



The Parable and Its Lesson: A Novella (Stanford Studies in Jewish History and C)

S. Agnon

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S.Y. Agnon was the greatest Hebrew writer of the twentieth century, and the only Hebrew writer to receive the Nobel Prize for literature. He devoted the last years of his life to writing a massive cycle of stories about Buczacz, the Galician town (now in Ukraine) in which he grew up. Yet when these stories were collected and published three years after Agnon's death, few took notice. Years passed before the brilliance and audacity of Agnon's late project could be appreciated.

The Parable and Its Lesson is one of the major stories from this work. Set shortly after the massacres of hundreds of Jewish communities in the Ukraine in 1648, it tells the tale of a journey into the Netherworld taken by a rabbi and his young assistant. What the rabbi finds in his infernal journey is a series of troubling theological contradictions that bear on divine justice. Agnon's story gives us a fascinating window onto a community in the throes of mourning its losses and reconstituting its spiritual, communal, and economic life in the aftermath of catastrophe. There is no question that Agnon wrote of the 1648 massacres out of an awareness of the singular catastrophic massacre of his own time—the Holocaust.

James S. Diamond has provides an extensive set of notes to make it possible for today's reader to grasp the rich cultural world of the text. The introduction and interpretive essay by Alan Mintz illuminate Agnon's grand project for recreating the life of Polish Jewry, and steer the reader through the knots and twists of the plot.

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