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ALAN MINTZ

THE APPEARANCE IN 1934 of Agnon's novella *Bilvav yamim* (*In the Heart of the Seas*), which tells the story of the journey of a group of Hasidim to the Holy Land, marked a particular moment in his career as a writer. The novella was apparently written by 1926, and some lines from it were included in a presentation of gifts made to Franz Rosenzweig on the occasion of his fortieth birthday on December 26 of that year.[1] Agnon eventually chose to have it included in *Sefer Bialik,* the prestigious festschrift for the national poet, who died the next year. The connection with Bialik proved especially significant. Bialik himself considered Agnon's narrative not only the best thing in the volume but the best piece of Hebrew literature recently published. His high opinion of this specific story encouraged the award to Agnon of the newly established Bialik Prize two years later. The effect, according to Agnon's biographer Dan Laor, was to bestow on Agnon, who was only in his late forties at the time, the mantel of the great national writer in the aftermath of Bialik's passing.[2] Bialik's praise joined the general acclamation that greeted the appearance of *Bilvav yamim.* The novella was taken as representing the consummation of Agnon's craft, an art in which aggadic and folk materials are perfectly integrated into modern storytelling. Readers and critics were especially entranced by the heightened expression given by the text to the ideal of the love of Zion. In the midst of the Yishuv's struggles to establish itself, there was inspiration to be drawn from this tale of immaculate faith in the goal of Zion and the intrepid resolve to reach it.

The plot of *Bilvav yamim* is simply sketched. The time is the second or third decade of the nineteenth century, and the place is Agnon's ancestral town of

Buczacz. The story is told by a belated narrator who, as we find out on the last, colophon-like page of the novella, has taken up the task because others have been prevented from doing so. A small group of pious townspeople decide to sell their property and belongings, put aside their business affairs, and make their way to the Holy Land to spend the remainder of their days in study and prayer. They are joined by a simple Jew named Hananya, who carries all his possessions in a kerchief and who has encountered many obstacles and privations in his longstanding efforts to reach Jerusalem. He not only completes their minyan but drives one of the wagons and provides the practical know-how that enables the faithful to negotiate the long journey across Eastern Europe to Constantinople. Along the way many Jewish settlements are encountered and described and many legends about the Holy Land are told. Hananya is late to ship's departure from Constantinople to the Holy Land because he is busy releasing an *agunah,* and, unaware of his absence, the faithful embark on their tempest-tossed voyage without him. When they arrive in Jaffa, Hananya is there before them, having flown over the seas transported on his kerchief. Settled in Jerusalem, the members of the group experience a mixture of fates, and it is only Hananya who lives to a contented old age.

My first encounter with Agnon's novella took place in the framework of an introductory course on modern literature given by Avraham Holtz at the Seminary College of the Jewish Theological Seminary. It was the spring of 1966; I was a freshman at Columbia College and took occasional courses at the Seminary. I don't remember a great deal from the course beyond Holtz's infectious enthusiasm in demonstrating the unity of form and content in Bialik's short poems. The course, which was taught in Hebrew, required a paper in Hebrew, and early in the summer I submitted a paper on *Bilvav yamim.* I have the underlinings and marginal comments I made then in the volume of *Eilu ve'eilu* I still use; but the paper itself is lost, and the reasons why I chose to work on that novella, and how I came to it altogether, have only now become a little clearer to me.

The Hebrew paper, however, was to have another incarnation. During my sophomore year, I and several friends I had met as a counselor at Camp Ramah each put up one hundred dollars to publish the first issue of *Response: A Contemporary Jewish Review,* for which I acted as editor for three years until William Novak took over the job. In the inaugural issue I included two essays of my own, one of which

was titled "Agnon on the Individual and the Community."[3] Using the recent award of the Nobel to Agnon merely as a pretext, the essay takes as its real occasion what it defines as the current crisis in American Jewish life: the disaffection of creative young people from the Jewish community. The issue is explored through an analysis of *Bilvav yamim* that traces the vicissitudes of the relationship between Hananya, taken as an embodiment of the free and creative individual, and the faithful, who represent the community. The essay concludes by wondering whether the creative young Jews of the present will have the courage to persevere in the face of the organized community's disregard for them. This message fitted well into the overall spirit of *Response,* whose founders felt that Judaism had been cheapened and betrayed by contemporary synagogue culture and that rescue could come only from attending to the message of young people who had rediscovered Judaism's true radical and creative nature. My other contribution to the first issue was an attempt to illustrate that betrayal; the title suggests the tenor of our attitudes at the time: "Fear and Trembling: A Retrospective Critique of United Synagogue Youth."

When I recently returned to *Bilvav yamim* for the purposes of the present essay, it was the first time I looked at the novella since writing the Hebrew paper and the English article some thirty-four years ago. This interval perplexes me. I've taught Agnon often and in many different settings; I've written reviews and articles about his fiction; I've edited (with Anne Golomb Hoffman) a major anthology of his short stories; and I've never ceased reading Agnon and expanding my familiarity with his corpus. Yet I've never revisited *Bilvav yamim,* despite its importance in the formation of Agnon's reputation. I suspect that the reason has to do with my recollection of the novella as being sentimental and belonging to what I imagined to be the cute, soppy and pietistic Agnon that I was eager to leave behind in my later quest for the properly ironic and modernist Agnon. At any rate, when the chance to participate in the "Rereadings" issue of *Prooftexts* arose, I took advantage of the opportunity to figure out why I had chosen *Bilvav yamim* as the subject for my first publication and my critical debut. In returning to Agnon's novella I am aware of my ulterior motives. I identify with the speaker of Bialik's autobiographical poem "Lifnei aron hasefarim" ("Before the Bookcase"), who admits that he has returned to the classical texts of Judaism—the reference is to Bialik's many years of work on *Sefer ha'aggadah*—not out of a love of the books themselves but out of a desire to

recapture the origins of his self, which are pressed between the leaves of the ancient tomes. Similarly, I have taken up and reread *Bilvav yamim* not out of a desire to work on that corner of the Agnon oeuvre but out of a curiosity to catch a glimpse of who I was circa 1966.

Rereading the novella proved to be much more interesting than I thought it would be. The actual experience of reading the text chapter by chapter was surprisingly pleasurable, and when I sat down to think about the work critically and to read what others have written about it, I found a great deal that interested me. When it comes to the critical issues raised by the novella, the truth be told, I see little overlap between what I find fascinating now and what I found fascinating then. Yet when it comes to the pleasure taken in the reading of the text, I sense a link between my attraction to *Bilvav yamim* as a college student and my delight in reading it today. In what follows I first contrast what I find interesting about *Bilvav yamim* now with what I found interesting then, and then I will conclude by speculating upon the continuity of the mystique the novella still exerts.

Much of what interests me now about *Bilvav yamim* is undoubtedly the result of the professionalization I've undergone as a reader over these many years. I've learned—or been conditioned—to see particular poems and stories not just in their own terms but as part of literary systems whose rules are my responsibility to attempt to understand. An example is the element of the fantastic in *Bilvav yamim* embodied in the magical properties of Hananya's kerchief. In his 1968 study of Agnon, Arnold Band presents the novella as sophisticated fantasy inviting a sophisticated reader to suspend belief and engage the text as an aesthetic rather than an ideational experience.[4] Similarly, the explosion of magic realism in European and Latin American literature and then in Israeli literature (especially in Grossman and Shalev) has led me to consider *Bilvav yamim,* written in the 1920s, as an early precursor of this technique. Whereas in fantasy the laws of nature can be wholly suspended or rewritten, in magic realism the deviation from the real is a strictly delimited element, even if it is dramatically conspicuous.[5] In the case of *Bilvav yamim,* the travelers are in no way protected from the dangers of travel, both psychological and material, especially when it comes to their perilous sea voyage from Constantinople. The only violation of the realistic conventions in the world of

the novella is Hananya's magical flight over the seas to the Holy Land. It is, to be sure, a rather large violation, but its magicalness does not infect the rest of the narrative world and maintains the kind of exceptionality that we will later come to associate with magic realism.

Now, while nothing miraculous transfigures the lives of the travelers, often enough they strengthen their spirits with fabulous legends about the holiness of the Land of Israel. The novella is replete with aggadic material from the early masters and the later masters. Whenever there is a pause in their forward journey or whenever danger besets them, the faithful immerse themselves in the legends of the Holy Land, so much so that one would have to consider this aggadic medium as often pushing to the margins the historically contingent chronicle offered by the narrator.[6] *Bilvav yamim* thus becomes a productive context for exploring a critical question in Agnon studies in general: How does Agnon invoke and then domesticate aggadic discourse within the novelistic discourse of the fictional text? Who is the implied reader for this genre of narrative? Is there a threshold of "literary competence," in the sense of a familiarity with the canon of aggadah, necessary to be a reader of *Bilvav yamim?*

As a professional reader I am given to looking for earlier narrative models against which to locate the uniqueness of the text under analysis. In the case of *Bilvav yamim,* at least from my retrospective vantage point, many models come easily to hand. The Hebrew chronicles of such medieval travelers as Benjamin of Tudela and Eldad Hadani shed light on the ethnographic conventions of the genre and the assumed responsibility to describe the situation and customs of unfamiliar communities. The classic send-up of the genre, Abramowitch's *The Travels of Benjamin the Third,* cannot be far from the Hebrew and Yiddish reader's mind. Closer still are the peregrinations among the Jewish townlets of Galicia of Reb Yudl, the protagonist of Agnon's own earlier novel *Hakhnasat kalah (The Bridal Canopy),* who also eventually and miraculously makes his way to the Holy Land. Widening the lens to world literature, especially medieval European Christian literature, offers the opportunity for useful comparisons between versions of the sacred quest and the ascent to Erets Yisrael as a narrative structure.

Yet it was not until I read Shmuel Werses's chapter on *Bilvav yamim* in his recent collection of Agnon studies that I grasped the fact that there may be not just a

vague set of narrative models for the novel but *an actual source.*[7] In 1764–65, R. Simha of Zalozhitz, a town near Brody from which Agnon's own father hailed, undertook a trip to Erets Yisrael, which he described in a book titled *Ahavat tsiyon* (Love of Zion), which appeared posthumously in 1790. Werses brings parallel passages from the eighteenth-century chronicle and from the novella that are very persuasive in making a case for seeing *Ahavat tsiyon* as a source that Agnon had before him in the composition of *Bilvav yamim.* The parallels make the critic eager to use the source to set off systematically the particular ways in which Agnon molded his modern literary text. The pilgrimage chronicles tends to have a very linear structure, each station in the journey and each encounter being added to the previous ones. Werses astutely contrasts this combinatorial method with the elements of epic design, which he defines as the deployment of significant detail and the presentation of characters from multiple perspectives, and concludes that *Bilvav yamim* partakes of both models.

Coming to *Bilvav yamim* after being a longtime reader of Agnon also makes one keep an eye constantly peeled for the master's tricks. This does not mean that the piety of the narrator and his subjects is not sincere; it does mean that even in these holy precincts there lurks the presence of Agnonian playfulness and irony. The playfulness begins with the very fact that Agnon makes Buczacz the place of origin of the travelers and the font of all their wanderings, whereas, according to Werses, we know of no hasidic *aliyot* that came from this locality. The greatest stroke of what Band calls Agnon's mirth is nothing less than the insertion of a figure bearing his own name into the story. Rabbi Shemuel Yosef the son of Rabbi Shalom Mordechai Halevi is an esteemed member of the traveling party, and his distinction lies in his encyclopedic knowledge of legends of the Holy Land and his gift for retrieving them precisely at the moments the faithful falter and find themselves in need of spiritual uplift. Exercising his authorial omnipotence and imaginative freedom, Agnon conjures up the figure of who he might have been had he been born a century earlier during the great age of Polish Hasidism. As for irony, it makes its distinctly unmirthful presence felt at the conclusion of the novella when the narrator informs us in a tone of unruffled faith replete with honeyed martyrological overtones about the privations and humiliations suffered by the faithful once they had fulfilled their hearts' desire to reach God's city.

The playful and ironic fuse in the colophon-like concluding paragraph of the novella:

> The sages and rabbis of Jerusalem have long desired that all that befell Hananya should be put on record in a book. But by reason of harshness of servitude and the urgency of livelihood, as well as because of strife and contention, the matter was deferred from day to day and from year to year; until I came and wrote all the adventures of Hananya in a book which I have called *In the Heart of the Seas.* This name I have given this book in memory of Hananya, peace be upon him, who went down into the heart of the sea and came forth peacefully. I have not left out anything I have heard and have added nothing more than my soul advised. Some will read my book as a man reads legends [*sippurei aggadah*], while others will read it and derive benefit for themselves. With regard to the former I quote the words of the Book of Proverbs: "But a good word maketh the heart glad"; a good word maketh the soul to rejoice and delivereth from care. But of the latter I say in the words of the Psalmist: "But those who wait for the Lord, they shall inherit the land."

The veteran Agnon reader has much to savor here as Agnon tweaks his or her nose in this performance of grandiosity disguised as piety. The telling of the tale is presented as the deferred fulfillment of longstanding rabbinic wishes; and it is the narrator alone who has heroically succeeded in overcoming the political and social forces that have thwarted previous attempts. The purpose of the telling is given as being devoted entirely to recording the adventures of Hananya, although he is in fact absent or marginal in much of the book's matter. The conventional assertion, with its Deutronomic echoes, that nothing has been left out of or added to the account, is teasingly undercut by the qualification that nothing has been supplemented beyond that which "the soul advised" [*mah shehaneshamah hayetah magidah li*], as though the promptings of a chronicler's soul were nothing at all. Finally, there are the two scriptural verses matching the two classes of readers the narrator envisions for his book. I've read this passage many times, and I still have no clear sense of what Agnon is up to. Despite the fact that the two classes or options are

presented symmetrically, each with its accompanying prooftext, it would seem that there are ways of privileging one over the other. On the one hand, it is those who read to derive benefit for themselves [*yotsiʾu toʿelet leʿatsmam*] who will be granted the Land as their inheritance. On the other hand, one cannot easily discredit the primacy of aggadah and its constructive role in the religious imagination in a work suffused with aggadah, much of which is purveyed by a character who is a retrojection of the author. So, masterful ambiguity or writerly playfulness? I'm not sure I can determine, and I realize that that is probably where Agnon wants me.

Finally, my return to *Bilvav yamim* has taught me something about Agnon's religious Zionism. In my transactions with Agnon over the years, I have been drawn in my teaching and writing to Agnon the modernist and fabulist and to the fiction that reevokes the lost inner life of Polish Jewry. I have always been mindful, to be sure, of narratives set in Erets Israel and the deep attachment to the Land evinced in Agnon's work. Yet rereading *Bilvav yamim* has forced me to acknowledge the utter inconographic centrality of the ideal of Zion in Agnon's imaginative enterprise. Wholeness and redemption for either the individual or the Jewish people are available—to the degree to which they are possible at all for modern man in the world after faith—only through a wholehearted identification with the ideal of Zion and a commitment to its realization. The ideal and the real, alas, remain distinct throughout Agnon's work, as the narrative of *Bilvav yamim* illustrates. Nothing is more ennobling and sustaining than the belief in Zion on the part of the faithful as they leave their comfortable lives behind them and seek to raise themselves to a higher spiritual plain by their journey to the Holy Land. The way is one thing, the arrival another. In the end, nothing tries their faith more cruelly than the reality of Zion.

Turning back now to my first encounter with Agnon's text in 1966, I am astonished first by the fact that it took place in Hebrew. *Bilvav yamim* was, I am sure, the longest Hebrew text I had ever read, and the term paper I wrote about it my most sustained and serious attempt at writing expository prose in Hebrew. I state this with no sense of my having been a prodigy. When I came to New York for college from Worcester, Massachusetts, Columbia and Barnard were teeming with undergraduates who had attended the Yeshiva of Flatbush and Ramaz and spent summers

at Camp Massad and for whom Hebrew was a secure attainment, even if many of them took it for granted and did little to develop it. I had gone to public schools and my Hebrew was more hard won, having been acquired in the afternoons at my synagogue school, which was connected to the Boston Hebrew Teachers College. For me, writing a college paper in Hebrew was an assertion of will that stretched my capability. Even though I no longer have the paper, I still remember specific instances of putting together awkward Hebrew equivalents for conceptual phrases I knew well in English; and I also remember Avraham Holtz's exasperated question marks in the margins. I am moved by this picture of myself at age nineteen struggling to enter into an intellectual relationship to Hebrew separate from folk songs of youth movements and the pidgin conversations at summer camp. My connection to Hebrew had no professional intimations at the time; it would not be until some seven years later, toward the end of my graduate studies in English literature, that I would seize upon the study of modern Hebrew literature as a vocation. To discover that long ago my imagination was engaged and nurtured by the mystique of Hebrew puts me in possession of a deep-running continuity in the formation of my self.

Other aspects of that self are thrown into relief by the fact that I translated my Hebrew paper into English and published it myself. Writing a student paper is one thing; setting it in print and disseminating it is quite another. From this distance I look back and wonder at the self-importance, the grandiosity, the hutzpah. There are two factors—separate from the Jewish motives, which I'll get to in a moment—that help me to understand this impulse toward self-advertisement. The first has to do with the intellectual temper of Columbia College in those days, with its hoary legacy of the Great Books and its more recent legacy of the New Criticism. As first- and second-year students, we were expected to write analyses of the great texts of western civilization—a passage from the *Iliad,* say, or a chapter from Machiavelli—without consulting criticism or scholarship or delving deeply into the historical context. It was assumed that, left alone with the text, we could come up with something to say and that our thoughts would be worth listening to. (Over the years I've had many contradictory thoughts about the encouragement given to this mystique of brilliance; and I've felt cheated more than once by teachers who dazzled me with their originality until I later discovered that their ideas had been cribbed

from others without attribution. But on balance I have to admit that I am grateful for the self-confidence I feel when it comes to taking chances and making my own interpretations even before I know what other minds have already gone on record as saying.)

The other influence was a kind of crush on the world of the New York Jewish intellectuals. Lionel Trilling taught at Columbia. Norman Podhoretz, whose memoir *Making It* had just appeared, had not only gone to Columbia but had also studied at the Seminary. It was a world that was close enough to touch and at the same time beyond reach. We, by which I mean the group of us who started *Response,* had come too late to the party. The quarrel between the Communists and Anti-Communists was not our issue, and we were not part of a post-war generation that had rushed to put Jewish "particularism" aside in order to seize the mainstream of American letters. And we weren't, by and large, from New York. Yet the glitter of those passions drew us nonetheless. We wanted to stage an intellectual life for ourselves around the Jewish issues that engaged us, and we wanted to do it in print, writing as controvertialists, on the pages of intellectual journals, even if we had to create them ourselves.

In turning my term paper into a review-essay, I was, in furtherance of this goal, displaying a prescient intuition about one of the key differences between academic writing and intellectual journalism: the necessity of creating a contemporary, relevant occasion for any extended analysis of a particular work. In my *Response* essay on *Bilvav yamim,* I took this charge as a matter of great gravity rather than merely as a convention. The chief theme I identified in the novella was the tense dialectic between the individual and the community as enacted in the relationship between Hananya and the faithful. The contemporary context which I used to introduce and justify my examination of Agnon was fraught with great moment:

> The question of the relationship between the individual and the community is now so pressing because the last forty years have witnessed its almost complete disintegration in the American Jewish community. Until now, because Judaism has been misunderstood, and there have been few around to properly explain it, bright people growing up in the Jewish community have become dissassociated [*sic*] from it. They have

> acknowledged Jewishness but rejected Judaism, and have reserved a special key on their typewriters for this syndrome: *Alienation.* Members of the generation coming of age now, however, find their connection with the organized just as tenuous but for different reasons. They think they are on the verge of discovering the contemporary value of Judaism, but at the same time they are repulsed by the vulgarity and hostility to criticism and creativity that Judaism's organized forms display.

This analysis of the crisis of American Jewish life—which I believe represents the shared urgency behind the founding of *Response*—proceeded from a stance of conservative rebellion. We viewed the Jewish institutions around us, especially suburban synagogues and the national organizations, as corrupt entities that had betrayed the real values of Judaism. We were "on the verge" of discovering the contemporary relevance of those genuine values; it was a process we had to go alone in the absence of true teachers and in the face of community's hostility to "criticism and creativity." The tragedy of our generation lay in the fact that most Jewish young people, seeing only the vulgar misrepresentation of Judaism, naturally lapsed into disaffection and alienation.

After establishing this context, my analysis of the text of *Bilvav yamim* offered two arguments. The first insisted on an essential distinction between Hananya and the rest of the travelers. They are householders who, despite their readiness to make serious material sacrifices, remain conventional in their attitudes and piety. This is expressed in their relegating Hananya to a lower status and accepting his humbleness as their due. Hananya, on the other hand, exists on a different plain of reality, and he shines above the faithful "as a totally free individual who exudes love and values men for their qualities, not their positions in society." His kerchief, with its magical properties, is the symbol of his irreducible individuality. The second argument is that the relationship between Hananya and the others is implied by the structure of the plot. Hananya is with the faithful during the first stage of the journey; he is absent in the middle and then rejoins them in Erets Israel. It is on the sea voyage in Hananya's absence that the entire enterprise nearly founders. Since form is content, it follows that their spiritual project prevails only because the faithful are joined with Hananya, and that in general "we can say that without the

inclusion of the free individual the effort of the community cannot succeed." Leaving little doubt with which term in this binary opposition I and my comrades identify, the essay concludes:

> In the story, Hananya had love, freedom and singleness of purpose to offer the Faithful. Similarly, today there are people finishing school who have a vital and creative vision of Judaism to offer to the organized community. Whether they will try to contribute, whether the community will receive them, and whether they will have the courage to persevere in the face of disregard, all constitute questions not yet answered.

My ears burn as I read these lines aloud to myself after these many years. Could I have been that self-serious and that self-important? How could I have managed to shift the responsibility so completely away from myself and onto "the community"? How could I have so blithely epitomized myself under the sign of love, freedom and creativity? My mind crowds with all the structures and themes in the novella that I did *not* see. Many things I can be forgiven for failing to notice because of the lack of training and learning. But how could I have been oblivious to the centrality of the Zion theme? These are issues I will surely have to deal with in my own reckoning with my personal history.

More to the point, here is a different question: Does my preoccupation with the theme of individual and community contribute anything to our understanding of *Bilvav yamim?* Or, was I only catching a glimpse of myself in the mirror of the text? I say "only" because in an era of hermeneutical self-awareness we know that it is never wholly one or the other. Yet with a childlike need for assurance and a dread of its being withheld, I still need to ask whether there was something really there.

After revisiting the novella and thinking about it critically and reading what others have said about it, I am prepared to venture—with a catch in my throat and rush of relief—that, yes, there really is something there. Agnon could have spun an enchanting tale without Hananya, but he chose to include the figure and endow it with singularity. The collective really does seem collective; none of the faithful stands out in full relief. Their piety is impressive, but it comes off as stolid, passive,

and even noisy when compared to Hananya's silent and graceful service and his energetic undertaking of acts of *ḥesed.* And the faithful company are certainly lesser and even lost without him. So, I would conclude, the insight is sound, once, that is, it has been disentangled from the self-regarding lessons I wished to learn from it. I will even go so far as to say that in some small way I feel retroactively instructed by what I saw then. For in my recent rereading of *Bilvav yamim* the tension between the individual and the community was not particularly present to me as an issue in the story. Having "gone over" to the side of the community over the course of the years, I suppose that my empathic identification with Hananya may have become attenuated. The corrective lens from the past is thus most welcome.

I also welcome, in conclusion, the chance to feel again what I must have felt when I first picked up and read Agnon as a college student. I have no certain way of knowing what attracted me to his stories then, but my recent return to *Bilvav yamim* has opened up what feels like a direct channel to those early promptings. As best I can tell the motive was this: the desire to experience the poetry of religion. I grew up in mid-century America as Jews were rushing headlong to enter the mainstream; because of certain influences on my life and certain needs of my own, I decided as an adolescent to move in the opposite direction. I became more observant of the rituals of Judaism than my parents and more knowledgeable about Jewish history and culture. Yet however much I strove to learn, I was frustrated in my desire to penetrate the authenticity of Judaism by the very embeddedness of my life in the American milieu. I caught glimpses of the pockets of European orthodoxy that survived at the time, but only from a distance; this was not and could not be my world.

Here Agnon came to my aid. Because of the great good fortune of my having had a Hebraist education, I was able to read a novella like *Bilvav yamim* in Hebrew and feel I was peering directly into the inner romance of faith and hearing its music in its original tones. Setting aside some of story's playful and ironic wrappings, I think this is exactly the experience Agnon was trying to convey. The critique of the obscurantism and otherworldliness of Hasidism is present and accounted for in plenty of other locations in Agnon's work. But here, with clear-minded resolve, Agnon chose to create an idealization in the tradition of the naïve but not the sentimental. And I was ready to listen, and grateful to be given the chance to seize

through the reverie of reading what could not be given to me in life. As a proper intellectual in training I was constrained to use the novella to make a point in print about cultural and political realities of the day. But that seems, on reflection, to have been a mask for a deeper satisfaction.

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NOTES

1 For a facsimile of the offering see Martin Goldner, ed., *Die Gabe: For Franz Rosenzweig on his 40th Birthday, 12/25/26* (New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 1985). For reflections on Agnon's contribution, see Anne Golomb Hoffman, *Between Exile and Return: S. Y. Agnon and the Drama of Writing* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 177–79.

2 Dan Laor, *Hayei Agnon: biografiyah [S. Y. Agnon: A Biography]* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1998), 542–49.

3 Vol. 1, No. 1 (Summer 1967), 28–31.

4 Arnold J. Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare: A Study in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 262–70.

5 Robert Alter in Alan Mintz, ed., *The Boom in Israeli Fiction* (Hanover, N.H. and London: University Press of New England, 1997), 17–34.

6 Gustav Krojanker, *Yetsirato shel Shai Agnon* [The Work of S. J. Agnon] (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1991), 125–30.

7 Shmuel Werses, *Shai Agnon kifshuto: keri'ah bikhtavav* [S. Y. Agnon Literally: Studies of His Writings] (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 2000), 153–188.