. You are just so kind and sweet and awkward and wonderful. Anyhow, I was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art yesterday. I was sitting next to the Temple of Dendur, one of my favorite spots in NYC as a whole. The temple is just incredible and other worldly almost. I love anything and everything related to Ancient Egypt. I would probably have died in two second had I lived back then but sometimes I wish I had. That time period fascinates me and I really wonder if my choice at being a computer science major is the right one when Egypt and the pharaohs beckon me from the dessert. I do have a confession to make: I mainly love the Temple of Dendur because it is the location for one of the funniest moments in movie history. In the movie *When Harry Met Sally*, Harry turns to Sally and in a ridiculous accented voice makes her say, "Waiter, waiter there is too much pepper on my paprikash but I would be proud to partake of your pecan pie." Then after making her sound ridiculous in front of a bunch of tourists he go on to explain his theory on hieroglyphics: "You know, I have a theory that hieroglyphics are just an ancient comic strip about a character named Sphinxy." That is probably one of my favorite movie lines of all time. On the other hand, I'm not going to lie. I went up to the Temple yesterday and inspected it closely. Not a single sphinx. Not one. I guess I shouldn't be upset, but still, you expect some sort of credibility from these types of movies you know? In any case, *When Harry Met Sally* is my number-one go-to movie. I watch it monthly. There is something so wonderful about seeing two people so perfect for each other just unable to connect for years and years. And once they do finally connect, it takes them weeks to realize that it wasn't actually a mistake, that yes, they are made for each other, and they should just be together for the sake of their happiness, and that they do in fact love each other and always have, but have just been

complete idiots the entire time they have known each other — which by their count and mine is 12 years.

In any case, one of the most crucial moments in the entire movie happens towards the very end. Sally learns that her ex has just gotten engaged to the girlfriend who should have been his “transitional person.” Through all the sadness and the crying, Harry comforts Sally and the two eventually sleep together. It is a pivotal moment in the movie. Everything changes, just as Harry said from the moment they met: “Men and women can’t be friends because the sex always gets in the way.” For Harry and Sally, it wasn’t the idea of sex that got in the way, it was actual sex that did. The minute they actually slept together all their feelings, that they had been suppressing for years, finally welled up. But not questions emerged: Should they date? Was it a mistake? If you are curious, they both agreed that it was a mistake, but if we are all honest, it wasn’t. In any case, the truth is that after that moment they stop being friends. They stop completely. But it is only because they sleep together that they can move on with their lives, finally delve into being romantically involved with each other, and become Harry and Sally the couple who can openly admit that they love each other.

Now, bear with me. I swear I will get to homes eventually but it’s going to be a long road and it’s worth it. Well I hope so. My head is filled with mush and I’m trying to sort it out on paper and sorting all that out takes some effort...

Ok. Now, let’s go a few decades back to the original Jewish Harry met Sally (and let’s ignore that Harry is definitely Jewish and this has been analyzed in many different film journals that I may or may not have read for film classes at JTS but will not go into now). In any case, in S.Y. Agnon’s story *The Tale of the Scribe*, we are introduced to the original Harry and Sally, Raphael the Scribe and his wife Miriam. I know, you are saying “UMM juju they are married!!!

Aren't you missing the point over here? I'm confused???" Just wait a minute... The story tells of the relationship between Miriam and Raphael, or more accurately the lack of a relationship between the two. Although the two are married, the two are so focused on their own goals and ambitions that they forget the importance of building a proper home. In a way, they are the *When Harry Met Sally* friends who are together but have no physical connection whatsoever. In fact, they never have sex at all. The two are so caught up in making sure that they are doing everything they can to obey God, in whichever way they individually think is appropriate, that they completely forget to create and build a home together like He would want them to: by procreating and building a family. When Raphael is tempted by his lovely wife, he abruptly shrinks back in anguish over the sin he believes he committed:

...He is immediately attracted to her. He goes towards her to make some pleasing remark. But when he is near her, His name, may He be blessed, flashes before him out of the mirror. Immediately he stops and recites devoutly and in holiness: "I have set the Lord always before me," and shuts his eyes before the glory and awe of the Name.<sup>19</sup>

He is so focused on carrying God's work to an extreme that he cannot even let himself complement his wife or look at her lovingly. He must be pure, and his wife, as much as she wants to be, will never pure enough for him.

Now, let's delve more into this. Raphael is the town scribe. This means that when someone dies without any children he can be commissioned to write a Torah scroll in their name so that they will have a place in heaven. It is a wonderful job. It is close to godly. And he takes this job seriously. And by seriously I mean to an extreme. He goes to the bath house between every holy word and makes sure that he is of pure physically and mentally at all times. This means that he has never, NEVER, touched his wife. He has never gotten intimate with her. He has never done anything to disgrace his purity and holiness whatsoever. He is so focused on maintaining this impressive air of holy purity that he has forgone all need for real familial

---

<sup>19</sup> Agnon, 174-175.

interactions. His wife makes sure that the house is up to pure standards and is always clean. But she lusts after a child. That is all she wants. However she is quite foolish and believes that God will simply provide her with one if she puts ornaments around her house that are supposed to help with childbirth: “Her mother had given her the amulet on her wedding day to help keep away from the house the evil spirits that prevent births.”<sup>20</sup> So she simply waits for this child to miraculously come into her womb. The two just wait and wait hoping that their individual actions will create the perfect home, which it of course will not. Unlike Harry and Sally, who correct their wrong, these two never fix theirs. They just continue in their usual pattern of pure stupidity, waiting for their house to become a home and for their dysfunction to correct itself.

And so, in *The Tale of the Scribe* a home is described as a cohesive whole, as a family that is working in tangent to create a loving bond, and thus suggest that home, as the cliché statement suggests, is really where the heart is. Home is where family is. Home is where love is. Home is where you build those types of relationships. Whether those are friendships, romantic relationships, or just familial relationships, home is a place where you have a bond with people. It is where you can create a place of connection to those around you. Raphael and Miriam clearly do not have that type of relationship. Their relationship is sterile at best. Barely in the same mental space with each other, their relationship is nothing more than obligation. They occupy the same space but they have no connection to each other. They are sterile. They are pure. They are, sadly, too pure. Harry and Sally on the other hand always had a home in each other. Even as friends they could rely on each other for the comfort they required. And once they figured out that truly, deeply, wonderfully, they were meant for each other, they could create a home for themselves on a physical and more intimate relationship level. They always had that connection.

---

<sup>20</sup> Agnon, 172.

For them, home really was where the heart was. They couldn't escape each other for some reason. Fate brought them together and they created a type of home around that.

As for me, well, I appreciate the idea of home is where the heart is. I really do. I want that to be true, but I have yet to fully believe it. The thing is, if home is where the heart is, well, then, I should feel right at home in California where my parents are. I have lived there for a good chunk of my life, and I still think that no matter which house we move to or which city in California we are in, I feel like California is trying to reject me. Yes, the familiar is nice. The familiar supermarket that I've gone to since the age of seven is a nice sight and the IKEA that I used to roam around in, ever since it opened when I was in high school, is a great place to see coming back from the airport, but nothing more. It's not home. It just isn't. And I know that my mom says that as long as we're together everything is going to be ok, and I do believe that, but on the other hand, shouldn't I feel that too? I still don't feel at home in California and it's been well over 10 years. And if home is where the heart is, and my immediate family is in California, then my heart should definitely be in Silicon Valley right next to the Apple Buildings.

I will say that I love the friends I have. I have gone through many friends throughout my life, but the ones that have stuck are the ones I can't imagine my life without. And in a way, the comfort of knowing that even through all the ups and downs and the crazy moments we are still able to make each other laugh uncontrollably while walking down a random street at 2:00AM makes everything better. It is a home, it a type of home, but it isn't the home I want. Is that selfish? I love that type of home, but I want more. I don't just want to have friends to go to. I don't just want friends to run home to, I want a place to run home to. I guess that's a lot to ask for. One should suffice. And I am very lucky. I have some of the craziest friends in the world. They are insane and funny and weird. My best friend from third grade is still one of my favorite



people in the world and will randomly text me lines from musicals at 3:00AM just to make sure I wake up happy. And my other friend who I have known most of my life will still go on crazy NYC food hunts with me, even if they are to very obscure places that I have only heard of because they were in a movie that I loved randomly once when I was 10, and I thought we should try it out. She's great. I love her. She's in Paris now, but the minute she gets back we are going back to Cafe Lalo because that place is heaven, if I have not said so already. Also that's where *You've Got Mail* was filmed and where our childhood friendship became a real friendship and where we decided to spend Rosh Hashanah watching the Lion King 3D in theaters, eat sushi, and indulge in too much apple pie because that's what we felt we should do as modern Jewish girls. In a way, I established a type of home with my friends. No matter where we are or how long it's been since we've seen each other, we fall right back into our old routine. It is comfortable. It is wonderful. But it is also not the exact type of home I imagined for myself. I don't just want a home with friends; I want a home with family. Maybe it's almost the same thing but for now I'll take what I can get. A home is a home, no matter what shape—at least, I hope it is.

### **The Man From Buenos Aires: Tradition and Memory as Home**

*The Man From Buenos Aires* is one of the more peculiar tales in the *Railroad Stories*, because it discusses the white slave trade. Although Sholem Aleichem never visited South America, he was quite aware of the white slave trade, which was referenced in other Jewish literary pieces at the time and was thus able to write about the underworld of prostitution with such care:

The subject itself—the sale of prostitutes and its place in the life of the Jews on both sides of the ocean—was not new or shocking in Jewish literature at the time that Sholem Aleichem wrote this extraordinary monologue. This subject had already been treated in a relatively comprehensive way in a few central Yiddish novels of the 1880s, a period during which Jewish “white flesh” commerce flourished and had to be acknowledged as a social eyesore in the wake of the Balkan wars of the 1870s, and by them... The remarkable innovation in Sholem Aleichem’s story was in the presentation of the topic “from the inside”—that is to say, through the speech of the Jewish whoremonger himself. Granting this criminal type the privilege to tell his “story” and introducing his personality and mentality from his own perspective and in an obvious attempt to present himself “at his best” were indeed new and quite shocking.<sup>21</sup>

This is one of the stories in which we cannot trust the narrator or the storyteller for any information. They are both talking for the sake of talking and trying to prove to themselves that they understand the situation better than anyone else. The pimp keeps justifying his existence, while the narrator continually assesses the situation and tries to feel in control and aware of this man’s life when he clearly is clueless. It is a wonderful story of back and forth. The man from Buenos Aires declaring that he needs a hometown girl that he will basically lock up to serve as his bride in Argentina, while the storyteller is confusedly trying to understand the situation he gotten himself into. As Miron states so eloquently:

“The Man from Buenos Aires” is, in many ways, the quintessential “Railroad” story because in it the fundamental issue all the stories explore has been raised to the level of the communication between monologists and listener, whereas in most of the stories faulty communication is what the monoglists tell about, the ‘predicament’ they bewail. Of course they themselves do not always understand that is was faulty communication that undermined and failed them.<sup>22</sup>

All in all, it is a fascinating story of deception and trickery. But it is also a story that emphasizes home as the one location you can always go back to and feel comfortable right away, like you stepped right inside your memories.

---

<sup>21</sup> Dan Miron, *The Image of the Shtetl and Other Studies of Modern Jewish Literary Imagination*, New York: Syracuse Press, 2000, 285.

<sup>22</sup> Miron, 295.

Dear Journal,

So I just came back from a crazy supermarket run. I am going to be in Israel a few weeks and I am already craving Israeli deliciousness (aka milky), so I went to Seasons on 92nd and Amsterdam. I was unaware of this Mecca of Israeli snackage until very recently, but I definitely go more than once a week to fill my Israeli food needs.

I usually go for the chocolate and the schnitzel. Not the best combination, I must admit, but they are two of my favorite things. See, you can't find the same schnitzel here in America. It's just not the same. I have tried to find a good substitute for it all my life, and I have to say that the stuff that is packaged in America is just horrific in comparison. There was a period in my life where I thought Tyson's came close, but I went back to Israel one winter break and realized that nothing beats the taste of Israeli schnitzel, especially extra thin "Of Tov." And so, whenever I can find such deliciousness as Israeli schnitzel, which in New York City is weekly, I go on a small shopping adventure and indulge in a little taste of Israel.

My most potent memories of Israel revolve around food. I remember my mom baking the traditional chocolate cake with whip cream and sprinkles. I remember going to the weird Chinese restaurant place in Haifa, which was basically in the basement of a mall, and requesting four plates of the starter salad that was doused in sweet and sour sauce that was probably made of 90% sugar. I remember the incredible disgustingness of the grape juice that was basically just sugar that I used to gulp down by the bottle. I remember the delicious schnitzel that I would eat in front of the television screen that was playing a dubbed version of Power Rangers. And I remember Milky. If there is one thing on this world that I think is close to perfection it is Milky. I remember my mom and I would sit down on her bed every Saturday, watching some horrible kids program, and we would have a contest to see which of us would finish her milky first. Mliky

is chocolate pudding with whip cream on top. I prefer eating a bit of the whip cream and then mixing the rest of the whip cream into the rest of the pudding, while my mom prefers to just mix the entire thing. So really, my mom would mix everything and finish hers in two seconds while I would lag behind because of my extra two bites. It was a great tradition, one that I still sorely miss since we moved to America.

In Sholom Aleichem's story *The Man from Buenos Aires*, the narrator, sitting on yet another train, encounters a most peculiar figure. The mysterious man from Buenos Aires whisks the narrator away to discuss his entire life story of how he became quite rich in his newly adopted home of Argentina, all while sneakily not mentioning that he is in fact a pimp. In any case, that's not the part of the story that's important. How he became a pimp and moved to Argentina is of little consequence to the main point of the story. In truth, the story is more about establishing home and connecting to it than moving up in the underworld of crime in Argentina. The man from Buenos Aires, though somewhat boastful of his expensive lifestyle—which he happily shares with the narrator—cares more about where he came from than where he is now. He wants to feel part of his community even when he is thousands of miles away, so he donates money to make sure that his community in Latvia will remain in perfect condition should he need to visit: "My hometown of Soshmakin is something else. Believe it or not, Shoshmakin gets a barrellful of gold from me each year!"<sup>23</sup> It is important to him to keep the connection so that he can still refer to Soshmakin as his home. As he tells the narrator:

"It doesn't happen every day that a man comes home again after so many years—why, I haven't seen Soshmakin since i was a kid! But it is still home to me, Soshmakin is...Just to be in Soshmakin again, to kiss the ground, to see my old house! I tell you can have your Buenos Aires. You can have your New York. You can have your London. You can even have your Paris. Home for me is Soshmakin..."<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Aleichem, 170.

<sup>24</sup> Aleichem, 170-171.

For the man from Buenos Aires, home is his old neighborhood, his old house, his old community. Home is Soshmakin and all its splendors.

But of course, the problem is that he does not want to live in Soshmakin. As much as he loves the place he will forever call home, he wants to continue to be the rich mysterious boss who can afford the luxury of sending money to his beloved Soshmakin. He wants to continue on the course he set out for himself when he went to Buenos Aires. So instead of just abandoning his lovely town completely, he has come to Soshmakin to find a wife to bring back to Buenos Aires to finally establish the Soshmakin-ite home he wanted in his adopted city. "...I want to marry a hometown girl from Soshmakin, from my own folks," he tells the perplexed narrator, "...A wife I will find in Soshmakin. I want someone with character. A good Jewish girl. I don't care if she hasn't a penny to her name: I'll dress her in gold, I'll gold-plate her parents too, I'll make them one big happy family. And then I'll her back to Buenos Aires and build her a palace fit for a princess..."<sup>25</sup> The man from Buenos Aires wants to bring a piece of his hometown to establish his new home in Buenos Aires. Without a wife from Soshmakin, the mysterious man will simply be adrift between two continents unable to truly be at home properly in either location. By bringing a wife from Soshmakin, he is bringing a piece of his old home to establish his new one.

I understand the desire of the man from Buenos Aires to create a new home from part of his old one. I often find myself searching and longing for the things I had when I was growing up in Israel. The food, the sounds, the TV shows, everything. Somehow the minute I have something from my childhood in my grasp I feel better. The memories of my past make me feel at ease. I like the fact that I can bring these memories and artifacts into my life now. I like that I

---

<sup>25</sup> Aleichem, 171-172.

can eat schnitzel and watch *Bli Sodot* (a show that teaches children how to spell) at midnight and I instantly feel better. And I love how I can fall asleep to an old Israeli children's album I used to listen to obsessively. Just like the Jew from Buenos Aires, I too am trying to create a new home with the remnants of my past.

I think it is important to say that I do not feel that Israel is home. Not as a whole. Sometimes, randomly I do, but on the whole, I don't. When I land I feel like I am back where I am supposed to be, but once I am around my family I come to my senses and realize that I am completely mistaken. I have lived too many years away to be truly at home there. Even when I hang out with my cousins and talk to them, I am very aware that I am the black sheep of the family. I am the one who went back. I am the one who abandoned the Israeli lifestyle and ruined everything my grandparents tried to establish by coming to Israel from Boston. Oh well. A few months ago when my cousin came to visit me in NYC, she looked me up and down and was like, "Well, we don't look alike. We aren't very alike. You're American and I'm Israeli. But ehh at least we're family." It hurt a little, but I understood. Over the years I have come to realize that I do not fit in the country that I was born into. On the other hand, I'm more than happy to take bits and pieces of it with me wherever I go to create a new home for myself somewhere else. And when I go back, I find all the little stuff I loved still happily waiting for me, like watermelon popsicles and milky and too many varieties of schnitzel too count. It's a comfort to know that all the things I remember about my childhood are still there, waiting for me to come back. And so you might occasionally see me watching *Parpar Nechmad* — an old Israeli children's program — or eating bissli nonstop in the hopes of bringing a little Israel to wherever I am today.

**The Lady and the Peddler: A Story of Returning to Home and Home as Routine**

S.Y. Agnon's vampiric masterpiece is a story filled with lots of heart and soul. It is the story of a poor peddler who gets caught up in a love affair with a lady that he forgets his roots and slowly adapts to the Christian way of life. It is a horror story, not only because the Lady turns out to be a vampire who is intent on killing this poor man for his blood, but also because it shows the decline of the man's Jewish faith. The story suggests that there is always a home in one's religion, even if that does not seem so, and proves the importance of staying true to oneself. It is a very simplistic type of home. Agnon was able to venture into the Diaspora in Germany for twelve years, "...which he would later refer to with a deep sense of regret..."<sup>26</sup>, before eventually returning to Israel. This story emphasizes the important lesson that one can always return home, no matter what home is to them.

---

<sup>26</sup> Dan Laor, "Agnon in Germany: 1912-1924: A Chapter of a Biography," *AJS Review* 18 (1993), 75.

Ok, Hi Journal,

The semester is almost over. It's a scary thought but somehow I've always managed to survive, so I'm guessing that I will be ok. Well, I hope. But I keep telling myself that I've gone through finals before. I've done it before. I've passed my classes before. It always worked out before, so I should be fine this semester too. Every semester I get through it. I live in the library, freak out a bit, stay at JTS until unbelievable hours, and somehow—miraculously—get through it. It's a routine I've maintained since my freshman year and as much as I dread the marathon of study sessions that finals ultimately bring, the routine in itself is comforting. There is a comfort in the familiar. There is a comfort in the routine. In a way, knowing that this finals routine is coming is encouraging and wonderful. It allows me to feel like I can do what I need to do because this routine has clearly worked in the past. In a way, this routine is home. It is the familiar comforting situation that I am more than happy to replicate every semester in order to get through finals. I know that sounds absurd, but I am pretty sure that I have a home within my finals routine. The fact is that if home can be anything, I'm not going to complain that my home is sometimes a routine I have created to get through the most hellish two weeks of school.

To be honest, it's a little scary to me to think that for me home revolves around a routine I had to establish in order to survive finals week, but whatever. I think in general the idea of home as routine is poetic and wonderful. The familiar beckons us home, whether it is the house we grew up in or the shimmering lights when College Walk is finally lit up. And well, I guess a finals week routine might be horrific, but it is the familiar. It's nice to do similar things over and over. I look forward to my routines. I love getting a t-shirt on Barnard's Spirit Day. I wait obsessively until fall so that I can enjoy some hot cider. I wait every year to look at all the wonderful Christmas decorations. I get excited every time my best friend and I get our usual



table at our favorite Italian place near campus. Routines are not only useful, they are comforting as well. They are a type of home. And that's a wonderful thing to know, because even if you stray away from them for a while, you can always go back and feel the wonderfulness of the familiar rush over you. Finals week is once a semester. I don't go to the library this obsessively throughout the rest of the year, but when I come back to my finals routine I feel excited, I feel ready, I feel like I'm going to fail everything... but that's another issue.

In one of my classes at JTS, I read *The Lady and the Peddler* by S.Y. Agnon. It's one of the more ridiculous stories I have read for a class, mainly because the Lady turns out to be vampire-cannibal type of character. But why I always come back to the story is the transformation of the lowly peddler while co-habituating and falling in love with the Lady. In the beginning the peddler is just a Jew asking for the rich lady to buy some of his items. He knows his place and only wants to do his job and leave. But then it starts raining and he is allowed to stay in the barn. And then he starts helping around the house so he gets to live in the guest room. And then he falls for her so he sleeps in her bed. It is an interesting progression, one that is further emphasized by the peddler's adaptation from lowly Jew to fake aristocrat. In the process of adapting to his surroundings, the Jew slowly discards his Jewish identity. As the narrator tells us,

“Every day she prepared him a feast from all that she had, in house and field, every good town and every fat fowl. And if she broiled the meat in butter, he did not hold back from it. At first, when he would see her twisting the neck of a bird, he would be shocked. Afterward, he ate and even sucked the bone dry, as is the way of worthless folk: at first they are unwilling to commit a sin and afterward they commit all the sins in the world with a hearty appetite.”<sup>27</sup>

The rules and traditions that had been a central part of his identity are slowly eliminated from his daily life. Kashrut no longer matters because he no longer feels constrained by his religious domination. He does not feel obliged to keep rules that no longer fit in with his lifestyle. In a

---

<sup>27</sup> Agnon, 202.

way, it's understandable, but it's also incredibly emotional to read of someone throwing their entire identity and culture out the window—even for what seems to be love. Eventually, the peddler completely forgets his old life and fully embraces his new lifestyle: “He took off his peddler's clothes and put on the garments of aristocracy, and he fell in with the people of the place until he was like one of them... [he]...had forgotten that she was a lady and he was a Jew...”<sup>28</sup> The peddler lost his way and abandoned his faith for love, for shelter, for comfort. And although it is understandable to adapt to make oneself more comfortable, completely abandoning religion is an extreme. In any case, eventually the peddler realizes that this woman has murdered her husbands and finally understands how far he has strayed from his Jewish lifestyle: “‘Father in heaven,’ Joseph shouted, ‘how far away I have gone! If I don't return at once, I am lost.’”<sup>29</sup> After the Lady dies from malnourishment because she found the peddler's blood too cold, the peddler simply goes on his way back to his old life. He returns to his routine and to his roots. And so, “...that peddler took up his pack and traveled on from place to place, traveling and crying out his wares.”<sup>30</sup> In the end, the Jew returns to his roots and goes on his way and starts the cycle all over again.

The cyclical nature of the story is haunting but comforting at the same time. Yes, the cycle begins again and it is very clear that this poor Jew might fall for this trap again, but on the other hand he can also return to his old life. The routine and traditions of his old life have stayed in tact. Although he has drifted away from Judaism he can easily go back. He can get back to his old life as simply as he left it. I realize that going back to a routine and going back to a religion are different. I know. I understand. But the idea, at least for me, is the same. I can return to my

---

<sup>28</sup> Agnon, 202.

<sup>29</sup> Agnon, 208-209.

<sup>30</sup> Agnon, 210.

finals routine just as easily as the peddler can return to his previous life. The routine stays the same, always ready to be revisited. And so even though sometimes my routines are not exactly fun, I do appreciate knowing that I am returning to the comfortable, to the traditions I have created for myself. And somehow, wonderfully, even the mundane can become a comforting, perfect home. In a weird way, this interpretation of home is one of the best, because it opens up the definition of home to basically anything. Home is comfort. Home is love. Home is routine. Home is slipping into pajamas the minute you get home. Home is eating a piece of chocolate when you are stressed. Everything can be a routine. Everything can be a tradition. Everything, incredibly, wonderfully, awkwardly, can be a home.

Over the course of trying to find my home, I have come to the conclusion that home is anything. Home is just a term to describe life. Home is just a term to describe actions, places, and feelings. Home is joy and pain and love and hurt and random ice cream binges at 3:00AM. In a way, the fact that home can be so many things at once is scary, but on the other hand, it is perfect. If home can be anything, you can never be away from home. You can never escape. You will always find little reminders to cheer up your day. Home is all around—just like that song, “Love is All Around” that was later changed to “Christmas is All Around” for the movie *Love Actually*. Home is all around, and I could not be more grateful for that.

Work Cited

- Agnon, Shmuel Yosef, Alan L. Mintz, and Anne Golomb Hoffman. *A Book That Was Lost and Other Stories*. New York: Schocken, 1995. Print.
- Ezrahi, Sidra DeKoven. *Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination*. Berkeley: University of California, 2000. Print.
- Hochman, Baruch. "MEMOIR: An Afternoon with Agnon: A Face to Meet the Faces." *The American Scholar* 57.1 (1988): 91-99. Print.
- Laor, Dan. "Agnon in Germany: 1912–1924: A Chapter of A Biography." *AJS Review* 18.01 (1993): 75-93. Print.
- Miron, Dan. *The Image of the Shtetl and Other Studies of Modern Jewish Literary Imagination*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 2000. Print.
- Roskies, David G. *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1996. Print.
- Sholem, Aleichem, Hillel Halkin, and Aleichem Sholem. *Tevye the Dairyman and the Railroad Stories*. New York: Schocken, 1987. Print