Locations of Comparison: The Personal and the Political

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It was a great pleasure to be back in Tel Aviv, even if only virtually, for the conference on which this collection of essays is based, and all the more to have been simultaneously back at Stanford—a mildly disorienting gift of COVID-19—where I've long had many friends, from Marjorie Perloff, Franco Moretti, and Ursula Heise, over the years, to Roland Greene and Margaret Cohen still today. Tel Aviv has long been a place of special interest to me through the presence of such figures as Meir Sternberg, whose work was very important for my first book on biblical narrative; Itamar Even-Zohar, when I came to engage with translation studies; and Hana Wirth-Nesher, whose *Call it English* has been so inspiring to many of us in thinking of the worldly presence of Yiddish. And that's even without mentioning the formidable Dov Midrash, to whom I'll return in a minute.

For these remarks, I'll say something about the genesis of *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age*[1] and then offer some thoughts about where I now wish I'd taken its arguments further, particularly in light of initial reactions to the book, and hope to continue to work out its terms in the future.

Comparing the Literatures is a kind of dialectical synthesis of two of my previous books: *Meetings of the Mind*,[2] an autobiographical survey of comparative studies published in 2000, and then *What Is World Literature?*[3] three years later. As I began working on *Comparing the Literatures*, my editor at Princeton suggested that I might try to put together the (auto)biographical and the disciplinary sides of my scholarly personality, and this became something of a leitmotif in the book.

In *Meetings of the Mind*, I meet up with three friends at a series of conferences where we get into arguments about the state of literary studies and academic life in general. My interlocutors are the Israeli semiotician Dov Midrash, the multilingual aesthete Vic d'Ohr Addams (author

[1] Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020.
[2] Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.
[3] Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003.

of *The Utility of Futility*), and the feminist film theorist Marsha Doddvic. I left it to my readers to notice that my friends' names are all anagrams of my own, each of them staking out opposing positions I largely agree with. The three of them are united largely in mocking the blandly liberal Damrosch, who thinks he can persuade all the warring parties to get along together. This is a tendency that clearly continues in the new book as well.

Just as a local sidenote: when I formulated Dov Midrash's name, I had three letters left over from my own, and so I awarded him a D.C.A. (Doctoral in Critical Alterity) from Tel Aviv, which seemed the perfect base for his career as the deconstructor of Continental philosophy; his magnum opus is his definitive critique of Gadamer: *Narrheit und Methode*. If you haven't encountered the Critical Alterity program on campus, I can give you a flavor of it by the way students complete their doctoral programs. At the closing public session, instead of defending their dissertation, they attack their advisers, laying all of the dissertation's faults at their feet. The advisers in turn attack the student, and usually each other as well. Back in the United States, as an independent scholar of private means, Vic Addams is spared the stresses of departmental politics, while Marsha Doddvic, teaching at the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine, struggles to reconcile the abstruse pleasures of Lacanian theory with the practical imperatives of social action as an ecofeminist. Different though the four of us (or of me) are in so many respects, by the end of the book we've all become close friends.

I mention this book, in which I distributed myself across four characters, because I continue to feel that all serious scholarship is autobiographical in some deep sense. *Comparing the Literatures* represents my best attempt to imagine the terms on which the warring factions within literary studies can get along together today and learn from each other, though at my back I always hear the echo of Dov Midrash, twenty years ago, when I was trying to make peace among my friends during one of our arguments: "It's all right with Damrosch—*everything* is all right with *Damrosch*!"

In writing *Comparing the Literatures*, I wanted to avoid producing the kind of bloodless survey that makes most disciplinary handbooks so dull, and I felt that building my chapters around comparatists' life stories could bring the disciplinary issues to life. As Erich Auerbach emphasized in his theory of perspectivism, our comparative work is always conducted in a dialogue—and often in a tension—between the writers we discuss and our own cultural and personal location. So the biographical is a motive force in *Comparing the Literatures*. A common thread, which I only realized late in the writing of the book, is that I'm especially drawn to scholars who are barely holding their own personalities together, from Herder to Lin Yutang to Paul de Man and beyond. But wouldn't de Man say that my insight into their lives has blinded me to the way that my personal investment in these life stories falsifies my account, skewing my analysis and narcissistically projecting myself onto the discipline at large?

How far have I used a very personal, almost arbitrary, cast of characters in the guise of a broad, objective survey of the field? How far have I therefore fallen short in my effort to bring together the often warring camps of comparative, postcolonial, and world literary studies? Should I have done more to bring in people I find less congenial than Germaine de Staël, René Étiemble, Lilian Furst, and my own teachers? Should I have been more open about my deep disagreements with less congenial figures when I do include them, instead of papering over my real annoyance with a kind of genial irony? And beyond the scholars I discuss, what of my literary examples, from the comparison of James Joyce with Higuchi Ichiyo, of Gabriel García Márquez with

J. R. R. Tolkien, or Pramoedya Ananta Toer with Yukio Mishima and Thailand's Kukrit Pramoj? Are these the judiciously chosen fruits of a lifetime of reading, or a random assortment of capricious comparisons? Worse yet, might the *appearance* of arbitrariness really mask its opposite, a series of tendentious choices that insinuate a one-sided presentation through the very semblance of multifaceted pluralism?

One way to find out what I've actually written is by attending to how the book is received, argued against, and otherwise transformed by its readers. This process is amply shown in the papers contributed for this conference, all the more so given the variety of perspectives in the conference's bicontinental framing. I've been centrally concerned, over the past twenty years, with problems of circulation and the way a work takes on a new identity in a foreign context, and so it is an illuminating—and at times unsettling—experience to see one's own work begin to circulate out into the world. Pascale Casanova gave a memorable expression to this experience in the preface she wrote in 2008 for a new edition of *La république mondiale des lettres*. "With the translation of this book into several languages," she says, "I myself have experienced the story I've told. A strange and troubling *mise en abyme* for me." She continues:

> When one then enters into the universe one had described, thereby gaining an understanding through emotional reactions, contradictions, misunderstandings, and unanticipated objections—albeit in a displaced manner, since these didn't concern a work of literature—in short, by experiencing in practice what it means to enter into international space, it leads one to understand one's own work in a different way.... In sum, I had never truly comprehended the effects of a work's going beyond national and linguistic borders—the theme of my book—until I had experienced this as regards my own text.[4]

Or, as she declared more emphatically in a radio interview in 2009, "Ça fait des effets très très bizarres!"[5] These effects included radically different readings of her book. She says that in the Anglosphere, she often found herself criticized as Eurocentric. Whereas she'd thought that she was championing writers from peripheral or "dominated" countries, her Anglophone critics saw her as reinforcing the dominance of Paris as the arbiter of value. Yet these reactions "were entirely distinct from the problems that were formulated, with regard to the very same model, in São Paulo, in Cairo, or in Bucharest," where her interlocutors were far more interested in using her theory to better understand how to put their literature on the world map.[6]

Casanova experienced these effects through the translation of her book into English and several other languages, but a work written in today's scholarly lingua franca of English can be read in multiple contexts even in the original. It thus becomes possible to try comparing *Comparing the Literatures* to itself, in its different manifestations abroad, even before its first translations appear. It was typical of Casanova's penchant for binary oppositions that she found one kind of response everywhere in the Anglophone world, versus an "entirely distinct" approach everywhere else. I've found more variety both within and beyond the Anglosphere, though with some commonality to her experience. Reviewers in China, Romania, Slovenia, and Turkey have all highlighted

4 Pascale Casanova, "Preface to the 2008 Edition of *La république mondiale des lettres*," trans. David Damrosch, *Journal of World Literature* 5, no. 2 (2020): 169.

5 Alain Veinstein, "Pascale Casanova—*La république mondiale des lettres*," interview on "Du jour au lendemain," *France Culture*, January 6, 2009, https://www.franceculture.fr/litterature/ pascale-casanova-artisane-de-luniversel-litteraire-est-morte.

6 Casanova, "Preface," 170.

examples of scholars or writers from their country who figure in the book. In terms very similar to what Casanova reports, a reviewer in Slovenia, Blaž Zabel, takes note of the pages I give to two Slovenian libraries and to the national poet France Prešeren (1800–1849). Zabel adds (as Google Translate informs me): "In the future it will be interesting to see how strongly *Comparing the Literatures* popularizes Slovenian literature and Prešeren around the world, making it possible to actively observe the role of the global academic network, which needs just such incentives for the canonization of peripheral literary traditions in academic centers."[7]

If only, we might say, even though I do believe that Prešeren deserves to be recognized as one of the most international of national poets. He was in dialogue with a wide range of European writers, and he composed poetry in German as well as Slovenian. (Despite the seeming Francophilia of his first name, it's actually the Slovenian spelling of "Franz.") But it would be a lot to expect that my two pages on him would spark an international Prešeren revival. Indeed, a Romanian reviewer felt that *Comparing the Literatures* doesn't offer any real way to rectify the imbalances of international recognition that I describe at length: "It is not clear, however, in Damrosch's discourse what the general mechanisms for regulating these inequities in literary studies would be. The only solutions offered by the book are personal and aim to expand the study programs and course content to include less frequented writers."[8] Certainly course assignments can do something, but to realize Zabel's hope for Prešeren would entail a much broader range of activity. It is only through extended international mediation that a writer from a small country with a local language can reach a worldwide audience. This is all the more true if the writer has been dead for nearly two centuries, and was a poet rather than a more easily translated novelist.

It's a rare gatekeeper—to use William Marling's term—who can almost single-handedly bring a writer to the world's attention.[9] A couple of pages in an academic study can't even begin to accomplish this; or rather, at best it can *only* begin the process. The translations that I've seen of Prešeren's poetry are awkward and long out of date; a talented translator well versed in Slovenian (or working with a Slovenian poet) would need to take on the task of translating him for contemporary readers, most likely in English, French, or German; a publisher would need to take a gamble on the translation; the publicist would need to get the book into reviewers' hands; a prominent translation prize would help, as would some geopolitical upheaval that would draw renewed attention to the Balkans; podcasts and listicles could then add momentum. With all this, the process would truly be underway, long before Prešeren could find his way into the Longman or Norton anthologies of world literature. This in fact periodically happens, and variations of this opening of multiple gateways have brought us writers as varied as the Nobel laureates Orhan Pamuk and Olga Tokarzuk, the Omani Booker-winning Jokha Alharthi, and the Tamil novelist Perumal Murugan, four of whose novels are now available from Penguin.

Rather as Pascale Casanova found, it has been some American reviewers who have questioned the political valence and force of *Comparing the Literatures*. One reviewer sees a fundamental Eurocentrism: "The world of this world literature is constructed as a survey from the vantage of modern European languages and conceptual models, with East Asian texts, digital media, and

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7 Blaž Zabel, "Svetovna primerjalna književnost," *Primerjalna književnost* 44, no. 1 (2021): 226.

8 Alex Goldiş, "Un arbitru al poliglotismului şi al planetarismului," *Vatra* 3–4 (2021): 53.

9 William Marling, *Gatekeepers: The Emergence of World Literature and the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

colonial and postcolonial writing appearing along the more distant horizon."[10] Rather differently, a Turkish reviewer sees the book as contributing to "the demolition of the centered structure" of literary studies, and he feels that East Asia is actually over-emphasized, to the exclusion of regions closer to home:

> While stating that he should do research without being based on a focus or a center, he put his country and especially Chinese and Japanese literature at the center of his research. On the way to Asia, he ignored many of the literatures that fell between the two regions. From this point to be able to turn to all world literatures in comparative literature studies, it is necessary to abandon the convenience of positioning China against America or Europe.[11]

Whether in its lingering Euro-Americanism or in its focus on East/West comparative studies in the chapter on "Comparisons," *Comparing the Literatures* is the product of a very particular formation. As several of the contributors to the present conference have observed, this is a very American book, and I could even say that it's a very East Coast, Ivy League book, however leavened by experiences with colleagues and institutions elsewhere in the country and around the world, and it was written by a white male of a certain age. The book is part of an ongoing process for me of coming to terms with that formation, working outward both from and against it. As Alexander Beecroft has noted, I am now "engaging throughout the work with the politics of world literature, a topic whose relative absence many had felt in *What Is World Literature*."[12] Byron Taylor sees that the book isn't "merely an introduction to the discipline. Rather, there is also a sense in which Damrosch seeks to amend here for prior oversights," among which he cites "the lack of attention to female comparatists."[13]

The politics of gender, like the politics of comparative and world literature, loom a good deal larger for me than they would have twenty years ago. I am, in fact, a structuralist in recovery. I was formed in the markedly apolitical environment of Yale's Comparative Literature department of the 1970s, where one of my favorite courses, taught by the young Jonathan Culler, was *Modes of Discourse and Tropological Operations*, and where female theorists and women's writings were usually relegated to the sidelines when they were noticed at all. But since then, both internal and external forces have made a preoccupation with tropological operations seem increasingly insufficient, at least as an end in themselves. In my own case, it was a salutary shock, on receiving my PhD in 1980 from the Yale of Paul de Man, to get hired in what was rapidly becoming the Columbia of Edward Said. He'd published *Orientalism* two years before, and the book was changing the profile of a Conrad scholar best known until then for *Beginnings*, a work more in dialogue with structuralism and poststructuralism than with the nascent field of postcolonial studies. As a result, Columbia's Department of English and Comparative Literature soon began to receive an ever-increasing number of PhD applications from people eager to work with Said and then also with Gayatri Spivak once she joined the department in 1991. For quite a few years,

10 Charlotte Eubanks, review of *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age*, by David Damrosch, *Comparative Literature Studies* 58, no. 3 (2021): 648.

11 Veysel Lidar, review of *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age*, by David Damrosch, *Folklor/Edebiyat* 106 (2021): 637.

12 Alexander Beecroft, review of *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age*, by David Damrosch, *Modern Philology* 119, no. 2 (2021): E1–E2.

13 Byron Taylor, review of *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age*, by David Damrosch, *OCCT Review* (Oxford Comparative Criticism and Translation), November 30, 2021, https://www.occt.ox.ac.uk/cct-review.

Said was chair of the interdepartmental doctoral subcommittee on comparative literature, for which I was the director of graduate studies, and such budding scholars as Anne McClintock, Rob Nixon, Aamir Mufti, and Joe Cleary brought dimensions to comparative studies not dreamt of in Yale's Continental philosophy.

At the same time, as a preacher's kid with ongoing interests in biblical studies, I was never entirely comfortable with the secularism of so many postcolonialists. Though Edward Said, like me, had been baptized in the Anglican Communion, he alluded to religion mostly in terms of fundamentalism and authoritarianism, which was not at all my experience growing up, whether at home or in following the civil rights struggles of the 1960s. Then too, the hyper-textuality of the "Yale School" assorted awkwardly for me with my studies in Middle Egyptian and later in Nahuatl, taught by archaeologists who were deeply committed to the truths encoded in material artifacts.

To a degree, then, I was at odds with both poststructuralism and postcolonialism, even as I was restlessly drawn to languages and literatures far beyond the Western European sphere. But at the same time, I was more ensconced in a kind of post-Orientalist framework than I could realize. It was Middle Egyptian rather than Arabic that I studied in college and in graduate school, after falling in love with ancient Egyptian art at the Metropolitan Museum, a few blocks from my father's parish in my teenage years. I studied Nahuatl in order to work on the Aztec court poetry of the sixteenth century, not any poetry or prose by the contemporary descendants of the Mexica. It is a significant sign of progress in the field that a comparatist who came to my department from Poland by way of Barcelona, Matylda Figlerowicz, recently completed her PhD with a dissertation that included contemporary Nahuatl, K'iché, and Quechua literature, as well as writing in Spanish, Catalan, and Basque. An essay derived from her dissertation has been published in the *Journal of World Literature*.[14] In my own student days, and for years thereafter, such an essay could have been published, if at all, only in a specialized journal such as *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl*, most of whose small though devoted readership aren't even interested in literature.

So there's been real progress over the past four decades, but a great deal remains to be done. I myself could have done a good deal more in *Comparing the Literatures* with media beyond literature, which get just half a chapter. Despite Marsha Doddvic's urging twenty years ago, I'm only now finally getting serious about teaching film in my courses, a mere fifty years after film studies became a prominent and theoretically sophisticated field. Since then, globalization has opened up all kinds of new challenges and opportunities both for writers and for filmmakers, but there's been little dialogue between comparatists and people working on film. Dudley Andrew is one of very few people in film studies who is based in a comparative literature department, and, conversely, most film studies programs haven't opened their doors to comparatists. I'm pleased to say that this is starting to change, as we can see in a recent book by the film scholar Robert Stam, *World Literature, Transnational Cinema, and Global Media: Towards a Transartistic Commons*,[15] and from the literary side, Delia Ungureanu's *Time Regained: World Literature and Cinema*.[16] It was on her recommendation that I've ended a seminar on "Migratory Identities" with Radu Mihăileanu's superb 2005 film *Va, vis et deviens*, with its haunting portrayal of the plight of a

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14 Matylda Figlerowicz, "Multilingual Novel: Anticlimax and the Real of World Literature," *Journal of World Literature* 4, no. 3 (2019): 411–36.

15 Robert Stam, *World Literature, Transnational Cinema, and Global Media: Towards a Transartistic Commons* (London: Routledge, 2019).

16 Delia Ungureanu, *Time Regained: World Literature and Cinema* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

young Ethiopian Christian who has to pass as Jewish in order to "go, live, and become," as his mother orders him when she sends him off to Israel with Operation Moses in 1984. In a recent interview, Mihăileanu said that

> I realize there are recurrent themes in my films that keep coming back. They rise from the unconscious, from what I lived. Immigration, the problem of identity, because I always ask myself: *What am I? A Romanian, a Jew, a Frenchman, a citizen of the world?* In my films, characters of different identities interact; at first poorly, of course, because they think so differently. But what I'm interested in is how they manage to become closer and get along.[17]

Every citizen of the world, and especially every comparatist, has to be asking our own versions of these wrenching questions.

During the postwar years, comparative literature found its voice and its public role in the urgent quest to help put European civilization together again after the fall of fascism. How should we comparatists intervene today amid the rise of varieties of neofascism in so much of the world, not least in the United States? More specifically for me, as a recovering structuralist who is still fundamentally a liberal humanist, what is the best response to the world falling apart around us, amid a sharply polarized discourse at all levels of society, including in academia? After publishing *Comparing the Literatures*, with its academic focus, I turned to writing on world literature for a general readership. In an increasingly isolationist America, the multiple voices and cultural perspectives of world literature seem to me to be desperately needed today. But how to bring these perspectives to non-academic readers who may never have even heard of most of the authors who matter most to me? On what structure could I hang a compelling narrative?

I started from a title that seemed attractive—*Around the World in 80 Books*—and then found a structure, gradually settling on sixteen worldly locales, discussing five works in each. So far, so good. But when I first planned the book, it was more or less a pure celebration of the joy of reading, and that just didn't seem enough. Then came COVID-19. I was locked down at home, and the project took on a new focus and urgency. I took to the internet with a blog, writing on five books per week for sixteen weeks (taking the weekends off, to give a semblance of a division between "the work week" and "the weekend"). I stressed the ways in which literature helps writers, and then readers, deal with traumatic times, and I began to get readers of my own around the world.

In writing the blog and then the ensuing book, I systematically made it both more personal and more political than it was originally planned to be. In the introduction to the finished book, I still emphasize the values of beauty and pleasure that are so important to my aesthete friend Vic Addams, but I also set out the political stakes:

> While the pandemic provided a particular occasion for framing this project, a still more troubling, and likely more lasting, phenomenon in many parts of the world is the rise of ethnic nationalism, isolationism, and the fear of people or even ideas crossing borders. Still widespread is the siloing of political discourse and cultural or religious perspectives; we are all finding it more and more difficult to really listen to viewpoints we don't already agree with. In such times, literature offers us unique opportunities to resist what Chimamanda Adichie calls "the danger

17 Radu Mihăileanu, interview for Digi24 (October 14 2018), https://www.digi24.ro/magazin/timp-liber/film/radu-mihaileanu-eu-ma-intreb-tot-timpul-ce-sunt-roman-evreu-francez-cetatean-al-lumii-1009990.

> of a single story." Not that writers ever simply reflect some pure ethnic or national identity, but we can learn from the ways they *refract* their experience into new perspectives on the world.[18]

The project's political intent also informs the selection of works. In the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie became one of my eighty authors, as did James Baldwin and the Afro-Brazilian Joachim Maria Machado de Assis, joining Derek Walcott and several African writers who'd already been included.

Throughout the book, I am more open than in the past about the politics of the project, and it's also more personal, as when I discuss Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* from my perspective of a missionary's son, comparing his portrayal of Nigerian village life at the turn of the century to my parents' experience in the Philippines in the 1930s and 1940s. I allow that this might seem an anachronistic and politically dubious way for a white reader to approach the novel, but I note that this is precisely the aspect of *Things Fall Apart* that is closest to Achebe's own experience, recreating the world of his grandparents after growing up as the son of a missionary convert. As for the neo-Orientalism of my education in the seventies, I remain loyal to my longstanding interests in ancient Egypt and in Mesoamerica, but now my eighty books include works by Naguib Mahfouz, Emile Habiby, and Mahmoud Darwish as well as ancient Egyptian love poetry, and I follow my discussions of the *Popol Vuh* and Aztec poetry with Miguel Ángel Asturias's *El Señor Presidente* and Rosario Castellanos's *Book of Lamentations*, with its searching portrayal of Tzotzil-Ladino conflicts in Chiapas. In this book for a general audience, as in *Comparing the Literatures* for its academic readers, I've made my best effort to square the personal and the political and to bring works I love to the banquet table of world literature.

I've quoted the reviewer who questioned my seeming lack of any method or program to alleviate the persisting imbalance of attention to peripheral and nonhegemonic works, but I think that elsewhere in his review, Alex Goldiș actually touches on my version of a solution, beyond a teacher's or anthologist's personal taste or initiative. As he says:

> Obviously, we are dealing with an "interested" archaeology, concerned with identifying and retaining those characters who have contributed to the removal of the disciplinary barriers—not a few—of comparativism.... Comparativism is not a set of theories with a self-referential evolution, as it has been most often presented, but a community of specialists who have tried to broaden their horizons by improving their own status and that of those in similar situations on the world cultural scene.[19]

In an email sent a few days before the conference that has yielded the present collection, Galili Shahar said that his class in Tel Aviv had felt at home in *Comparing the Literatures* when they came upon my closing discussion of Judah Halevi's *Kitab al-Kuzari*, including the resonant statement, "Tradition in itself is a fine thing, if it satisfies the soul; but the perturbed soul prefers research." I have that quote on my office door, underneath a picture from the cover of *Meetings of the Mind*, showing myself in debate with Dov Midrash, Marsha Doddvic, and Vic Addams. As I see it, comparative literature at its best is a community of perturbed souls who manage to find ways to work together, and it is in our collective work that we can have our fullest impact in the world.

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[18] David Damrosch, *Around the World in 80 Books* (New York: Penguin, 2021), xvi.

[19] Goldiș, "Un arbitru al poliglotismului și al planetarismului," 52.

Twenty-five years ago, I ended my book *We Scholars*[20] with a different Jewish text, a passage from the *Midrash on Psalms*, and I'll end with this now:

> "When the Lord brought back those that returned to Zion, we were like those who dream." Rabbi Johanan said: All the years of his life, Honi, that man renowned for righteousness, was troubled about this verse. He said: "Is it possible for a man to lie sleeping for seventy years?" One day, while Honi was walking along the road, he saw a man planting a carob-tree. Honi asked: "Tell me now—in how many years will the carob-tree bear fruit?" The man replied: "Seventy years." Said Honi: "Are you sure that you will live for seventy years more?" The man replied: "Me, I found carob-trees already planted in the earth. And so, like my fathers who planted carob-trees for me, I plant carob-trees for my children."
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> Then Honi sat down to eat, and sleep came upon him. As he slept, a hedge grew up around Honi and concealed him from human eyes, and so he slept on for seventy years. When Honi awoke, he saw a man gathering fruit from the carob-tree, and he asked: "Are you the man who planted it?" And when the man replied: "I am the son of his son," Honi said to himself: "This seems to prove that it is possible to sleep for seventy years." And when he saw his ass which by this time had borne many mules, Honi said: "Now it is certain that I have been asleep for seventy years."
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> Honi went to his house, and said: "I am Honi the Circle-drawer," but his household did not believe him. He went to the house of study, and heard the rabbis say: "This tradition is as clear to us as it was in the days of Honi the Circle-drawer,"—for whenever he had come to the house of study, he had solved for the rabbis every moot point they had—and he said: "I am Honi." But they did not believe him and did not give him the honor that was due him. Full of despair, he asked for the Lord's mercy, and his soul went to its rest.
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> Rabba declared: People rightly say, "Either fellowship or death."[21] A

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[20] David Damrosch, *We Scholars: Changing the Culture of the University* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

[21] William G. Braude, trans., *The Midrash on Psalms,* 2 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 126:1.