

Agnon's Tales of the Land of Israel

EDITED BY

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AGNON'S TALES OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

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5

The Art of Agnon Annotation

Discussing Professor Avraham Holtz's Monumental Edition of Agnon's *T'mol Shilshom*

AVRAHAM HOLTZ AND JEFFREY SAKS IN CONVERSATION

Avraham Holtz, professor emeritus of Hebrew Literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, is the author of a large body of important scholarship concerning Hebrew Literature in general, and Agnon specifically, and most notably, the fully annotated and illustrated edition of Agnon's *Hakhnasat Kallah, The Bridal Canopy*.¹ Since that significant contribution, Holtz has been at work on a parallel edition, fully annotating Agnon's *T'mol Shilshom, Only Yesterday*.

Professor Holtz was ordained as a rabbi and received his doctorate from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, where he taught and served as Chair of its Department of Hebrew Literature and as Dean of Academic Development. He is an Honorary Member of Israel's Academy of the Hebrew Language and has published several articles about aspects of the Hebrew language in the Academy's various publications, in addition to

1. Agnon, *Hakhnasat Kallah*.

scholarly articles in the field of Hebrew literature, many of which are related to various aspects of Agnon's works.

In the context of Yeshiva University's conference on *Agnon's Stories of the Land of Israel*, Holtz spoke about his work in annotating Agnon, in general, and specifically his focus on *T'mol Shilshom*, which is perhaps Hebrew literature's most significant novel of *Eretz Yisrael*. He discussed these topics in conversation with Jeffrey Saks. What follows is an edited transcript.

Jeffrey Saks: Your work on Agnon's *Hakhnasat Kallah* is truly unparalleled in Hebrew literature, although of course there are examples in other cultures. How did that first great annotation project inform what you have been doing for these past two-plus decades in working on *T'mol Shilshom*. What was the background to these two colossal undertakings?

Avraham Holtz: I suppose it all has something to do with the fact that I never forget that Agnon was a Galitzianer, as am I on both of my parents' sides. (*Audience applause*)

JS: There aren't too many other audiences where that line would get applause! (*Audience laughter*)

AH: I grew up with one Galitzianer grandfather and we spoke Galitzianer Yiddish. And my grandfather, Shulim Nadel *z"l*, taught me how to read Hebrew. So I read in his native Galitzianer accent, and I thought that that was the only way to read. But when I went to Hebrew School, they just decided that that's not the way to pronounce words. My teachers there insisted that I read according to the Litvish Ashkenazic pronunciation and accents. A few years later, I went to Herzliya Hebrew High School, where they did not teach Agnon, and then I went to Herzliya Teachers Seminary, where they also did not teach Agnon. I guess he wasn't part of the corpus, or part of the Zionist idea, I don't exactly know. In 1952 I went to Israel. Before I left, my Hebrew grammar teacher, the late Daniel Persky, approached me and cautioned me in thick Ashkenozis: *Avrohom, hizoher shelo yikalkalu es ho-Ivris shelcho*, "Take care that they not ruin your Hebrew!" Despite his warning I came back from Israel speaking and reading in the more "modern" and more Israeli Sefaradit accent. The first Friday night after my return, when he heard me recite Kiddush in Sefaradit, my grandfather said: *Yetzt farshtei Ich goornisht*, or "Now I don't understand a thing!" Agnon had the same problem—and the recordings of him speaking, reading, or being interviewed which are available online all bear this out; listen and you'll hear his struggle to overcome his native Galitzianer accented Hebrew. I mention all of this because I think it's essential to understand where Agnon's writing

emerges from. If one reads the title of the book as *Hakhnasat Kallah* and doesn't at least hear in his mind the Yiddish "*Hachnosses Kalle*," he's missing something. Professor Dov Sadan insisted that I indicate in my book that the protagonist's name is Reb Yeedl and his famed wagon-driver's name should be read or pronounced as Nussin Nutte (not Natan Neta).

JS: There's an amusing passage at the beginning of *T'mol Shilshom* when Yitzhak goes out on his first day looking for work as a laborer, in which Agnon renders his not-yet Sefardi accent by visually representing all the letter *tavs* as *samekhs*, so the reader knows Yitzhak is speaking in Ashkenozis.

AH: Correct, so the reader will hear in his mind the name of the city as *Paisach Tikva*, for example. The reader knows Yitzhak is a Galitzianer and speaks the Hebrew he brought with him on the ship from home—and he's made fun of because of it. And of course, Agnon wanted to replicate that pronunciation in order that we follow Yitzhak Kummer as his language becomes acclimated or acculturated, or whatever it is that he has to do. In truth, I don't think that he actually does speak much Hebrew at any point in the book. Presumably most of the dialogue would have been spoken in Yiddish, and Agnon renders it into Hebrew for us. (There is even mention that Regel-HaMetukah speaks to his dogs in Yiddish; that everyone spoke in Yiddish amongst themselves unless Ben-Yehudah was around to catch them!) At one point there's a woman from his hometown who reminds Yitzhak that he's forgetting his Buczaczer Yiddish, and he's beginning to pronounce words in some other way, and Heaven help us, he's introducing all kinds of Arabic words and other phrases that we never heard about in Buczacz. What's he doing? But at any rate, back to the beginning. Agnon had his own way of getting even with that young man who made fun of Yitzhak. There's a passage in the Prologue, when Yitzhak is on the train, that relates that when one of the hasidim wanted to curse the Zionists, fearful lest God Himself wouldn't understand Hebrew, translated his invective to Yiddish!—*Di epikorsim vus zaanen in inzere tsaatn* ("The heretics of our times!")—but he pronounces it in a Galitzianer Yiddish, slightly different than Buczaczer Yiddish. This is how I came up with the idea that, I hope, in the new book on *T'mol Shilshom* we'll include a CD with voice recordings, so the readers can get a true sense of how it all sounded.

JS: When you started the work on *Hakhnasat Kallah* did you have a model in mind? How did it originate and evolve?

AH: The origin of the work on *Hakhnasat Kallah* began with my monograph, *Ma'aseh Reb Yudel Hasid* (Jewish Theological Seminary, 1986). In that work I dealt with the “archeology” behind the novel, identifying the principle source in hasidic literature on which Agnon drew, the Yiddish work *Nisim veNiflooes*, a kind of hagiography of Reb Avraham Yehoshua Heschel, the Apter Rav. That’s where I got the idea that the other sources might be “excavated” as well. I understand now that if *T'mol Shilshom* (in its hardcover edition) contains 607 pages with 31 lines to a page, each and every page requires another type of expertise, different kinds throughout the book. Through the literary allusions, the linguistic problems, the biblical and rabbinical sources, references to liturgy and realia, foreign phrases—you name it and it’s in there as questions that arise from the text. It was also very important to me to situate all of the stories within the actual geography of eastern Galicia, and that’s how we came to produce the detailed map which was researched and drawn by my wife Toby. We were able to chart out the actual route that Reb Yudel travels throughout the book. Once I got into the work of “excavation” I realized how much I, and presumably other readers, didn’t understand, how much required study and research, and that’s what guided me. I knew I needed to develop an apparatus to organize all the information, and I found a model in Gifford and Seidman’s annotated edition of Joyce’s *Ulysses*.²

JS: Why was it obvious that this edition of *Ulysses* should be the model? You have drawn our attention in the past to other scholarly work, meta-scholarship, on the work of annotation. Why was this model preferred over a different model?

AH: With *Ulysses* you have an annotator wrestling with a book that has two different editions, two different layers of the text. So, too, with *Hakhnasat Kallah*, which Agnon rewrote four times. Curiously, the first edition was published in America. Then, quite typically, Agnon came back to it, revising and expanding it each time. In my preliminary monograph I examined the kernel story of the Apter Rav guiding an impoverished man to go out seeking a dowry for his daughters. That story is what stands at the core of *Hakhnasat Kallah*—quite literally the money needed to bring the bride under the marriage canopy. Agnon’s achievement in expanding the story was also, in the process, creating a Hebrew language to tell it in! We, the Hebrew readers in the twentieth century know that it’s not really Hebrew, because these people didn’t really speak Hebrew. Maybe they prayed

2. Gifford and Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated*.

AGNON'S TALES OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

in Hebrew, but they didn't actually speak Hebrew. And he created his own Hebrew. So, part of my job for this book was to recreate the Yiddish which is hidden "between the lines," because Agnon crafted all the dialogue in the novel. In the *Nisim veNiflooes* it's almost entirely a plot recitation with no character dialogue. I very much wanted the reader to understand and experience that.

JS: Was the original plan to first prepare a critical edition of the text and then to pursue all of the other annotations?

AH: When Racheli Edelman, Schocken's granddaughter and the current publisher, first asked me about the work I had begun she wanted to know what I was aiming at in the proposed work. I began to spell out for her the scope of what needed to be involved in the annotations and explained that what I want to do is to guide the reader through the book. She correctly observed that "Jews don't read that way. Jews read everything on the same page." She took down a copy of Schocken's *Mikraot Gedolot* from the shelf and said, "That's how we'll publish it." Curiously, that Hebrew Bible was published in Berlin in 1937, already after Hitler had come to power.

JS: Interesting. It was Mrs. Edelman's idea. The irony, of course, is that one of the critiques of the book, from a very specific sector, was that it had trampled on the holy, by graphically modeling an Agnon book after a page of Talmud!

AH: Yes, they said, "How dare you take the Gemara page and apply it to Agnon and his *ma'ases!* It's desecrating the *Daf!*" You can understand the whole attack by the fact that I came from Jewish Theological Seminary. Only somebody coming from the Seminary would do such a sinful thing. (*Laughter*) And curiously enough, just last week somebody called me up. He's writing a book about all these kinds of things among the Haredi community. So he said: Do I have permission to quote? I said: "Please!" So, I sent him the review which had appeared in the *Yated HaShavuah*.³

JS: So let me turn our attention to the next topic which you already foreshadowed. In an essay, a couple of years back on the website of *Tablet Magazine*, the literary critic Adam Kirsch shared his thoughts on first reading *T'mol Shilshom* in translation.⁴ It has relevance for your work, but maybe even more so for our work at the Toby Press in now trying to render Agnon in English translations with annotations. Kirsch writes:

3. *Yated HaShavuah*, 15.

4. Kirsch, "Pilgrim's Progress."

The biblical diction of [Agnon's writing] is a key to *Only Yesterday*. [Translator] Barbara Harshav works hard to render the echoes of biblical and rabbinical Hebrew in the modern Hebrew of Agnon's novel. But this can't really be done in English, which is one reason why the novel's texture ends up feeling thin: The plot and characterization are forced to bear much of the weight that, in Hebrew, must be borne by the language itself. Still, enough of these antique resonances come across to show how the language of *Only Yesterday* embodies its theme, which is the vertigo that results when a 20th-century Jew returns to the land his ancestors left 2,000 years earlier.

Now here he is referring to having read the novel and experiencing the novel in translation, but if I'm understanding you correctly that's part of what you're trying to do for the contemporary Hebrew reader as well, so could you say a word about what the contemporary Hebrew reader encounters in Agnon, and how your editions aim to accomplish that for the contemporary Hebrew audience.

AH: For example, it became clear to me, while working on this book, that to enter the world of Second Aliyah Jaffa and Jerusalem today's readers need maps, pictures, and perhaps especially music. Agnon's works are full of music, and all kinds of sounds. I have a file called "*Kolot T'mol Shilshom*" [Sounds of *Only Yesterday*], and I could have done the same thing for Hakhnasat Kallah but the technology wasn't as advanced back when I worked on that book. Remember, *T'mol Shilshom* takes place from 1908 through 1911, when Tel Aviv is just beginning to be built. Our maps will have to leave out most of Tel Aviv (which consisted of only a few houses, just being built), and center on Yaffo, although only certain streets in Yaffo. Yerushalayim is not the contemporary city we know; only certain streets and neighborhoods existed, and we have to map them to understand the dog Balak's journeys around town.

JS: So by way of example, and we planned this out in advance, there is a central passage at the beginning of the third book of *T'mol Shilshom* when Yitzhak is returning by wagon from Jaffa back to Jerusalem. I'll read it, or adapt it from the English translation, and you can comment, or "orally annotate," as we go along [*Only Yesterday*, 378–79]:

One of the passengers said to the carter, Perhaps, Reb Zundl, you can sing something by Bezalel Hazzan . . .

AH: One mistake: His name should be pronounced *Zindl!* I won't keep interrupting, but it's important to appreciate the language, or the tension in

Agnon between modern Hebrew and the Hebrew that he wanted to evoke. *T'mol Shilshom* is set in the early twentieth century—it's a different country (and a different language) than the State of Israel today. It's a different place. Agnon was part of that. He came in 1908. I almost think I know the ship in which he came, and I am looking for a picture of that ship because if it wasn't that ship it was a similar ship. How did he get there? How does one travel through Galicia to Trieste and the Mediterranean Sea? . . .

JS: You can see why the project has been going on for 25 years! (*Laughter*) That's the note on having read only half a sentence! So one of the passengers said: "Perhaps you can sing something by Bezalel Hazzan?"

AH: I'm going to interrupt you again because I wanted to question one thing that occupies me many times over. Was this person an historical figure? Did he live? Is this his name? Do we have pictures? Because if we have a picture, I think the picture ought to appear in my volume. But right now, we have this strange wagon-driver, called in the awkward English translation a "carter"—but he's a *Balagole*—I should say *Balagoole*, but OK. At this point more than halfway into the novel Yitzhak is finally coming around to Sefaradit. The wagon has already entered the outskirts of Jerusalem. Who are the primary settlers there? The original ones were Sefaradim and Litvaks! And if you were a Galitzianer you were an outsider. And nothing helped you unless you changed your Hebrew and Yiddish pronunciation. You have to be Litvish. Agnon always felt like an outsider because of his accent.

JS: Moving on:

One of the passengers said to the carter, Perhaps, Reb *Zindl* you can sing something by Bezalel Hazzan, like, *Then all shall come to serve You [Vey'e'soyu kol lovdecho]*.⁵ The carter laughed and said, I knew you would call me *Zindl*, but *Zindl* isn't my name, my name is *Avreml*. The man said to him, Didn't I hear them calling you *Zindl*? Said he, They call me *Zindl* because my younger brother was named Abraham after me.

I'll skip to the end:

And now you want me to sing you Bezalel Hazzan's *Then all shall come to serve You [Vey'e'soyu kol lovdecho]*. That, my friend, is impossible, for once I was traveling on the road and I started singing *Then all shall come to serve You*, and the horses started quaking and shaking and jumping and leaping until their yoke came undone to serve the Holy One Himself. You

5. A piyyut (liturgical poem) of great antiquity, recited as part of Rosh Ha'Shanah Musaf.

think I'm telling you made-up things. The God's honest truth I'm telling you, just as my name is Avreml and not Zindl.⁶

AH: And now I can tell you that this is a real person and a real tune. I propose that this hazzan was one Bezalel Shulsinger—and that's a great name for a *hazzan*, or perhaps, of course, that's how he got his family name. He was born in Uman, lived 1779–1873, was also known as Bezalel Odesser as he served as the *hazzan* in Odessa for many years before moving to Jerusalem. His tunes gained great popularity and were widely disseminated by his students and followers. We even have a photograph of him. Now my next chore is to discover exactly which tune to this piyut *Then all shall come to serve You* [*Veyèsoyu kol lovdecho*], which is a centerpiece of the service on *Yamim Noraim*, was composed by Bezalel. There is one tune which is fairly well known and still widely sung which I suspect is the very version of Bezalel Hazzan that Agnon is referencing. It is recorded in different versions but I recommend a recording by Vizhnitzer hasidim which we uploaded to YouTube.⁷ The description of the tune as causing the horses to start “quaking and shaking and jumping and leaping until their yoke came undone to serve the Holy One Himself” is perfectly imaginable when you listen to the *niggun*. You sing along and the horses gallop right off the page!

JS: Before we turn our attention back to another piece of what certain academics call the realia—a major agenda, a major aspect of the annotation is to uncover or to reveal, or to simply cite the very many sources in *Tanakh*, in the Talmud and rabbinic literature, in a variety of works from every layer of Jewish literature and every corner of the Jewish bookshelf, that Agnon is directly or indirectly referencing, or working in echoes of, or is subverting in the text. And just the simple act of footnoting every Gemara and every Midrash and every line from the prayerbook is a major effort and part of the work. And presumably between the original work starting back in the 1980s to the current work at hand that's changed slightly. We know that you're a little, how shall we say it, Luddite, technophobic, but nevertheless all this has been made easier with the advent of the many digital resources, searchable databases, etc. But here we get to a very interesting question about the work of annotation as interpretation. Because these are not mere footnote references to specific chapter and verse; the very act of annotating is also an act of interpreting, because Agnon is doing different things when he's citing a variety of sources.

6. Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 378–79.

7. Available at <https://youtu.be/EGTONE-SIYw>.

AH: Correct

JS: Sometimes he's merely borrowing, and we've all encountered this in different aspects of Agnon scholarship. Someone will identify a particular source that Agnon is clearly echoing or riffing off of. In some cases, people will identify a reference to something and will try to build a whole mountain of interpretation based upon their "find." But the reader or another scholar may think they're making a mountain out of a molehill. And sometimes a reference is just a reference, as Sigmund told us; sometimes Agnon's just borrowing a turn of phrase for its rhythm, its cadence. He's not trying to do the kind of intertextual bridge building, although often he is doing precisely that. When he does, sometimes he's doing it to draw your attention to a passage in *Tanakh*, so that the reader will consider the Jerusalem of *Tehillah* relative to Jeremiah's Jerusalem. In other cases, he'll build in a reference which serves as an intertextual key to unlocking the entire story or as an axis for interpretation. For example, the reference between the lines to a Rashi in Ta'anit 8a, which references a folktale of the "weasel and the well." Identifying that reference, one can then begin to unlock something underneath it and between the rabbinic and Agnonian text. On other occasions Agnon is quoting a source subversively, ironically. And it's not always clear to the reader, and readers of good conscience can debate what he's doing in any one place. How do you see the act of annotating the source work, not the realia, not knowing how much this kopek was worth, or the distance between this shtetl and that village, but the source work annotation? How do you view that as an act of interpretation for the reader?

AH: A perfect example of this is the presence of rabies in *T'mol Shilshom*. Of course, we all remember the character of the dog Balak, a very controversial figure, but a very obviously central figure in the novel. For some scholars and critics, he's perhaps more important than Yitzhak Kummer himself, the human protagonist. Throughout the book Agnon never uses the word *kalevet*, the modern word for rabies. This has led some people to false conclusions about what is going on in the plot. Rather, Agnon assumes that every Hebrew reader would know that a *kelev shoteh* is a rabid dog. What he does is to reference a passage in Yoma (83b) of what a rabid dog, a *kelev shoteh* in the Mishnah's language, looks like:

Our Rabbis taught: Five things were mentioned in connection with a mad dog [*kelev shoteh*]. Its mouth is open, its saliva dripping, its ears flap, its tail is hanging between its thighs, it walks on the edge of the road. Some say: Also it barks without its voice being heard.

Agnon doesn't have to tell us that the dog is affected by *kalevet*, we know it from his borrowing of the Talmudic symptoms:

Balak enters Meah Shearim walking on the sides of the roads and his mouth gapes open and his saliva drools and his ears droop and his tail is between his legs and his eyes are bloodshot and he barks and his voice isn't heard. He stood still and cleansed his body of the forbidden food in it. He folded two of his legs beneath him and sat on them in the style of an Ishmaelite and put out his tongue and breathed like a blacksmith's bellows and looked all around and didn't see a living soul, for Meah Shearim was gathered inside to hear Rabbi Grunam.⁸

So, in this case, the unmentioned Talmudic text gives us the key to understanding the description. But here I will expand on this a little bit. Earlier in the book, there are various descriptions of Balak smelling and sniffing things, as dogs do. Professor Alexandra Horowitz, a researcher of animal cognition at Barnard College, has just published *Being a Dog: Following the Dog into a World of Smell*,⁹ a follow-up to an earlier book called *Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell, and Know* (2009). The description of Balak's journeys, led by his nose, from the tip of his sniffing nose to his wagging tail, are described scientifically in Horowitz's books. Agnon got the description down perfectly. Horowitz describes it as "There is no such thing as 'fresh air' to a dog. Air is rich: an olfactory tangle that the dog's nose will diligently unknot."

At any rate, as we know Yitzhak Kummer becomes a painter and he has this nudnik dog sniffing around, the dog that keeps getting in his way. So he chases the dog off but Balak keeps returning to him. Then, in the pivotal moment in the novel, Yitzhak does something with the paint, it's not exactly what he does with the paint but the paint, on its own somehow, drips and writes on the back of the dog: *Kelev meshuga!* Now that's not a Hebrew phrase exactly, but Yiddish: *A meshiginne hint*, a mad dog. Agnon is making a comment about the Jews in Meah Shearim who are Torah scholars, but Yiddish-speaking ones. Had Yitzhak written "kelev shoteh" they would have understood it as *A kelev shoyteh*, a "foolish dog." Agnon did not want them to miss the point that this is a rabid dog, so he writes *kelev meshuga*, which all Yiddish speakers understand as a rabid dog.

8. Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 618.

9. Horowitz, *Being a Dog*, 29.

JS: Or they react to Balak as if he's a rabid dog, which he is not actually yet at this point in the story. Perhaps he becomes rabid through the "incantation" now inscribed on his skin.

AH: That's right. But without the Yiddish echo they wouldn't understand what's the big deal with a "silly dog." But once the dog is marked by what they would have understood as a rabid dog, they run away from it. Everyone that is except for Yitzhak, who ultimately gets bitten by Balak once he really has become rabid, with the tragic consequences at the end of the novel.

At any rate, one of my editors at Schocken serves another purpose as the "common reader." She keeps an eye out to let me know what we can assume the average Hebrew reader, the common, regular reader in Israel, will or will not understand about the text, and this was one of the examples.

JS: What contemporary readers don't know is, unfortunately, often quite shocking.

AH: Absolutely. But to go back a moment to the comparison of the description of a rabid dog with the passage in Yoma, Agnon sneaks in a symptom which does not appear in the Talmud. He writes that Balak's *einav tosesot dam*, his eyes are bloody ("bloodshot" in the English edition). That does not appear in the Talmudic description. That made its way in from another source. Agnon's daughter, Emunah Yaron mentions in her memoirs, *Perakim MeHayyai*, that when Agnon wrote about any animal, he consulted a book by Alfred Brehm for specific information, and Agnon consulted veterinary manuals that describe rabies and accounts of cases of rabies epidemics in Palestine.¹⁰ Some of these materials are still in his library at the Agnon House. Emunah Yaron's reference to Brehm led me to the popular German encyclopedic twelve-volume *Tierleben* (published in English as *Life of Animals*). Parenthetically, both the German and the English version of Brehm's work are available online in their entirety. Brehm concludes the detailed section on the dog with a description of rabies, in which he states that in the advanced stages of the disease "the eyes [of rabid dogs] become red and inflamed."¹¹ This, I suggest is the source for Balak's bloody or bloodshot eyes. Here, Agnon drew upon other sources, and seamlessly wove this detail into the Talmudic description of a rabid dog.

10. Yaron, *Perakim MeHayyai*, 62.

11. Volume 2, page 108 in the original German; volume 2, page 213 in the English.

JS: Before we conclude I want to ask just one last question. Part of my own first encounter with *Hakhnasat Kallah* was through using, and being aided by, your work. On my maiden voyage through the novel as a novel, I relied on your book. I didn't read the novel with your annotations in hand but used it as a reference on the side. As a reader, once one starts to go down the annotation rabbit hole it becomes hard to enjoy the novel, to let the words of the prose enter you without constantly stopping and starting. But part of that encounter with *Hakhnasat Kallah*, through your work, was that it's a time machine. It helps us bridge the chasm that really does exist between us in the twenty-first century and the world Agnon describes of the nineteenth century. We stand at a great remove from the events described. And part of the achievement of your work, and part of the benefit of encountering Agnon through the works of Avraham Holtz is the wormhole that we're allowed to get back to that world, and now hopefully soon the world of the Seond Aliyah in *T'mol Shilshom*. Since we're talking today about *Sippurei Eretz Yisrael*, give us one insight, one small little nugget, briefly, of something that you have uncovered that opened up a window to what it meant to be a young man coming to Yaffo or to Yerushalayim in 1908.

AH: It's useful to follow Yitzhak Kummer's journey from Galicia to Yaffo. Yitzhak is certainly not an autobiographical projection of Agnon (in the way that the character Hemdat is), but there are places and dates that align between the fictitious character and the autobiography of his creator (or at least the partially fictionalized autobiography Agnon put forth). Let's assume that he arrived in Yaffo on Lag B'Omer 1908. He meets a person who fools him initially, the owner of some type of inn in Yaffo. There's an extremely significant Hebrew volume by Gur Alroey called *Immigrantim* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2004). Every chapter presents a historical study of an aspect of what it meant to be an immigrant to *Eretz Yisrael*—what each wave of immigrants encountered, the people and places. Often the immigrants were taken advantage of by those already established locals who were out to swindle them of their money. It's a real portrait of some very unpleasant people and unpleasant times, fraught with problems. So, what Yitzhak Kummer encounters in that world, first of all, is the sense of being an immigrant, a new-comer in the Land of Israel. When he's on the ship at sea, before arriving, Yitzhak has the naiveté to mention that, although he has no family in *Eretz Yisrael*, it's all right because *Kol Yisrael haverim*, the whole Jewish people is like one extended family. Well, the response to that

from an older and wiser person is: yes, yes, that's wonderful, but that's what you say on *Shabbes Mevorchim* (laughter), as an aspirational prayer, but he better brace himself for the realities of the here and now. Yitzhak remembers this and it echoes again later when he encounters just such harsh realities. Little did he know at the time of the ship voyage that the older man is the grandfather of the woman he will ultimately marry. At any rate, that's part of the beauty of the story. The insight of the immigrant experience as depicted by Agnon, something of course with which he had personal experience, can really be heightened through some knowledge of the historical reality depicted. Among the charms of Alroey's book is that he prefaces each chapter with a quote from, what else, Agnon's *T'mol Shilshom*, and cites Agnon frequently in the book.¹²

JS: We have to end. We could stay here talking all day, but that would prevent you from writing another ten annotations and completing the task before you—and we can't afford that delay!

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THE ART OF AGNON ANNOTATION

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