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**The Intertextual Function  
of Kepler's *Somnium*  
in Yaakov Shabtai's  
*Past Continuous***

ONE OF THE MORE ENIGMATIC ASPECTS of Yaakov Shabtai's *Past Continuous* is the use made of Johannes Kepler's *Somnium*. We are told about this work in the novel's very first sentence but then hear almost nothing about it until the ending approaches, when the *Somnium* moves to the center of the narrative. There in two lengthy passages we finally get some details, first of Kepler's life (340–43, 247–49)<sup>1</sup> and then a summary of the *Somnium* itself with fragments of Goldman's putative "translations" of its text (382–84, 276–78). The *Somnium* thus frames the novel and is clearly integral to the articulation of the central character, Goldman.

Why does Shabtai fasten on Kepler, of all figures, as the object of Goldman's cosmological concerns? Why, of all Kepler's writings, the *Somnium*? What is there about this work that would lead Shabtai to make such central use of it?

These questions might understandably elude the interpretive horizons of the casual reader. After all, Shabtai never tells us exactly what the *Somnium* is. Perhaps he assumes, questionably, that it is widely known that the *Somnium* is Kepler's fictional account of a "dream voyage" to the moon published posthumously in 1634. Nor do we ever get any clear statement about why Goldman is drawn to this mysterious work. The casual reader might simply regard the whole matter of Kepler and the *Somnium* as but one of Goldman's several interests.

A more attentive reader, however, would observe in the novel's opening sentence that Goldman's desire to translate the *Somnium* is parallel to his exercise training on the "Bullworker": both activities express his search to integrate his life in the wake of his father's death—one by means of the body, the other by means of the intellect or even the spirit (which in this philosophical context are virtually coterminous).

That both the Kepler/*Somnium* topos and the Bullworker are not random plot elements but fundamental to an understanding of Goldman and the work as a whole can be seen not merely from their linkage in the opening sentence but, more important, from how they appear in the text. Miron has observed that the advertisement for the Bullworker (153–55, 210f.) constitutes the only break in the "stream of memory."<sup>2</sup> This point needs to be modified, for close inspection of the Kepler and *Somnium* passages will reveal that they are as radically disjunctive with the narrative flow as is the text of the advertisement for the Bullworker. Though they are not set off visually from the rest of the text as is the Bullworker ad, the two long passages about the life of Kepler and the *Somnium* extrude from the narrative no less. They may appear to be parts of the novel's text itself but, as I shall presently show, they are actually unmarked quotations.<sup>3</sup>

I want to claim that if an understanding of the textual function of the *Somnium* in *Past Continuous* is helpful in grasping more fully Goldman as the central figure, and thereby attaining a deeper reading of the novel, it is necessary to consider the *Somnium* as an intertextual entity, that is to say, as a text imported into the novel. Just what kind of intertextual relationship or relationships obtain between the two works will be made clear from my discussion, which will incorporate insights garnered from two contemporary readings of Kepler's *Somnium*.

## 1

To appreciate the function of the *Somnium* in *Past Continuous*, it is first necessary to explain why Shabtai was drawn to Kepler. Tsiporah Kagan has provided some initial answers to this question. In her seminal article written just after Shabtai's death, she notes that Goldman's excursions into the arcane domain of early modern astronomy and into Kepler, in particular, reflect Shabtai's personal interests.

There is no doubt that the unique and engaging persona of Kepler as a person, scientist, and writer had a decisive influence on Shabtai, whose inquiring mind knew no bounds. Anyone who would happen to converse with him or be in his presence for an extended period of time could not but be

swept along and made part of his [intellectual] travels, where the same distinctive rhythms of *Past Continuous* are evident—the endless flowing and interweaving of sentences, memories, details, opinions, and perceptions—everything in order to try to reveal the connections (the meaning) between the ceaseless peregrinations in the life of the spirit (the imagination) and the laws of nature (astrophysics).<sup>4</sup>

Kagan knows this because, as a friend of Yaakov and Edna Shabtai, she was a frequent visitor to their home from 1974 until Shabtai's untimely death in 1981. Edna Shabtai herself confirms that her husband had a consuming "insatiable" interest in the matters Kagan reports.<sup>5</sup>

As for the *Somnium*, it is virtually certain that Shabtai did not know the book firsthand. Not knowing Latin, he could not have read it in its original, and there is no evidence that he ever saw or read either of the two English translations that exist.<sup>6</sup> His main, perhaps only, exposure to the work was from a secondary source. Kagan identifies this source as Arthur Koestler's semipopular account of the history of cosmology, *The Sleepwalkers*.<sup>7</sup> Perusal of the chapters on Kepler in this book reveals something that Kagan does not point out: that the passages in question in *Past Continuous*, both the sketch of Kepler's life and all the *Somnium* material, are all *copied verbatim from Koestler*.<sup>8</sup> This being the case, we need to consider these passages, their nature and their function, in a context in which Kagan does not discuss them: as intertextual entities.

Instructive here is the following fundamental insight about the many-sided issue of intertextuality:

Imitation [i.e., quotation or paraphrase] is . . . not repetition, but the completion of an act of interpretation. . . . [It] makes possible the *Aufhebung* of the dialectic between our own present text and its "originating" model. . . . We would go so far as to suggest that it is desirable to read both the *Urtext* and its translation in order to perceive the mobility of the intertextual relation.<sup>9</sup>

Now the *Urtext* here is not the original text of the *Somnium* but Koestler's paraphrase of it, i.e., the parts that Shabtai copies into his novel. Nevertheless, if we want to see fully the "mobility of the intertextual relation" here, it will be useful to turn briefly to the *Somnium* itself to gain some idea of its content, its place in Kepler's writings, and the implications it may hold for *Past Continuous*.

Because for the general reader there is relatively little in English about Kepler (1571–1630) other than Koestler's book, the *Somnium* in this country is a work known mostly to specialists.<sup>10</sup> A reading of it confirms Marjorie Nicolson's assessment of it a generation ago that, as the first account of a dream voyage beyond this planet, it is a precursor of what we now know as science fiction.<sup>11</sup>

Kepler had conceived of writing a book describing life on earth from the vantage point of the moon as early as 1593, during his university days at Tübingen. The *Somnium* itself was written, for reasons that will become clear, in 1609 and 1610. By 1620 Kepler had evidently decided to publish the work, and during the last decade of his life he wrote no fewer than 223 Rashi-like notes, which he appended to its relatively short text.<sup>12</sup> He wrote these notes mostly out of his felt need to buttress the scientific underpinning of the moon dream. The actual publication of the *Somnium* was not initiated until 1630, just prior to Kepler's death, and the full text was published posthumously in 1634. The work, we can see, occupied, or more accurately preoccupied, Kepler all his life. Although it differs generically and formally from such more widely known astronomical writings as *Mysterium Cosmographicum* (1596),<sup>13</sup> *Harmonice Mundi* (1618), or the *Rodolphine Tables* (1601–24), in retrospect the *Somnium* can be seen to be no less integral to his *oeuvre*. For, unlike the other writings, the *Somnium* is essentially a product of the imagination. Like a modern novelist, Kepler here transmutes the stuff of his own experience into a fictional narrative.<sup>14</sup> And so the *Somnium* constitutes a unique window into Kepler as a person and into how his life and his work are connected.

## 2

Technically, the *Somnium* is interesting, even sophisticated. It begins as a story related by a first-person narrator who tells how he fell asleep "one night after watching the stars and the moon." In his sleep, he "seemed to be reading a book" acquired at Frankfurt. This strange book tells about the adventures and travels of a boy named Duracotus who, no sooner than he is introduced, takes over the narrative. Duracotus relates the startling details of his ultimate trip: an imaginary voyage to the moon taken with his mother. Through their attaining a dreamlike state, she makes contact with a Daemon, or spirit, who, in the dream, takes them to the moon. The bulk of the narrative consists of descriptions by the Daemon of the lunar landscape and its weird inhabitants. The descriptions conclude with a reference to "the constant cloud cover and rain that sometimes prevail over" the lunar surface. Then, abruptly, the dream ends. The reader, having forgotten the larger context in which it has been set, is summarily returned to the original narrator:

When I had reached this point in my dream, a wind arose with the rattle of rain, disturbing my sleep and at the same time wiping out the end of the book acquired at Frankfurt. Therefore, leaving behind the Daemon narrator and her auditors, Duracotus the son with his mother Fiolxhilde, with their heads

covered up, I returned to myself and found my head really covered with the pillow and my body with blankets.<sup>15</sup>

The *Somnium* thus presents shifting narrative planes made possible by the multiple narrative voices Kepler deploys. Hallyn describes this technique as a

nesting of narratives, . . . a play of mirrors, a framing of the frame. . . . The *Dream* [i.e., the *Somnium*] is a book that recounts a dream. But the dream recounts a book. There is a symmetrical inversion of relations: from the book to the dream, from the dream to the book. . . . Duracotus' narrative reflects back to the general narrator of the *Dream* the image of a double, of another who is the same. The (con)fusion of the two characters is made all the easier by the fact that in their respective narratives both are narrator and actor, and both constantly employ the pronoun "I."<sup>16</sup>

The point here is that Kepler is using literary art, using it to make a point that was undoubtedly as important to him as anything he ever wrote in his more straightforwardly scientific works.

What is this point? Kepler himself tells us in one of the notes to the *Somnium*: "[T]he thesis of the whole *Dream* . . . is . . . an argument in favor of the motion of the earth or rather a refutation of the argument, based on sense perception, against the motion of the earth."<sup>17</sup> In other words, Kepler wrote it to advance the truth of Copernican theory that the earth revolves around the sun and not vice versa, to a world unwilling to acknowledge this claim. While the *Somnium* may have germinated in his mind before then, the immediate stimulus that led Kepler to write it was the appearance in 1610 of Galileo's *Siderius Nuncius* (The Sidereal Message), in which the Italian described what he had seen through the newly invented telescope—including the mountains of the moon. The lunar landscape was now empirically observable.<sup>18</sup>

The *Somnium*, then, is a text that is analogical or tropological both in its nature and its purpose. The whole point of Hallyn's study is to show that tropology is a key to grasping how Kepler and Copernicus apprehended the world, that their scientific enterprise was dedicated to outlining, in the words of Hallyn's title, "the poetic structure of the world." "Kepler's texts are impregnated with a cosmogonic *semiosis*. They present the universe as a collection of signs that concretize ideal tendencies."<sup>19</sup> In this context

Duracotus' narrative . . . can reveal truth since it interposes a veil on the double allegory: the characters [may] represent abstract notions . . . [but] the moon revolving around the earth is a figure for the earth revolving around the sun. . . . [T]he story . . . furnishes the author with an occasion to give free rein to his taste for analogical elaborations . . . and it also permits him to [articulate] the very heliocentric thesis that the work aims to promote.<sup>20</sup>

This is why in the *Somnium* Kepler has his moon dwellers call the earth "Volva." From the moon, he theorized, the earth's constant rotation would be easily discernible, a fact that modern space photography has made into a virtual commonplace.<sup>21</sup>

Another relevant aspect of the *Somnium's* tropological nature is its anti-Utopian intent. The immediate stimulus for the work may well have been Kepler's desire to actualize in writing his long-held fantasy of depicting life on earth as seen from the moon. But the publication of Galileo's *Siderius Nuncius* established once and for all that the moon could no longer be idealized as it had been. "On the literary level, [the moon described in] Kepler's *Dream* is equivalent to the corruptible and spotted moon observed by Galileo. . . . *The moon is not a meaningful model of somewhere else. It represents a defective here.*"<sup>22</sup>

With this observation, Hallyn's valuable reading of the *Somnium* leads directly to *Past Continuous* and to an understanding of one way in which the two works are connected intertextually. I noted above Shabtai's consuming interest in Kepler as a person. When we factor in the world-view of the novel's implied author, it is not hard to see what aspects of the *Somnium* would appeal, however intuitively, to the imagination of Shabtai as the real author, even from the limited material in Koestler's paraphrase.<sup>23</sup> The denizens of Privolva are really nothing more than fantastic metaphors for their human counterparts here on "Volva": They

lie in their caves or go in search of the receding waters and dive into them, all in order to find refuge from the burning rays of the sun. . . . And yet these creatures have a strange love of basking in the sun at noon. [They] have no fixed abode. They wander in hordes from horizon to horizon in the space of a single day. [Their] growth is rapid and life is short . . . . From growth to decay takes but a single day (383 277; Koestler 423f.).

These Privolvans sound remarkably like exaggerated semblances of the three protagonists in the Tel Aviv presented in *Past Continuous*. In this light, the elements of the *Somnium's* imputed text that Shabtai imports into the novel as the passages of Goldman's "translation" he has Israel read—that is to say, the parts Shabtai copies from *The Sleepwalkers*—are not at all discontinuous with the main text but integral to what Shabtai wishes to show in it. We need only extend the tropological cadence by an octave. The moon reflects in an exaggerated way not only what Kepler wants to say or show about the earth in the *Somnium*—namely, that it revolves around the sun—but also what Shabtai presents in *Past Continuous* as the essential truths about human life on this spinning planet: that time here passes swiftly in a never-ending flux, and the reality of those who live within it is absurd.

On one level, then, the *Somnium* functions in the novel as a kind of *hypertext*. The tropologies it furnishes bring to mind the idea of Gracián

that "all things of this world must be seen in reverse to be seen in their truth."<sup>24</sup>

## 3

But an intertextual transaction occurs not only between the *Urtext* and the writer but between the *Urtext* and the reader. After all, it is the act of reading itself that is the catalyst for any intertextual event, and this can be as true for the reader as it is for the writer (who, let us remember, is also a reader). On this basis, there are additional congruences that I, as a reader, see between *Past Continuous* and the *Somnium* that serve to illuminate in a different way the latter's role as an intertextual operator. I present these congruences not as an exercise in self-indulgence but because they lead me to grasp certain narratological features of *Past Continuous* that might otherwise have remained, for me at least, obscure.

The congruences I have in mind derive from the shared mode of existence of both works as narrative fictions. Hallyn has observed about Kepler that "his focus [in the *Somnium*] is not on the substance of meaning but on the formal production and presentation of meaning."<sup>25</sup> This is true of the tropologies discussed above; it is also true with respect to the hermeneutical agendas in which both works are grounded.

Kepler understood, albeit inchoately, that he and Galileo were facing after Copernicus what we in our time would call, following Thomas Kuhn, a paradigm shift. The modalities of knowledge of the Middle Ages were giving way to those of modernity. This was the epistemological implication of Copernicus' theory and also of the invention of the telescope. In his discussion of the *Somnium*, Reiss explains this epistemological transformation in Foucaultian terms: as a shift in "discursive practice."<sup>26</sup> To get a sense of what Reiss means, it is necessary to focus on his distinctive terminology.

Medieval hermeneutics was driven by the discourse of "patterning." In this mode of discourse, the world is known through "symbolizations and relationships," by the order or pattern of its constituent parts and what that pattern is thought to represent. Patterning "allows the world of phenomena and of concepts . . . to be serialized into a grammar, and to be analyzed by virtue of the signification given to each element in that grammar."<sup>27</sup> Certain kinds of kabbalistic thought work in this way.

In the early seventeenth century, a new class of discourse, what Reiss calls "analytico-referential," began to take over. In the "analytico-referential" system of discourse, the "patterning" method of structuring knowledge breaks down. Now the world is known not through the relation of its parts or through analogy or anagogy but through the

canons of causality as reason constructs them. The world now stands outside the mind. The mind comes to know it objectively by (what it believes to be) a correct *analysis* of its parts and data to which its analysis *refers* by naming and enumerating them. In this new discursive method, there is an a priori assumption of the adequacy of language: "the properly organized sentence . . . provides in its very syntax a correct *analysis* of both the rational and material orders, using elements that *refer* adequately through concepts to the true objective nature of the world." The "exemplary formal statement" of such discourse "is *cogito-ergo-sum* (reason-semiotic mediating system-world)." And its "principal formal metaphors will be those of the telescope (eye-instrument-world) and of the voyage of discovery (self-possessed port of departure-sea journey-country claimed as legitimate possession of the discoverer)."<sup>28</sup>

Kepler is crucial because he stands at the juncture of these two changing and differing epistemic systems. Even this brief summary of Reiss's often abstruse discussion establishes the import and importance of the *Somnium*.

Kepler's *Somnium* manifests a moment when two different classes of discourse function with equivalent power—a moment of transition which must obviously be brief, for the one is being produced from the other. And it may be possible to generalize here and suggest that a whole type of literary discourse is being undermined as well.<sup>29</sup>

The hermeneutic of "patterning" in the *Somnium* should be quite evident from Hallyn's structuralistic reading. It is implicit in his observation of Kepler's "taste for analogical elaborations" of a "universe [that is] a collection of signs that concretize ideal tendencies."<sup>30</sup> Reiss's poststructuralist approach shows how in the *Somnium* the two different discursive methods are interwoven. There is, in the first place, the text of the work, which makes clear what was noted above: that

*the overall pattern reveals something different from the isolated syntagms.* The laws of nature applying to the planetary movements are not to be seen as points of departure for the construction of theories and the ordering of referential knowledge. They are simply bits and pieces of an overall harmony.<sup>31</sup>

Then there are the 223 notes that Kepler appended to the *Somnium*—"those *analytical* projections which are at odds with . . . the text"—because they constitute an attempt to know and explain the world in an objective, "scientific" way. These notes are modern in another way as well: in the fact that some of them are explicitly autobiographical in content. They involve "the production of a discourse by and about a self (. . . [i.e.] the autobiographical notes and the *I* of the notes) whose intention is given as

providing truths about the world (the scientific and methodological notes)."<sup>32</sup>

In the *Somnium*, then, "patterning functions at odds with analysis: if the two discourses function simultaneously (as they seem to here), they subvert each other."<sup>33</sup> But in its overall intent, the *Somnium* is of a piece with Kepler's earlier works mentioned above, especially *Harmonice Mundi*. This intent can be fairly summarized in the words of the Psalmist: "The heavens declare the glory of God."

The specifics of Reiss's detailed explication of the *Somnium* are not germane here. His conclusion is. In its ultimate significance, the *Somnium* represents the posing of an epistemological problem:

A choice is now offered between the production of patterns and the construction of an analyzable meaning about the world, between a discourse of "joy and satisfaction," as Bacon scoffed, and one of utility and power. The ever more precise correspondence being achieved at the end of the Renaissance between an analytico-referential discourse and the world of phenomena made of the European seventeenth century perhaps the first after the fifth century of ancient Greece to feel the problem of knowledge as one having urgent need of a *solution*. . . .

The perhaps not altogether untimely lesson of the *Somnium* is that although we may refer to "fact" and "superstition" as two mutually exclusive classes of discourse, they are not so much "opposites" as complementary, different from one another in their constructs of the same.<sup>34</sup>

This brief look at the discursive practice of the *Somnium* leads me to suggest an interesting homology with Shabtai's novel, where two opposing epistemic systems also function in opposition to each other. But now they are the systems intrinsic to the novel in the late twentieth century. "Narrative," it has been observed, "is itself a kind of language that functions independently of specific verbal formulations."<sup>35</sup>

In *Past Continuous* we have, as in any novel, mimesis and diagesis. But unlike the novels of classic realism, where the two narrative modalities are fused and the relationship between them is in balance, or works of modernist fiction, where the desire to render consciousness subordinates the diagetical to the mimetic function of narrative as the implied author falls silent in full confidence of his artifice, here that relationship is skewed in an unusual and new way. Here typographical structure organizes the discourse. (I speak of the Hebrew original, although this aspect, while weakened in it, is not entirely lost in the English translation.) To be sure, we occasionally hear the voice of a narrator or of an implied author *in* the narrative. But the fact that everything, from the first words to the last, everything, "that [whole] bundle of existence . . . transformed into memories" (240, 331) is related within the parameters of one paragraph, implies that *the entire novel is a diagesis*, related by a voice that stands

outside the narrative. The visuality of the printed page never allows the reader to forget this.

But now something curious happens: the discourse subverts itself. The "foregrounding of diagesis," which the typography accentuates and which David Lodge believes furnishes a "formal, as distinct from an ideological, definition of postmodernism,"<sup>36</sup> is overridden. It is overridden not by another, opposing narrative entity but by something larger and more elemental, a principle that is metanarrative in nature.

Lodge has noted that:

the more nakedly the author appears to reveal himself in . . . [postmodern] texts, the more inescapable it becomes, paradoxically, that the author as a *voice* is only a function of his own fiction, a rhetorical construct, not a privileged authority, but an object of interpretation.<sup>37</sup>

This is not what happens in *Past Continuous*. For here, as Miron saw early on, it is not a random or casual authorial voice that is doing the narrating but one hypostatized as memory or, more accurately, as Memory.<sup>38</sup> Memory in *Past Continuous* is more than a "rhetorical construct"; it is, in fact, a "privileged authority." Memory here is not merely a principle of narrative but an intimation of metanarrative. This is because Memory here is endowed with ontological significance, even ontological power, the implications of which I shall consider below.

Two epistemic systems, then, are at work in *Past Continuous*, or, more precisely, at loggerheads. In its highlighting of diagesis, the work partakes of the discursive practice of the postmodern novel. But what the diagesis itself communicates, implicitly to be sure (although typographic arrangement is actually rather explicit), undercuts, and possibly overwhelms, the import and the effect of the foregrounding. This discursive situation recapitulates that of the *Somnium*—but in contemporary terms—and it allows us likewise to situate *Past Continuous* as a document of cultural transition.

The appropriation of the *Somnium* and its author is thus not only at the gross level of Shabtai's sheer fascination with Kepler as a person or even with the semiotic nature of his astrophysical enterprise, but with something even more fundamental: the epistemological nature of Kepler's life and work. The appropriation bespeaks an implicit empathy on Shabtai's part with Kepler as a mind on the cusp of a new age, trying to mediate a new understanding of the world. For, *mutatis mutandis*, this is, I want to claim, how he understood himself. This is, of course, not something Shabtai articulates. What I am pointing to is implicit in the homologous relationship between Duracotus and Goldman. Both embark on visionary voyages to areas remote from their immediate experience—

Duracotus to the moon, Goldman to northern Europe of the early seventeenth century. Indeed, it is precisely the vicariousness of both journeys that betrays the emblematic function of each: Duracotus does not really go to the moon but only dreams the voyage as he hears the voice of the Daemon; Goldman, without ever leaving Tel Aviv, takes flight to another realm through an act of translation. By translating the text of the *Somnium*, he is translated not only into the semiosis that work expresses but also, and more significantly, into its epistemological moment. (In a radio interview broadcast three days before his death, Shabtai himself describes his own making of fiction as "a flight to distant places.")<sup>39</sup> Here it is worth citing what Reiss says about the motif of the voyage: "As potential material of discourse the image of a difficult . . . voyage, . . . sometimes *interpreted* as the search for knowledge or as the descent into the unconscious (or more), is often associated with the loss and rediscovery of discourse."<sup>40</sup>

## 4

What does this ascribing Memory with ontological power signify? What does it mean to accord to Memory the status of an Absolute?

To understand this, it is necessary to appreciate what Krell calls "the mystery of mnemonic presence" or the "aporia" that memory, phenomenologically apprehended, presents:

Remembrance . . . poses an ontological paradox and even "impasse," inasmuch as it allows what is past to become present as past, transposing us—sometimes faithfully, sometimes not—to what is no longer that which is, performing solo what both perception . . . and thought . . . once accomplished, and perfectly assured of its own efficacious performance.<sup>41</sup>

There is, therefore, something godlike about memory. In its ability to transcend the limitations of time and tense, to make the past present, memory appears to be omnipotent. Likewise, in its seeming ability to recall the minutiae of everything—in *Past Continuous* the supply of events and people and speeches recalled by the implied author seems inexhaustible—memory is also omniscient.<sup>42</sup>

This analogy with the Divinity (or, in human, literary terms, with the "author") prepares us for where Krell's Derridean inquiry leads: to the conclusion that memory has been deconstructed in our time as a "transcendental signified" (along with all authority and authorship, Divine and human). This is because the history of memory as a metaphysical entity, as Krell tracks it, shows that from Plato and Aristotle down to Freud, the "recollection of presence always . . . demanded a certain kind

of *writing* as its translucent medium."<sup>43</sup> Memory always was understood to involve graphics, the joint processes of inscription (whether on the wax tablet of the mind as Plato imagined, or onto the pineal gland as Descartes believed, or onto the "mystic writing pad" of the psyche as Freud speculated) and the recovery and interpretation of this inscription. And so if memory is a kind of writing, what happens when the power of all logocentrism to provide a purchase on reality is called into question, when the graphics of memory are nothing more than "tracings without wax"? "Does the Derridean 'trace' altogether escape the reductive grooves and notches of the mnemonic tradition?"<sup>44</sup> Whatever we want to say or think about memory, its authority can no longer be privileged.

But *Past Continuous* implies that it can. Memory here is indeed "a modern substitute for God."<sup>45</sup> I would emphasize the ontological nature of this apotheosis of mnemonic presence, since it is, on the surface, totally disembodied from any national memory. Shabtai's narrative is almost Heideggerian in its contemplation of pure being as it is lived out in time.<sup>46</sup> He is deploying Memory, not memory, for there is in *Past Continuous*, paradoxically, a great deal of national forgetting (forgetting, not repression). As Kagan has noted, the intellectual and spiritual quests of virtually all the protagonists take place outside the realm of Jewish or Israeli sources. The language itself, in contrast to Agnon and even to Oz and Yehoshua, is wholly of the present and devoid of allusiveness, which, for modern Hebrew, is a remarkable achievement.<sup>47</sup>

All the forgetting of national culture in the novel notwithstanding, it might be possible to suggest that the "deep structure" of *Past Continuous* is (still) connected to that of Western culture and is a vestigial expression of the way memory was conceived in the Bible and even in Homer: as a mode of human thought and cognition that encompasses the total person—thought, action, and will (*nefesh* and *lev*).<sup>48</sup> This is in contradistinction to Plato and Aristotle and more recent epistemologies, which reduce the nature, power, and scope of Memory and focus on the mechanics of memory. Indeed, the very Hebrew title *Zikhron devarim* evokes a biblical kind of record or account. The silent, unrecorded implication of the work is that Memory is indeed ineradicable and has the power to render human existence coherent in the face of the absurd and the attendant specter of nihilism.<sup>49</sup>

Yaakov Shabtai was not a philosopher nor should he be read as one. But, as Frank Kermode has said of Wallace Stevens, "he has a kind of peripheral awareness of the important issues in philosophy, which is more impressive in a poet than actually getting down and working them out."<sup>50</sup> Shabtai's writing suggests an awareness that the grand narratives that have organized or legitimated human culture in general and Jewish existence in particular are no longer credible.<sup>51</sup> Like Kepler in his time, he

senses that in the late twentieth century, "the problem of knowledge [is again in] urgent need of a *solution*."<sup>52</sup> In Jewish terms, *Past Continuous* evinces a sharp understanding that Jewish religion and Labor Zionism have both collapsed as foundations of Jewish life.<sup>53</sup> Even the elemental institution of the family, which the novel clearly establishes as a powerful source of meaning and authority, is gone.<sup>54</sup> What is left? In the post-modern sensibility, this lack of foundations has been described as "no big deal."<sup>55</sup> For Shabtai, however, it is, as we can see from the discursive tension in the novel. If in framing his narrative within a metanarrative he shows that he knows the limits of what mimetic fiction can now provide, in making that metanarrative coterminous with Memory, and in endowing that Memory with the power of metaphysical presence, the present is made continuous with the past, the absurd is controverted, and the specter of nihilism is, presumably, allayed.

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#### NOTES

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1. Yaakov Shabtai, *Zikhron devarim* (Tel Aviv, 1977), translated by Dalya Bilu, as *Past Continuous* (Philadelphia, 1985). Parenthetical references are made first to pagination in the English translation, and then in italics to the Hebrew original.

2. *Pinkas patuah: 'al hasipporet ha'ivrit betashlah* [Current Israeli Prose-Fiction: Views and Reviews] (Tel Aviv, 1979), p. 23.

3. Moshe Ron sees this also, but does not develop the implications ("Past Continuous: The Sentence" [Hebrew], *Siman qri'ah* 16–17, April 1983: 273).

4. Kagan, "'Skybound Was the Mind, Earthbound the Body Rests': Sheloshim for Yaakov Shabtai" [Hebrew], *Ha'arets*, September 4, 1981. The translation is my own. The citation in this article's title is from Kepler's epitaph, which Kagan accurately applies to Shabtai. See *Past Continuous* 249, 343.

5. Edna Shabtai, personal letter to me, February 20, 1993. In this letter she notes that such books as Fred Hoyle's *The Nature of the Universe* (mentioned in *Past Continuous* as a book that Goldman loans to Uncle Lazer [347, 252]) and other popular treatments of Einstein's theories were among Shabtai's favorite reading, as were books that straddled the boundary between reality and fantasy, such as *The Bermuda Triangle* (which Meir in *Past Perfect* reads).

6. So Edna Shabtai in a personal letter to me, November 3, 1993. In the novel, Goldman has access to an English version brought to him from England by a friend (261, 360). The two English translations are: (1) *Kepler's Dream with the Full Text and Notes of Somnium, Sive Astronomia Lunaris, Joannis Kepleri*, ed. John Lear, trans. Patricia F. Kirkwood (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1965); (2) *Kepler's Somnium: The Dream, or Posthumous Work on Lunar Astronomy*, trans. with a commentary by Edward Rosen (Madison, Milwaukee, and London, 1967). All quotations below are from Rosen's version.

7. See Arthur Koestler, *The Sleepwalkers: A History of Man's Changing Vision of the Universe* (New York, 1959). The section on Kepler has been published as a separate book, *The Watershed: A Biography of Johannes Kepler* (Garden City, N.Y., 1960).

8. Compare *Past Continuous* 341 247f. with Koestler 231 and 389f.; *Past Continuous* 342 248 with Koestler 237f.; *Past Continuous* 343 249 with Koestler 427; *Past Continuous* 382–84 276–78 with Koestler 421–24. Koestler's book was published in a Hebrew translation in 1970.

9. *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, ed. Michael Worton and Judith Still (New York, 1990), 7f. Kagan (*Ha'arets*, September 4, 1981) says that "Shabtai made use of this source" (i.e., Koestler) for his artistic purposes but she does not specify the precise "use" discovered by textual comparison. Her conclusion about the *Somnium's* function is unexceptionable: "Like any stargazer, Shabtai sought after an extraterrestrial vantage point that would enable him to observe us [i.e., the earth] from outside." This conclusion is not different in substance from what I want to show, although I do wish to expand on it. Where I differ is in approach: whereas hers seems more in the nature of source criticism, mine is grounded in the fact that the kind of plagiaristic quotation we are dealing with here is "an act of apparent appropriation" and, therefore, "meaning and significance are to be constructed rather than extracted." In other words, hermeneutic activity must give way to semiotic, intertextual analysis" (Worton and Still, 12).

10. A good biography of Kepler available in English is Max Caspar's *Kepler*, trans. from the German by C. Doris Hellman (London and New York, 1959). Other works are: Carola Baumgardt, *Johannes Kepler: Life and Letters* (New York, 1951) and David C. Knight, *Johannes Kepler and Planetary Motion* (New York, 1962).

11. Marjorie Nicolson, in *Voyages to the Moon* (1948), quoted in Timothy J. Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism* (Ithaca and London, 1982), p. 147. See also Nicolson's "Kepler, The *Somnium*, and John Donne," *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 1 (June 1940): 277. In the introduction to his English translation, Lear describes how his curiosity about the work led him to hire a librarian fluent in Latin to read it to him in translation. "The more I heard the more convinced I became that I was listening to a forgotten masterpiece" (21).

12. See Rosen's introduction, p. xix. These notes are no less fascinating than the text of the *Somnium* itself. To discuss their diverse content and purpose is beyond the scope of this discussion. Reiss makes the important point that, because they seek to explain the dream, the notes are integral and not ancillary to the work's discourse (145). Koestler treats them just this way. A close analysis of his text in *The Sleepwalkers* will show that at one point, he interpolates material from Kepler's notes into his citations from the *Somnium* text. Shabtai duplicates this interweaving, thus showing conclusively that he copied the *Somnium* material directly from Koestler and did not have Rosen's or Lear's translations in front of him. Compare, for example, Kepler's note no. 74 (Rosen 73) with Koestler 423 and *Past Continuous* 383 bottom, 278.

13. The *Mysterium Cosmographicum* has been translated as *The Secret of the Universe*, trans. A. M. Duncan (New York, 1981).

14. The autobiographical elements in the *Somnium* have been noted by virtually all who have written on it. Duracotus' career parallels Kepler's in the period of tutelage with Tycho de Brahe at Hveen, in the loss of his father at an early age and, most important, in the image of a mother possessed of uncanny magical powers. This last feature got Kepler into trouble. Authorities who read parts of the *Somnium* well before the full work was actually published cut through the "veil of fiction" and charged Kepler's mother with witchcraft. Kepler depleted himself in defending her. It was upon her death in 1620 that he began to write the notes, one of the main purposes of which was to uphold the scientific credibility of the work and thus diminish suspicion of witchcraft. Some of these autobiographical elements constitute one aspect of Shabtai's attraction to the *Somnium*.

15. Rosen, pp. 28f.

16. Fernand Hallyn, *The Poetic Structure of the World: Copernicus and Kepler*, trans. from the French by Donald Leslie (New York, 1990), 260. See also Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism*, p. 150. Of course, on top of all these various narrative personae is Kepler himself as the real author of the *Somnium*. When we consider that all this is imported into *Past Continuous*, we have also to take into account its implied author and then its real author.

17. Note 96 (Rosen, p. 82).

18. Kepler wrote a more direct response to Galileo in his *Dissertatio cum nuncio siderio*. See *Kepler's Conversation with Galileo's Sidereal Messenger*, trans. Edward Rosen (New York and London, 1965).

19. Hallyn, p. 163.

20. Hallyn, p. 258.

21. In the original text of the *Somnium*, the far side of the moon is called "Privolva" because, as Kepler explains, it is "deprived forever of the sight of the Volva" (Rosen, p. 17; see also Kepler's note 89, Rosen, pp. 78f.). At root here is the Latin verb *privo*. Koestler's orthography "Prevolva" is thus incorrect, and, therefore, so is the spelling given in Dalya Bilu's otherwise superb translation.

22. Hallyn, p. 275. Emphasis is mine.

23. This worldview correlates most closely with that of Albert Camus, particularly the Camus of *The Myth of Sisyphus*. See my paper "Modalities of the Absurd in Modern Jewish Writing: Kafka, Agnon and Shabtai" (forthcoming in *Hebrew Literature in the Context of World Literature*, to be published by the International Center for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization in Jerusalem). The influence of Camus on Shabtai was first studied by Shoshana Ze'evi in her M.A. thesis for Tel Aviv University. An excerpt (precis?) has been published: "The Stone of Sisyphus in *Past Continuous*" [Hebrew], *Davar* (February 4, 1983).

24. Quoted from the *Criticon* in Hallyn, p. 274.

25. Hallyn, p. 255.

26. "Discourse" for Reiss "is a coherent set of linguistic facts organized by some enunciating entity. . . . [It refers to] any semiotic system as practiced, not necessarily a simply 'linguistic' one in any narrow sense (as the term has been generally used). I assert that such a broader definition is essential: language . . . is but one of the possible materials through and in which discursive order manifests itself" (*The Discourse of Modernism*, pp. 27f.).

27. Reiss, p. 32.

28. See Reiss, p. 31. Emphasis here is his.

29. Reiss, pp. 148f.

30. Hallyn, pp. 258, 163.

31. Reiss, pp. 163f. Emphasis here is his.

32. Reiss, pp. 163, 149. Emphasis is mine.

33. Reiss, p. 164.

34. Reiss, pp. 165f. Emphasis is his.

35. David Lodge, *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London and New York, 1990), p. 4. My discussion is based on Lodge's instructive discussion in chapter 2 of this book, "Mimesis and Diagesis in Modern Fiction" (pp. 25-44). Mimesis and Diagesis are terms originally used by Plato in *The Republic* to distinguish between two modalities of narrative. Diagesis refers to that which is narrated in the author's or implied author's own voice and includes such material as summary or commentary. Mimesis, used in this context somewhat differently than in Aristotle, involves the characters' voices and denotes showing—either of a scene or of character.

36. Lodge, p. 28. The foregrounding of diagesis is postmodern because it bespeaks an abandonment of trust in the efficacy of novelistic mimesis, embodied in the presentation of consciousness by the modernist novel, to stand on its own as an adequate representation of reality.

37. Lodge, p. 43.
38. See Miron, *Pinkas patuah*, pp. 26–28.
39. Part of this interview was published as “Writing As a Flight to Distant Places” [Hebrew], *Yedi’ot aḥaronot* (September 4, 1981).
40. Reiss, p. 153.
41. David F. Krell, *Of Memory, Reminiscence and Writing: On the Verge* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1990), pp. 4, 14f.
42. The fact, noted by Moshe Ron, that events and conversations from before and after the nine-month period of the *fabula* are reported serves to heighten the effect of the omniscience of memory.
43. Krell, p. 165.
44. Krell, pp. 185, 179. See his full discussion of this in chapter 4 (pp. 165–204).
45. Tsiporah Kagan, “The Bundle of Existence in Yaakov Shabtai’s Novel *Past Continuous*” [Hebrew], *‘Aleï siaḥ* 9 (September 1980): 73.
46. An analysis of *Past Continuous* in terms of Heidegger’s thought would be well worth doing.
47. Kagan writes: “There are [in *Past Continuous*] no references to biblical literature or thought, to the Aggadah, to the Apocrypha (including the Book of Enoch, which contains whole chapters . . . on the heavenly hosts . . .). Nor to any poem or even a line of Bialik or Tchernichowsky . . . or of any modern Hebrew poet who gives expression to the existential dread of the contemporary young Israeli Jew (*Ha’arets*, September 4, 1981).
48. See Brevard S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel, Studies in Biblical Theology* (London, 1962), pp. 17–30.
49. Speculation on the gendering of Memory, however interesting, seems at this point to be inconclusive. In Greek mythology, the power of Memory was accorded divine status in the figure of Mnemosyne, who was the daughter of sky and earth, the bride of Zeus, and the mother of the Muses. Mnemic presence here is a feminine entity with implications for poetics. Attempts have been made to understand Memory in the biblical worldview as a masculine element. Childs writes that “the etymology of the Hebrew root *zkr* is unknown. . . . [D]uring the latter part of the last century . . . the attempt [was] made to connect the root *zkr* (to remember) with the noun *zakhar* (male). . . . The origin of the root lay in the idea of pricking or piercing, whence came the noun as the *membrum virile*. The idea of memory came from that of penetrating or fixing in the mind.” But none of this, Childs notes, has been accepted by recent Hebrew lexicographers (9f. and n. 3). See also Willy Schottroff’s comprehensive study, which agrees with Childs on this point (“*Gedenken’ im alten Orient und im Alten Testament: Die Wurzel Zakar im semitischen Sprachkreis*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1964). Since masculinity is such a central issue in *Past Continuous*, it is tempting to regard Shabtai’s conception of Memory, perhaps, as an active retrieval of the past or as the active inscription with a mental stylus on a receiving consciousness—but this is, to say the least, far-fetched.
50. Interview with Imre Salusinszky, in *Criticism in Society* (New York and London, 1987), p. 115.
51. The classical definition of postmodernism in its epistemological sense was given by Lyotard as “an incredulity toward metanarratives.” Unlike modernism, which he “designate[s] as” any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse . . . making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational,” postmodernism eschews this confidence that everything can be known. See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. from the French by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 1984), pp. xxiii f.
52. See above, n. 34.
53. Of Goldman it is told that “he had made enthusiastic efforts to return to the bosom of Judaism and to attain a religious frame of mind [as the description of his library indicates]

. . . but his religion had nothing to sustain it and it dwindled and died because it was a religion without belief" (169 125).

54. This to me is what makes the ending so shattering, for Ella's refusal to suckle her child is in effect, simultaneously, a refusal of motherhood, a rejection of marriage to Israel, and a consequent negation of the family as an institution to be perpetuated.

55. Karen L. Carr, *The Banalization of Nihilism: Twentieth-Century Responses to Meaninglessness* (Albany, 1992), p. 131.