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The Tragedy of Romance: A Case of Literary Exile*

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Masterpieces are written in a sort of foreign tongue.¹

Proust

In the centuries since Tertullian asked, “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”² the dichotomy between these two cities and their respective cultures has assumed almost mythical proportions. Scholars have expended a great deal of energy to show that this sentiment has a greater prescriptive value than a descriptive one. It now seems apparent that for nearly a thousand years, from the time of Alexander to the Muslim conquest, the Jews of Palestine lived in and successfully negotiated with Greco-Roman culture. The question that remains open is the depth and intensity of this interaction.³ It would plainly be both irresponsible and beyond my capabilities to attempt any type of comprehensive answer to this question.

*I conceived of this paper during a NEH seminar at Yale University on “The Sacred, the Secular, and the Profane in Bakhtinian Perspective” directed by Michael Holquist and Walter Reed. I wish to thank them both, as well as my fellow participants for their assistance.

¹Quoted in Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1987) 124.

²Tertullian *Praescr. haer.* 7.

³For a concise summary of the different positions, see Moshe Herr, “Hellenismus and the Jews of Palestine,” *Eshkolot*, n.s., 2–3 (1978) 20–27 [Hebrew].

Even if I limit my investigation to the classical rabbinic period (70–550 CE), I am addressing a considerable span of time, and distinctions must be made between various periods, social strata, and material manifestations. Linguistic or architectural influence is different from literary or theological acculturation. Those who lived in cities were affected differently than the farmers. The cultural exposure experienced in Caesarea, where the Tenth Roman Legion was encamped⁴ and some prayers were conducted in Greek,⁵ differed from the academies of Tiberias or among the thieves and theatergoers of Sepphoris.⁶

There are many excellent studies that attempt to trace the extent and modes of Hellenization in rabbinic literature, as discourses on such diverse topics as taxes and tombstones attest.⁷ In this paper I shall address a topic that has received limited attention—the adoption and adaptation of Greco-Roman literary models in midrashic literature. Assuredly, many scholars have pointed out the appearance of Hellenistic literary motifs⁸ and genres⁹ in the rabbinic corpus. The compiling of parallel motifs and topoi, however, has only limited value. As Lieberman observed, “whenever a loan word makes its way into a language we must ask after the reason.”¹⁰ What is true for a single word is all the more appropriate for larger literary units,

⁴Zeev Safrai, “The Roman Army in the Galilee,” in Lee I. Levine, ed., *The Galilee in Late Antiquity* (New York: JTSA, 1992) 105. Safrai remarks that from the second to the fourth centuries, Judea contained 25,000 soldiers or 8 percent of the Roman forces, thus making it the greatest concentration of Roman troops in any province of its size. Of course the army was a considerable consumer of services and supplies and an important medium of cultural exchange. See *b. Šabbat* 145b for the frequent visits of the army to Tiberias and Sepphoris.

⁵“R. Levi bar Hita went to Caesarea. He heard them reading the *shema* in Greek” (*y. Sota* 21b).

⁶*y. Ma‘aser Š.* 55d. Archaeologists relate that the theater in Sepphoris had a seating capacity of 5,000. See Zeev Weiss, “Roman Leisure Culture and Its Influence on the Jews of Palestine,” *Qadmoniyot* 28 (1995) 2–19 [Hebrew]; and Mary T. Boatwright, “Theaters in the Roman Empire,” *BA* 53 (1990) 185.

⁷See Herr, “Hellenismus,” and idem, “External Influences on the World of the Sages in Palestine—Acceptance and Rejection,” in Yosef Kaplan and Menahem Stern, eds., *Acculturation and Assimilation* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 1989) 83–106 and the literature recorded there.

⁸See the encyclopedic works of Elimelech Halevi; Herr, “External Influences,” 85 n. 8. Shaye Cohen (“The Beauty of Flora and the Beauty of Sarai,” *Helios*, n.s., 5 [1981] 41–53) examines literary influences of Greek love poetry which can already be noticed in the *Genesis Apocryphon* of the first century BCE.

⁹See Henry A. Fischel, *Rabbinic Literature and Greco-Roman Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1974); idem, “Story and History: Observations on Greco-Roman Rhetoric and Pharisaism,” in idem, ed., *Essays in Greco-Roman and Related Talmudic Literature* (New York: Ktav, 1977) 443–72; and Martin Braun, *History and Romance in Graeco-Oriental Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell 1939).

¹⁰Saul Lieberman, *Studies in Palestinian Talmudic Literature* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991) 433.

which are always embedded within a network of overlapping institutional, historical, and ideological discourses.

“What material does Talmudic literature contain which may indicate rabbinic acquaintance with Greek literary sources that do not have a direct bearing on the practical life?”¹¹ How cognizant were the rabbis of the extensive literary activity that surrounded them? There seem to be contradictory indications regarding this question. On the one hand, various scholars have pointed out the paucity of specific references to philosophers or classical authors.¹² From classical literature, only Homer is mentioned by name,¹³ and Origen testifies to the fact that the “Jews are not at all well read in Greek literature.”¹⁴ On the other hand, Gafni echoes the prevailing scholarly consensus “that knowledge of Greco-Roman ideas, phrases and parables—as well as grammatical and rhetorical systems—infiltrated not only rabbinic literary work, but even religiously motivated deliberations. We assume that these Greco-Roman elements were transmitted through a variety of intermediaries, most probably in oral rather than written form.”¹⁵

Regarding the issue of literary models, it has recently been suggested that the rabbis intentionally chose generic literary frameworks that distinguished their writings from those of the surrounding cultures. The mid-rashic mode, therefore, is a “negative response to cultural assimilation,” which precluded “a flowering of other forms of writing or speculation.”¹⁶ While this observation may apply to the larger redactional units of rabbinic discourse, its validity is far from certain with regard to individual pericope.¹⁷ Undoubtedly, as a subordinate minority, the Judaism of Late Antiquity had to struggle to forge its own narrative space, to tell its own tale, which differed radically from those told around and about it. The desire and need

¹¹Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962) 105.

¹²Wolfson (*Philo* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947] 92) has remarked that “in the entire Greek vocabulary that is embodied in the Midrash, Mishnah, and Talmud there is not a single technical philosophic term.” See also Saul Lieberman, “How Much Greek in Jewish Palestine?” *Texts and Studies* (New York: Ktav, 1974) 222.

¹³*m. Yad.* 4.6; *y. Sanh.* 28a; *b. Hul.* 60b; *Midrash Tehilim* 1.8 (Buber, p. 9); see Lieberman, *Hellenism*, 105.

¹⁴Origen *Cels.* 2.34 (trans. Henry Chadwick; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 94.

¹⁵Isaiah M. Gafni, “The World of the Talmud: From the Mishnah to the Arab Conquest,” in Hershel Shanks, ed., *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1992) 233; see also Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974); and Elias J. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

¹⁶Marc Hirshman, “The Greek Fathers and the Aggada on Ecclesiastes: Formats of Exegesis in Late Antiquity,” *HUCA* 59 (1988) 138.

¹⁷This distinction raises interesting questions regarding the redactional history of rabbinic literature which have yet to be suitably addressed.

to narrate itself had to struggle constantly with the temptation of adopting the hegemonic perspective. Rejection, however, is only one weapon, and not necessarily the most effective one in the arsenal of cultural survival.

Instead of viewing the text as an inventory for calculating the acceptance or rejection of literary minutia, I would like to explore it as an arena of struggle, a means of cultural intervention, and one realm among many for the negotiation and production of social meaning. Texts gain access to tensions and contradictions that may be less clearly articulated in other cultural forums. Specifically, I would like to investigate the midrashic adoption and adaptation of genres and character-types from the Greco-Roman culture which surrounded them. Under what circumstances and for which purposes did rabbinic culture use and adapt Hellenized literary models? It should be stressed at the outset that I am not positing direct literary influence. There is little evidence to support the hypothesis that the rabbis read Terence, Chariton, or Xenophon. The material cultural milieu, however, presented ample opportunities for acquiring indirect knowledge. The rabbis encountered Hellenistic culture through a plethora of semiotic systems—through conversations and debates, oral legends and stories, or statues, mosaics, and coins.¹⁸ In this vein, I present the following text from *Lamentations Rabbah*¹⁹ as an example of literary appropriation, as the process by which the other's language is taken and made to bear the burden of one's own cultural experience. In other words, I shall examine how the rabbis conveyed—in a language that was not their own—the spirit that was.

A tale of the two children of Yahozadok²⁰ the priest who were taken captive, one a boy, the other a girl. This one fell to a soldier, and that one to a soldier. This one went to a whore and gave her the boy as her fee. That one went to a tavern-keeper and handed over the girl for wine, to fulfill the verse, "And cast lots over my people, and they bartered a boy for a whore and sold a girl for wine" (Joel 4:3). Subsequently, the whore brought the boy to the tavern-keeper and said to him, "I have a Jewish slave²¹ who resembles this girl; come and we will mate them with one another, and whatever they produce we will

¹⁸Lieberman, "How Much Greek?" 224; Herr, "Hellenismus," 25; and idem, "External Influences," 85. See also Douglas Edwards's summary: "Any suggestion that the Galilee was isolated from its gentile neighbors either locally or internationally. . . is not borne out by the ceramic or numismatic evidence. . . . A wide range of people, not just the upper class and not just in the coastal areas, was influenced by Greek language and culture" ("The Socio-Economic and Cultural Ethos of the Lower Galilee in the First Century," in Levine, *The Galilee*, 62, 71).

¹⁹I have followed the version of MS Parma De Rossi 1400. This midrash has been transmitted in two different recensions. I shall provide differences in the other branch using MS Cambridge 495. I want to thank Paul Mandel for generously providing me with the variants.

²⁰MS Cambridge 495: Zadok.

²¹MS Cambridge 495: a youth.

split between us.” So they forcibly mated them²² and confined them in a room. The girl began to cry, and the boy said, “Why are you crying?” She answered, “Woe to that woman, the daughter of the high priest, who has been given to a slave!”²³ He said to her, “Who is your father?” She answered, “Yahozadok the high priest.”²⁴ He said, “Where did you live?” She answered, “In Jerusalem.” He asked, “In which neighborhood?” She said, “In such and such.” He asked, “In which building?”²⁵ And she answered, “In such and such a building.” “And what mark was on your house?” She answered, “So and so.” He asked, “Did you have a brother?” She answered, “Yes.” He asked, “Did he have some recognizable mark?” She responded, “He had a mole on his shoulder, and when he would come home from school I would uncover it and kiss him.”²⁶ He said, “And if you saw it²⁷ would you recognize him?” She answered, “Yes.” He bared his shoulder²⁸ before her and she recognized it. And they embraced each other and kissed each other, and wept till their soul expired. And the Holy Spirit exclaims, “For these do I weep, [My eyes flow with tears, Far from me is any comforter who might revive my spirit; my children are forlorn, for the enemy has prevailed]” (Lam 1:16).²⁹

This tale presents the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, and as such triggers the interpretive framework of tragedy.³⁰ We could summarize this narrative as the story of two beautiful children, who being separated by a series of misfortunes and trials, mostly erotic, are finally reunited in a manner that ironically yet tragically recalls their previous estate. Although this summary is slightly disingenuous, it foregrounds what I take to be its most startling characteristic. This “tragedy” is presented in the narrative form and with the character types of an ancient Greek novel or romance.³¹ The remainder of this paper will be an attempt

²²MS Cambridge 495: put them; the reading of MS Parma De Rossi 1400 is unclear here.

²³MS Cambridge 495: She answered, “Should I not cry that the daughter of a high priest has gone and wed a slave?”

²⁴MS Cambridge 495: Zadok the priest.

²⁵MS Cambridge 495: He said, “And where did you used to live?” She answered, “In the upper quarter.” He said, “And what mark was on your house?” She answered, “Such and such.”

²⁶MS Cambridge 495: “I would uncover him and kiss him.”

²⁷MS Cambridge 495: him.

²⁸MS Cambridge 495: He exposed himself.

²⁹*Lam. R.* 1.46.

³⁰The redactional context further strengthens this orientation.

³¹I refer to the corpus exemplified by such works as Chariton *Chaereas and Callirhoe* (first century CE); Xenophon of Ephesus *Ephesiaca* (second century CE); Achilles Tatius *Leucippe and Clitophon* (late second century CE); Longus *Daphnis and Chloe* (end of second century CE); Heliodorus *Aethiopica* (third to fourth century CE); *Apollonius King of Tyre* (third century CE). All quotations are taken from Bryan P. Reardon, *Collected Ancient Greek Novels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

to substantiate this assertion. This genre emerged and flourished in the first to the fifth centuries of the Greco-Roman world, precisely the same period that saw the development and consolidation of classical rabbinic literature. Compare the above summary with the following description of the typical Greek novel:

Archetypically, a supremely handsome young man and a supremely beautiful young woman fall in love at first sight. Somehow they are separated and launched into a series of adventures which take them all over the Mediterranean world. They undergo shipwreck, meet pirates, attract the unwanted sexual attentions of third parties, and believe one another dead. But through everything they remain true to one another and are eventually reunited to pass the rest of their lives in wedded bliss.³²

Aside from the disparity between the narrative length of the average Greek novel and the typical midrashic tale, there is only one critical aspect of the narrated world that prevents a comprehensive equivalence: the midrashic narrative ends in death rather than wedded bliss.³³ The rabbinic use of this specific literary model, which the emperor Julian denigrated as *erōtikai hypotheseis*,³⁴ seems extremely incongruous. The basic question I shall address is why our narrator chose this seemingly inappropriate generic framework to recount a story of the traumatic loss of national identity subsequent to the destruction of the temple.

I agree with Sinfield that “societies have to reproduce themselves culturally as well as materially, and this is done in great part by putting into circulation stories of how the world goes.”³⁵ One of the mechanisms that a culture uses to ensure the proper reception of its narratives is a limited repertoire of genres that act as a complex system for seeing and understanding reality.³⁶ As Culler has succinctly remarked:

³²John R. Morgan, “Introduction,” in John Morgan and Richard Stoneman, eds., *Greek Fiction: The Greek Novel in Context* (London: Routledge, 1994) 2. See also Konstan’s (*Sexual Symmetry: Love in the Ancient Novel and Related Genre* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994] 14) definition: “A young couple in love, of extraordinary beauty, are plunged by a hostile fate into various adventures and dangers, until, in the end, for the most part after a rather long separation, they are united in a stable, faithful love for a life that is henceforth unchangingly happy.”

³³Even the fact that the protagonists are brother and sister has precedents in the extant romances. This motif appears in the late *Clement Romance* (fourth century CE) which recounts the separation and reunion of two brothers. So also *The Story of Apollonius King of Tyre* (third century CE) describes the travails of a father and his daughter.

³⁴Julian *Epistulae* 89b (301B): “We must eschew the fictions reported in the shape of history by earlier writers, love themes and all that sort of stuff.”

³⁵Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics, and Culture in Postwar Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 2.

³⁶Mikhail M. Bakhtin and Pavel M. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985) 133.

A genre, one might say is a conventional function of language, a particular relation to the world which serves as norm or expectation to guide the reader in his encounter with the text. . . . To assimilate or interpret something is to bring it within the modes of order which culture makes available, and this is usually done by talking about it in a mode of discourse which a culture takes as natural.³⁷

While it is extremely difficult and speculative to reconstruct the generic horizon of expectations on the basis of which a work in the past was created and received, I submit that this text can best be understood against the background of the works that the author could expect his contemporary public to know either explicitly or implicitly.³⁸ I am tentatively suggesting that the Greek novel constitutes just such an horizon of expectations from which we can most fruitfully find the questions that this midrashic tale originally answered. This interpretive move raises certain difficulties, however. As the context from *Lamentations Rabbah* shows, rabbinic literature has no lack of indigenous tragic narrative forms at its disposal. Why would the narrator adopt this particular foreign and secular plot to portray one of the most intimate and tragic of moments of Jewish history? What are the consequences of this narrative mimicry by which the other's language is made to bear the burden of one's own cultural experience?

Before proceeding, let us augment the characteristics of the Greek romance. The extant exemplars of the romance display a remarkable similarity in plot structure and thematic repertoire.³⁹ In the four hundred years of their popularity, however, the genre underwent many changes and variations, incorporated motifs from other genres, and even reached a degree of self-consciousness that permitted parodization.⁴⁰ As one of the popular literary genres of Late Antiquity,⁴¹ it is not surprising that this form made its

³⁷Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975) 135.

³⁸Hans R. Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," in Ralph Cohen, ed., *New Directions in Literary History* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974) 23.

³⁹C. Ruiz-Montero, "The Structural Pattern in the Ancient Greek Romances and the *Morphology of the Folktales* of V. Propp," *Fabula* 22 (1981) 228–38.

⁴⁰For example, see Petronius *Satyricon*. On the development of this genre and its tendency to borrow and incorporate themes and motifs from other genres, see Tomas Hagg, *The Novel in Antiquity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983) 161, 171; Bryan P. Reardon, *The Form of Greek Romance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) 127; Morgan, "Introduction," 1–14; Niklas Holzberg, *The Ancient Novel* (London: Routledge, 1995).

⁴¹This popularity in no way characterizes the actual audiences. As Brigitte Egger remarks ("Women and Marriage in Greek Novels," in James Tatum, ed., *The Search for the Ancient Novel* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994] 362), it is "now generally accepted that the novelists were well-read, educated men of literary aspirations—theories of juvenile, trivial, uncultivated, or frivolous writers (and readers) have become obsolete." See also Ewen Bowie, "The Readership of Greek Novels in the Ancient World," in Tatum, *Search*, 435–59. For a different view of the popularity of the romances, see Susan A. Stephens, "Who Read Ancient Novels?" in Tatum, *Search*, 405–18.

way into the rabbinic corpus⁴² as well as later Christian hagiography. Its reception into rabbinic literature and culture was not merely a consequence of adopting a prevalent narrative framework. Just as the rise and decline of this genre can be attributed to its ability to address some urgent needs of society in Late Antiquity, so also its appropriation and transformation in rabbinic culture reflects a deep ideological need.⁴³ With its similarity to biblical historiography, the narrative structure of union-separation-reunion created a deep resonance in the rabbinic imagination. It was by this very configuration that they understood their historical present in relation to their past and imagined eschatological future.

The first part of the narrative depicts the progressive separation and differentiation of the two protagonists. Hasan-Rokem sees here a process of gradual dehumanization of the characters.⁴⁴ It may be more appropriate, however, to see this process as a gradual profanation—from the progeny of the high priest they become coinage for whores. Our narrator adopted the ubiquitous romance motif of the characters' loss of cultural identity and social status, from prince to pauper, and adapted it to portray a process of secularization from priesthood to pandery.⁴⁵ I do not know why the prophet Joel singled out whores and wine to signify the ordeals of the exile, but in the rabbinic imagination these two items have emphatic echoes. All priests

⁴²The narrative of R. Akiva and his wife (*b. Ned.* 50a), as recognized and analyzed by Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 136, is but one example. See also Shamma Friedman's interesting suggestion ("The Primacy of Tosefta in Mishnah-Tosefta Parallels," *Tarbiz* 62 [1993] 328 [Hebrew]) concerning the halakhah that forbids reading secular texts (שפרי דריושנה) on shabbat (*t. Šabbat* 13.1). He speculates that these may be secular Hellenistic texts. Stephanie West ("Joseph and Asenath: A Neglected Greek Romance," *Classical Quarterly* 24 [1974] 70–81) has posited the influence of the romance literature on *Joseph and Asenath*. For a summary of prerabbinic influence, see Lawrence Wills, "The Jewish Novellas," in Morgan and Stoneman, *Greek Fiction*, 223. David Stern noted (*The Parables in Midrash* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991] 245) in passing the similarity of this tale with the romance form.

⁴³For example, Boyarin has shown how the Akiva romance was appropriated in order to placate deep-seated ideological tensions. It can be added to his sensitive analysis that the incorporation of the New Comedy motif of parental and class conflict served the needs of legitimizing the house of study as the spiritual home and nexus of society. For a similar effect, see the story of R. Eliezer in *BR* 41.1, 398. On these themes, see David Konstan, *Roman Comedy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

⁴⁴Galit Hasan-Rokem, "The Ideological and Psychological Codes," *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 3 (1983) 135 [Hebrew]. It is precisely in regard to the effects of the generic horizon of expectations that I differ from Hasan-Rokem. Though we vary in our perspectives, I am much indebted to Professor Hasan-Rokem's insightful and innovative article, as well as her generous comments.

⁴⁵See, for example *The Story of Apollonius King of Tyre* (33.758) where the princess-heroine is bought by a pimp but succeeds in keeping her virginity until reunited with her father.

were conjoined from drinking wine (Lev 10:8) and from marrying harlots (Lev 21:7). Moreover, the daughter of a priest who has illicit intercourse is condemned to death by burning (Lev 21:9). Each sexual partner in the narrative represents a greater profanation than the former, and thus the tragic irony is especially acute. In spite of the fact that the final partner is identical to the first, this union is the most disastrous. What is staged in the first part of the narrative is not only a gradual profanation of cultural identity but also the termination of a possible cultural future. A priest who cohabits with a whore produces offspring who are barred from the priesthood and can produce only profane descendants.⁴⁶

The narrator has significantly altered not only the proportions, but also the sequence of the typical romance tripartite structure. Instead of the trials of separation occupying the greater portion of narrated time, here the reunion is the narrative crux. This is not a fortuitous breach of narrative convention. By all external signs there is no difference between the past and the present: there is a couple, a house, a mole, and physical intimacy in both worlds. The destruction, however, separates the two worlds by an abyss. The present reenactment of the past can only precipitate a tragedy. The staging of an identical dramatic situation against the background of the destruction brings home to both characters that they have no future. Distinct from the classical Greek novel, therefore, the reunion is not the consequence of the successful negotiation of the trials, but is itself the ultimate trial. The demise of the priesthood is not through separation, but through reunion. The high priest is commanded to marry “only a virgin of his own kin” (Lev 21:14), and the daughter in the story is exactly that! The problem is not that he is incompatible; rather, he is too compatible. The romance has been considered an elaboration of the period between initial desire (*eros*) and final consummation (*gamos*),⁴⁷ and the successful coupling of these two moments lies at the heart of the genre’s social function. This is exactly the same timespan covered in the midrashic narrative. Through the manipulation of the narrative sequence, however, the narrator has collapsed these two moments into one, thus stressing their grotesque disjunction. If, as Winkler has pointed out, the romance is “a fantasy of the significantly impossible,”⁴⁸ then this tale cogently, yet tragically, epitomizes this insight. In this postdestruction world the most compatible mate is the least compatible, and the passage from Leviticus takes on a paradoxical and grotesque reality. This is not a mere religious or sexual conundrum; the narrative scandal is that in this new world the violation of the Torah becomes its fulfillment and vice versa, and therefore the protagonists must die. The

⁴⁶Lev 18:9; *m. Yebamot* 4.13; *m. Qidd.* 3.12.

⁴⁷John J. Winkler, “The Invention of Romance,” in Tatum, *Search*, 28.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 36.

generic framework of the text before us stands in a marked tension with its thematic repertoire. The combination of the romance form with this tragic content has resulted in a narrative blind or dead end. If the characters consummate the codes of the romance, they must abandon their social identities. They can preserve those identities only by forfeiting the consolation proffered by the romance conventions. It would seem that the hybrid generic construction modeled in this narrative is no less an act of violence than the events recounted within the narrated world. I think that we can begin to see why the narrator has adopted the romance model. What better way to emphasize and illustrate the loss of their previous estate than by adopting the very genre whose foreign and secular plot embodies the chronotope of “enforced exile to an alien world?”⁴⁹

The greater portion of the narrative is taken up by the recognition scene. Recognition by birth or body marks is a prevalent motif in the romances.⁵⁰ As Cave has said in his penetrating study: “in Aristotle’s definition, *anagnorisis* [“recognition”] brings about a shift from ignorance to knowledge; it is the moment at which the characters understand their predicament fully for the first time, the moment that resolves a sequence of unexplained and often implausible occurrences; it makes the world intelligible.”⁵¹ Like the classical use of the recognition motif, the protagonists understand “fully for the first time” the horror of their predicament. I do not think, however, that the world they now inhabit becomes any more intelligible. In opposition to the classical romance, the process of recognition in the midrashic narrative occludes rather than facilitates the future.

Using an interesting technique, the narrator progressively reduces the narrative field in this recognition scene to more and more intimate space. As the characters learn more and more about each other, the reader learns less and less. We are not privy to the specific information exchanged and are precluded from experiencing the youths’ recollection. Here, we readers are cast as voyeurs, or spectators from afar. This refusal of the narrator to allow the reader access to the past appears to be part of his ideological

⁴⁹Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 105.

⁵⁰As Aristotle has remarked, *anagnorisis* may be brought about by “memory when the sight of some object awakens a feeling, as in seeing a picture” (*Poet.* 16.5 [trans. S. H. Butcher; New York: Dover, 1951] 57). For an identical motif of a birthmark on an arm see Heliodorus *Aethiopica* 10.569. This theme appears in almost all of the extant Greek novels. See *An Ephesian Tale* 10.167; *Daphnis and Chloe* 21.341; *Aethiopica* 12–13.567; *The Story of Appolonius King of Tyre* 44.767, and the well-known scene from Homer *Odyssey* 19. See also the satirical treatment of this theme in Petronius *Satyricon* 105. As Hasan-Rokem (“The Ideological Codes,” 135) has pointed out, Aristotle considered this type of recognition as one of the “least artistic forms” (Aristotle *Poet.* 16.1–3).

⁵¹Terence Cave, *Recognitions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) 1.

strategy, which places the reader firmly in the present over and against the characters who withdraw into a tragic nostalgia. As the sister recedes into a past that stands in stark contrast to her present, the future is permanently obstructed.⁵²

In order to address more fully the question of why this story was told as a romance we should point out the various motifs exhibited beyond the plot structure already mentioned. First, I shall consider the protagonists. As Konstan has shown convincingly, one of the innovations of the Greek novel was to create a new erotic model based upon sexual symmetry:

Uniquely in classical love literature, the Greek novels as a genre portray *eros* or amatory passion as a mutual bond between equals eventuating in marriage. The primary couple, invariably heterosexual, are either fellow citizens or members of the same social class, and of more or less the same age—very young. They fall in love at the beginning of the story, and the larger part of the narrative relates their subsequent adventures, in which they endure shipwrecks and separations, and fall captive to brigands, pirates, princesses and satraps, who are susceptible to the beauty of the hero or heroine and are in a position to force compliance. Both partners bear up under these trials with a certain fortitude, though they may yield to thoughts of suicide.⁵³

In the narrative before us the primary characters are indeed social equals of the same class who fall in love. This relationship, however, does not and cannot culminate in marriage since the relationship is too consanguineous. As in the romance, so in the midrash the love and fidelity of the protagonists is highlighted through the counter-punctual function of the secondary characters (soldiers, whore, and tavern-keeper). In contrast to the status of the primary couple themselves, in the period of their separation they both become sexual victims and fall prey to socially undesirable and more powerful characters. These force on the protagonists one-sided relationships involving “inequalities of power or status, and tends toward fickleness and promiscuity. The whole business is rather a sordid domestic drama, in contrast with which the primary romance seems the more exalted and spiritual, with its almost religious commitment to a chaste conjugal love.”⁵⁴ Despite their defenseless state both partners remain faithful, if not neces-

⁵²This narrative occlusion lends support to Wills’s insight (*The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994] 13) that in the Jewish literature that adopted the generic conventions of the romance “the women do not so much move onto stage as take total possession of it. Even where there are other male characters, the dramatic tension is focused on the heroine, she is the medium through which certain obsessions of the author and audience are expressed.”

⁵³Konstan, *Sexual Symmetry*; idem, “Xenophon of Ephesus,” in Morgan and Stoneman, *Greek Fiction*, 53.

⁵⁴Konstan, *Sexual Symmetry*, 97.

sarily chaste. As Konstan remarks: "each is committed to preserving faith with the other, each fears being overpowered and violated, each turns to death as a means of escaping the sexual violence of the pirates."⁵⁵ The desperate lament of the priestly daughter is no different than Anthis bemoaning her fate in the *Ephesian Tale*: "Let us die, Habrocomes. We shall have each other after death, with no one to molest us."⁵⁶ Habrocomes, her lover, sums up both the predicament of the protagonists in the romance and even those of the midrash as follows:

Our good looks are proving untimely for both of us! Was it for this that I kept myself chaste up to now, to submit to the foul lust of an amorous pirate? . . . But I swear by the chastity that has been with me from childhood till now, . . . I will die first and prove my chastity with my own dead body.⁵⁷

There seems to me to be a strong case for viewing this narrative as based upon the generic model of the romance; its structure, themes, motifs, and character-types are all organized around the moral center of constancy and fidelity.⁵⁸ I believe we are now in a better position to appreciate precisely why this literary exemplar was chosen. The spread of philhellenism in the second century is not enough to explain the rise and popularity of this genre.⁵⁹ Various scholars have remarked that the novel may be looked upon as the profane myth of salvation in late Hellenism: "With its central theme of the lonely traveler searching for his beloved, it is an expression of the individual's sense of isolation in the world."⁶⁰ The ideal of romantic love between individual's represented a new way to assert and justify selfhood; this concept was much needed in the postclassical world where new social and political structures deprived the individual of a whole nexus of functioning social relationships that had given his or her life a sense of place and purpose.⁶¹ As Perry has observed:

In the vastly expanded world of Hellenistic and Roman times, the individual lost nearly all his *quondam* ["former"] importance and representative significance, having become too tiny to be tragic, or heroic, or poetic, or symbolic of anything more than himself or a particular segment of contemporary society. . . . The bigger the world the smaller the man. Faced with the immensity of things and his own helplessness before them, the spirit of Hellenistic man became passive in a way that

⁵⁵Ibid., 25; Konstan, "Xenophon of Ephesus," 50.

⁵⁶*An Ephesian Tale* 2.1; Reardon, *Collected Novels*, 139.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Konstan, *Sexual Symmetry*, 48.

⁵⁹Hagg, *The Novel in Antiquity*, 104.

⁶⁰Ibid., 89; Holzberg, *The Ancient Novel*, 30.

⁶¹Morgan, "Introduction," 3; Reardon, *Form of Greek Romance*, 172.

it had never been before, and he regarded himself instinctively as the plaything of Fortune. All this is conspicuous from first to last in the Greek romance.⁶²

This sense of desperation is one of the causes for the new focus on the conjugal couple. The new home of the rootless individual is in the arms of the lover, where at the beginning of the novel, erotic love is perfect and where, at the end, the beginnings of nuclear family life are established.

The tripartite structure of the novel embodies this thematic nexus. The middle section thematically and structurally represents the realm of the chaotic, the sense of powerlessness contained by the narrative frame of order, control, and meaning. "The private individual is lost in a world too big for him, isolated by involuntary travels from the society of his own people, and assailed by the dangers inherent in travel. . . . But he is recovered and sustained by love of, and fidelity to, his partner and his god, ultimately to find therein his salvation, his private happiness, and his very identity."⁶³ Precisely for these reasons, the novel of Late Antiquity has been looked upon as the genre of social affirmation, which asserts the present worth of the human community and its future. "The romance functions as part of a cultural script that represents poverty, pain and suffering as unauthentic human conditions estranging those experiencing them from legitimate society."⁶⁴

A similar phenomenon appears in the adaptation of the romance in early hagiography which eclipsed the Greek romance. In the romances, suffering was a temporary state to be passed through and contained. In the early *Greek Saints Lives* (third to fifth centuries CE), suffering was courted as a means of escape from the human community.⁶⁵ As Peter Brown has stated:

The choice of the late classical romance as a model for so many Acts was a stroke of genius. For the pagan romances had already developed a narrative form that overlapped with the central concerns of a Christianity of impact and vocation. . . . The manifest destiny of the young lovers was postponed, over and again, by adventures that emphasized the vulnerability of all humans to the caprice of fortune, and, more particularly, the vulnerability of the young and the beautiful to the sexual lusts of the powerful, the brutal, and the seductive. . . . Love

⁶²Ben E. Perry, *The Ancient Romances* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) 48. See also the description of Bakhtin: "All moments of this infinite adventure-time are controlled by one force—chance" (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 94).

⁶³Reardon, *Form of Greek Romance*, 172.

⁶⁴Judith Perkins, "Representation in Greek Saints' Lives," in Morgan and Stoneman, *Greek Fiction*, 258–59; Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) 167.

⁶⁵Perkins, "Representation," 262; Alison G. Elliott, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1987) 42–76.

and the loyalty engendered by love were presented as the only abiding force in a chaotic and menacing world. The Christian authors of the Apocryphal Acts had only to replace a manifest destiny to the wedding bed, with which every pagan novel had ended, by the Apostle's call to continence.⁶⁶

The Christian community adopted and transformed the genre of the romance to suit its own ideological needs. I see a similar phenomenon in the text before us. The "manifest destiny," however, is not postponed but rather abolished, and the wedding bed becomes a wedding bier. The failure of romance in the narrative before us is the loss of selfhood, of meaning, and of coherence. There is no containment of this loss and no recuperation of meaning.

In an incisive article, Terry Comito has described the spiritual climate of the Greek novel as one of violent alienation from the world, as a "sense of exile from one's own natural place." In the romance plot,

the stratagem by which the soul preserves its integrity is a desperate one. The soul preserves its integrity through withdrawal, the mechanism of withdrawal means that the self is progressively emptied of content as more and more of the data of experience are surrendered to the impersonal world of fortune. . . . The action of providence is seen in the conversion of the prison world of fortune into a place of trial, a trial that often seems explicitly analogous to the mystery initiate's approach to birth through the rigors of death: so that cruel slaughters are turned into holy sacrifices. . . . The liberation of the lovers from the trials of fortune is felt to involve a change of levels, a transcendence: dying from one world into another.⁶⁷

Comito's understanding is astonishingly appropriate to our narrative as well. Not only are the social selves of the protagonists emptied of content as they surrender to the forces of capricious fortune, but the liberation of the lovers from the trials of fortune actually culminates in the ultimate sacrifice of martyrdom.

I suggest that this narrative presents the central theme of the "lonely traveler searching for his beloved, as an expression of the individual's sense of isolation in the world" or a "sense of exile from one's own natural place" as the new master-narrative in the postdestruction world. The narrator has not merely emulated the Greek novel, however, but has creatively appropriated it for his own ideological purposes. The step-by-step correspondences between the romance and the midrash are almost always accompanied by a violation of the codes and conventions of the romance

⁶⁶Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 155.

⁶⁷Terry Comito, "Exile and Return in the Greek Romances," *Arion*, n.s., 2 (1975) 66.

itself. The most important factor seems to me that what we have before us is a failed romance or a romantic dystopy. In other words, the narrator's valiant attempt to reunite the protagonists according to the romance code reflects the characters' futile bid to flee from the horrors of history. The strategies of containment in the classical romance which "hold out the implication that everything is actually under control, guided by a shaping intelligence and ultimately meaningful"⁶⁸ are exactly what is missing here. The protagonists are completely abandoned in a contingent and malevolent universe. This can be seen clearly in the use of the New Comedy motif of recognition. In this genre, as in the romance, the recognition scene resolves the problem of the inappropriate partner: contrary to appearances, the woman is revealed to be a citizen of suitable status. With this device, the conflicting claims of private passion and social responsibility are neatly reconciled and legitimated by society.⁶⁹ Precisely for these reasons, the novel of Late Antiquity has been looked upon as the genre of social affirmation. In the narrative before us, despite the almost rigid adherence to the romance conventions, the recognition scene impedes all possibility of such a reconciliation. In the classical romance structure, the tribulations are devised to keep loved ones apart, while here the trials culminate with their reunion. This reunion does not signify the victory of social values, but rather their disintegration.

If the Greek romance is the genre of social affirmation attesting to the present worth of the human community and its future, then the midrashic narrative is one not of affirmation but of social decay and collapse. This theme is emphatically expressed in the secularization and loss of cultural identity of the protagonists. Pain and suffering are not "inauthentic human conditions estranging those experiencing them from legitimate society," but neither are they the optimal conditions as in the Christian adaptation. Here they are the tragic reality of the postdestruction era. In this new world where norms are fulfilled through their violation, the vulnerability of existence is a fact and not a stage. One of the most insightful readers of the Greek novel was the Russian critic and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin. He agrees with the general sentiment, equally applicable to our midrashic tale, that "the world of the Greek romance is an *alien world*: everything in it is indefinite, unknown, foreign. Its heroes are there for the first time; they have no organic ties or relationships with it. . . . In this world, therefore, they can experience only random contingency."⁷⁰ Bakhtin asserts with his

⁶⁸Morgan, "Introduction," 3.

⁶⁹Konstan, *Roman Comedy*, 24; Froma I. Zeitlin, "The Poetics of Eros: Nature, Art, and Imitation in Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*," in David Halperin, John Winkler, and Froma Zeitlin, eds., *Before Sexuality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) 419.

⁷⁰Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 101.

usual acumen that the dominant compositional devices of recognition and testing combine in the chronotope of the “adventure novel of ordeal” in order to foreground “self-identity as anchored in personal experience and not in social status.”⁷¹ Characters stay true to themselves despite the collapse of the familiar social frameworks for establishing identity, be they social standing, status, city, polis, or country.⁷² The midrashic tale ends tragically precisely because the collapse of the residual identity themes has not coincided with the emergence of new ones. This failure of narrative, or what I have called a narrative blind embodied in the transgression of generic codes, becomes the failure of meaning itself. Even God himself, the master-narrator weeps, “For these do I weep, My eyes flow with tears, Far from me is any comforter who might revive my spirit; my children are forlorn, for the enemy has prevailed.”⁷³

There is one aspect of the text that I have not discussed, that is, the use of biblical verses. Two quotations, from the books of Joel and Lamentations respectively, frame and envelop the narrative. On one level, they are extraneous and secondary, and their removal would not impair the story.⁷⁴ Yet their meaning and function here lies in their very innocuousness. These quotations are the generic markers of midrash.⁷⁵ As quotations, they exploit the ideological authority of the “already uttered” in order to expropriate the narrated world. As such, they exemplify what Maclean has called “territorialization”; when “a text which uses conventional forms in a conventional way is territorialized, it embodies the majority discourse and reflects the obtaining ideology of the society from which it springs.”⁷⁶ The opposite, “deterritorialization,” may “be brought about by recontextualization, putting the traditional among the new or the products of one ideology alongside those of another.”⁷⁷ There could be no more felicitous term for the literary effect of the combined discourse markers of midrash and romance than “deterritorialization.” What better way to signify the consequences of the destruction, the sense of exile from one’s own natural place and that

⁷¹Ibid., 106.

⁷²Ibid., 105.

⁷³Lam 1:16.

⁷⁴The exposition of the narrative up until the first verse (Joel 4:4) is in Hebrew, the remainder is in Aramaic. This seems to indicate that this section circulated as an independent unit.

⁷⁵“Every genre depends on a conventional set of ways of framing a location, a semiotic space within which particular objects (texts) can be made to mean something. . . . A text is recognizable as of a particular type in so far as it lends itself to certain framing operations that locate it vis-à-vis other types of texts” (Ian Reid, “Genre and Framing,” *Poetics* 17 [1988] 28, 34).

⁷⁶Marie Maclean, *Narrative as Performance* (London: Routledge, 1988) 45.

⁷⁷Ibid., 46.

“the enemy has prevailed” than the literary exile embodied in the very form of this text.

Various scholars have pointed out that the Greek novels themselves often display a certain cultural bivalence. Their central narrative device is “a symmetric joining of hermeneutical alternatives which gives to each passage a stereoscopic quality of unresolved differences in perspective on the same item.”⁷⁸ This insight may provide a new perspective on the generic intertextuality mentioned above as a method of staging differences in cultural models. As Selden has remarked concerning the Greek romances, “many of these texts unfold along the borders between two cultures and can be read divergently within each one. . . . For the fiction of Late Antiquity, this master trope turns out to be syllepsis. Structurally, syllepsis always exceeds the law and, by satisfying one sense, one code, one logic at the same time as another, it constitutes a travesty and an undoing of the very possibility of genre.”⁷⁹ This midrashic narrative embodies two generic frameworks that vie with each other for the right to bestow meaning and significance. The quoted verses that frame the plot embody the attempt for ideological containment that struggles against the forces of fortuity and contingency represented in the narrative itself. Each genre functions as a synecdoche for its own cultural formation, and their conflict embodied in this narrative reflects the events recounted in the narrated world.

It is precisely in this use of the quoted verses that we can most clearly see the cultural syllepsis of generic conventions and their transgression. Frye has correctly pointed out that most romances culminate with an epiphany or acknowledgment that “there is a god behind the action who expresses his will by some kind of oracle or prophecy which speaks of the ultimate outcome as predetermined.”⁸⁰ This convention now becomes a source of a powerful tragic irony. The midrashic narrative also concludes with an epiphany, but one that subverts the ideological containment expected in the romance genre. The verses do not recuperate or contain the tragedy; rather, they become its emblem, displaying even God as a “lonely traveler searching for his beloved” and enacting his own “sense of isolation in the world.”

The adoption and adaptation of the romance model analyzed here is extremely poignant. What better way to display the tribulations of the exile than through the very genre that epitomizes “enforced movement through

⁷⁸John J. Winkler, *Auctor & Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's Golden Ass* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 123.

⁷⁹Daniel L. Selden, “Genre of Genre,” in Tatum, *Search*, 49–50.

⁸⁰Northrop Frye, *Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976) 107. So *Chaereas and Callirhoe, An Ephesian Tale, Leucippe and Clitophon, Daphnis and Chloe, Ethiopica*, and *The Ass*—all conclude with an offering of thanks to the gods who have preserved the good fortune of the protagonists.

an alien world?" The actual exile of the characters is mirrored in the self-imposed literary exile of the narrator. The important factor, however, is not whether the text attests to a cultural literacy. If this example is at all indicative, it would seem that the rabbis were not only cognizant of the extensive literary activity that surrounded them, but exhibited a remarkable versatility in their relations to it. If the argument suggested here is convincing, then we may have to revise not only an appreciation of rabbinic narrative artistry and control, but also some firmly held beliefs pertaining to the production and negotiation of cultural meaning in Late Antiquity, as well as the tensions and contradictions that inevitably accompany it. The process of secularization from priesthood to pandery which occurs in the aftermath of the destruction of the temple signifies the consummate loss of cultural identity. The survivors do not even have their own voice, their own story to tell about themselves. The collapse of predestruction identity themes is embodied in the text itself, which simultaneously conforms to two different and antithetical literary models. This narrative recounts in its content and embodies in its form a dialogical struggle for meaning and coherence enacted on the battlefield of genre. The ultimate destruction is the loss of narration itself: the inability to tell one's own story, or the necessity of telling one's own story through the narrative genre of the other.